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SELECTIVITY: A USER-CENTRIC CONTENT MANAGEMENT*

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INTRODUCTION

When I began writing this paper, I had the full intention of making it Japanese Studies specific, because I was to present it at the meeting of the CEAL Committee on Japanese Materials, the goal of which is to promote Japan-related academic matters and affairs. Initially, this paper had the title "Selectivity: From Quantitative to Qualitative Collection Development in Japanese Studies." Then, during the early stage of my study, the title transformed to "Selectivity: A User-Centric Content Management in Japanese Studies." But I soon realized that the content of the paper could apply to any librarianship outside Japanese Studies. Consequently, I removed the qualifier "Japanese Studies" from this paper. Nonetheless, while the content may be general, the reader may, if he or she so chooses, frame it with the qualifier "Japanese Studies."

The world has produced, and will continue to produce, information resources of great value. But these resources will remain static and meaningless unless they are brought into the arena of well-defined and methodically sound resource management—one which actualizes their functionality. Given that there are a number of ways to manage resources, I have chosen selectivity because the concept of selectivity has been discussed often as a counterpart to comprehensiveness in collection development since the emergence of the Farmington Plan in the late 1940s (Wagner, 2002). Today, I propose to define the term selectivity as a process of content management in which the selector is empowered to exercise his/her subject expertise as well as bibliographic acumen to decide upon qualitative resources that induce user satisfaction by meeting the academic needs of immediate local users and institutional programs. Selectivity, then, aims at qualitative resources and user satisfaction. This paper probes selectivity in light of (1) Content Management, (2) Quality, (3) User satisfaction, and (4) Resources.

CONTENT MANAGEMENT

Content management has its origin in collection management—which itself evolved from collection development in the last quarter of the 20th century (Wagner, 2002). With this evolution, the sophistication level of resource selection has risen from basic to holistic. Let us compare briefly the fundamental aspects of the three main resource selection processes in order to understand how each has evolved and why content management is the most suitable for today's complex library environment.

Collection development is the most basic of the three: it is the subject-based identification, acquisition, and preservation of resources relevant to the needs of users and of ongoing institutional programs (Branin, 2000). Collection management is slightly more complex than collection development: it amalgamates resource development, policy development, collection assessment,

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budget distribution, and various types of user and user studies as well as other administrative components (Branin, 2000). In both collection development and collection management, library resources are perceived taxonomically: that is, whether resources are tangible or intangible. If they are tangible, are they monographs, journals, video recordings, sound recordings, or CD-ROMs? If they are intangible, are they e-journals, online databases, or web sites? Library sources are also understood in terms of the access/ownership dichotomy: that is, who owns the resource, and how is it accessed?

These dichotomous perceptions dissolve in content management because its primary focus emphasizes the very content of the information resource itself regardless of its medium or format (Harloe, 1994). In other words, content management concerns itself with a set of ideational attributes (concepts, ideas, data, and so forth) contained in any tangible or intangible means that helps to interpret and/or determine the significance of academic communication (Budd, 1997). This type of organization requires the highest level of receptivity and responsiveness on the part of librarians as they must meet user needs by uncovering the best possible content. For example, as John Budd (1997) points out, librarians must be familiar with the same content manifested in different media and be able to determine which of these media can best serve library users goals--in this way, content precedes medium. The core question "What medium do we want for our users?" characterizes both collection development and collection management. And, the key question "What content do we want for our users?" represents the aims of content management.

In 1979 Charles Osbourn proposed tiering resource management plans so as to: (1) meet local users' needs and (2) unify local services into a national whole to implement resource sharing (Branin, 2000). Today resource management is getting away from this tiered framework, and is rapidly evolving into a form of "Integrated Content Management." In integrated content management, individual institutions operate independently to meet specific local user needs, while their individual operations are connected nationally through sophisticated, collaborative resource sharing systems (such as the Multi-Volume Set Program of the North American Coordinating Council on Japanese Library Resources and Borrow Direct) to meet user needs on this level. It seems clear that this integrated content management will mature and solidify as the technological sophistication of Borrow Direct continues to advance.

In this information environment, what is viewed as selectivity implemented by individual institutions on a local level will constitute comprehensiveness on a national level, or, perhaps, on a global level in a few years. Here, selectivity and comprehensiveness merge holistically--the integration of parts into a whole.

QUALITY

The primary focus of resource selection is the content of the resource, given user needs. This complex focus mandates a qualitative content management because the purpose of today's libraries is to provide user-specific information. In order to ascertain the viability of such service, the first question we must ask is: What is QUALITY? Donald Riggs suggests figuratively that "[Quality is] the rail on which the train runs" (Riggs, 1993). Paul Mosher offers a library-specific definition: "[Quality is] the utility or benefit of library collections to library patrons, their needs and works, and to institutional programs" (Mosher, 1979). The term "utility" refers to "usefulness by which to attain a certain purpose;" and the term "benefit" refers to "that which promotes gainful and positive
results." Riggs and Mosher appear to express exactly the same concern in different terms: What Mosher calls "the utility or benefit of library collection" is for Riggs "the rail"; and, what Mosher labels "user needs and institutional programs" is for Riggs "the train." Here, with Mosher's definition of QUALITY, the primary criterion for assessing research collections shifts from what Ephraim (1994) calls "standard scholarly bibliographies" to library users.

User satisfaction, then, is the ultimate goal of content management. Developed from this end, content management has an inductive structure: 1) to satisfy the user, quality must meet user needs; 2) to maintain a high level of quality, content management must improve continuously; and 3) to improve the quality of the content management, close communication between the librarian and the user is required.

**USER SATISFACTION**

What do we say to ourselves when we come across a new library resource? Don't we often assume almost instinctively, "This is useful; let's get it?" This is an assumptive approach to resource selection. Perhaps this approach is acceptable when research libraries are building omnivorous collections based upon assumed user needs and under the pretext of creating a "balanced collection" (Monroe, 1997). But if the ultimate goal of content management is to meet the immediate needs of specific users, then the assumptive approach used in developing a balanced collection is unsuitable for content management—it is too unwieldy. Remembering that the balanced collection is a derivative of the comprehensive collection, whose lack of practicality and manageability ignores individual user needs and user satisfaction, Paul Mosher (1989) attributes this inclination for a self-contained comprehensiveness to "the natural desire of each institution for academic self-sufficiency . . . to meet virtually all demands of local users from local collections." It is unrealistic to assume that a single library is capable of collecting ALL the resources necessary for the pursuit of knowledge (Buckland, 1995; Holley, 1995; Mosher, 1989). Content management, built not on the assumptive approach, but on selectivity, necessitates a high level of real-time user-librarian interaction.

Thinking of hermeneutics as the underlying linkage connecting the user, the librarian, and the content is suggested by Thomas Froehlich (1994). The hermeneutic linkage is a series of interpretive phases that generates the user-librarian interaction. Phase-1, for example, begins with users saying to themselves "I want to write a paper about Oshio Chusai's Confucian motives behind the 1836 insurrection because I want to know if Chusai's motives were political or philosophical." Here, on the basis of their own intentions, users interpret and contextualize a set of informational components, though the precision level of their interpretations and contextualizations will differ considerably each time they engage in this type of information-seeking behavior. Phase-2 highlights the librarian's binary interpretive skill: librarians interpret users' informational contextualizations to modify and/or refine them; then librarians interpret a broad range of relevant intellectual contents expressed in various media and formats. This interpretive process must be guided by the librarian's keen perception of (1) who the users are, (2) what their needs are, (3) what the users intend to accomplish, and (4) how relevant these identified user attributes are to overall institutional programs of which they are a part. Phase-3 synthesizes Phase-1 and Phase-2. The user-librarian interaction continues while the librarian integrates and remolds the two types of interpretive results in order to bring about a well-focused set of content options. Once again, in this process, content prevails over medium.
User satisfaction is the end result brought about both by the very fact of a content-based user-librarian interaction and by the quality of the interaction—one that is continuously maintained throughout this process. The librarian's mediation is qualitative and therefore judged successful, when the user is satisfied.

RESOURCES

Once the relevant content-results from the user-librarian interaction are obtained, then the librarian seeks the appropriate medium. The choice of medium depends upon how the user intends to utilize the given content. The medium can be tangible, such as a monograph; it can be intangible, such as an e-journal, or it can be a combination of both. The point is that media and formats constitute options for users; therefore, they must be viewed horizontally as possessing unique utilities and serving diverse purposes. For example, one user may want to retrieve and then copy-and-paste a line from the *Kiritsubo* section of *The Tale of Genji* in order to incorporate this line into his/her paper. For this user, an electronic version of this work would be suitable. Another user might want to engage in an in-depth reading of the *Kiritsubo* section and at the same time study the relationship between the *Kiritsubo* section and other sections. For this user, a print version of the same work would be appropriate. Joseph Brannin (2000) and Robert Holley (1995) look at the choice of media from another angle: Both print and electronic journals are scientists' vehicles for sharing information because they report and disseminate research results quickly; while monographs remain humanities scholars' main sources since humanities scholars do not depend on journal articles for their research. The medium, then, is a matter of user option.

Given that users will continue to need both electronic and print media, how will librarians manage the explosion of electronic materials? Electronic materials will continue to grow, evolving further their capacity for quantity and superb accessibility. Yet, despite the growth in resource management, current digitalization has not yet reached its maturity, nor has it established its reliability in terms of academic functionality (Brannin, 2000). As for the explosion of Web documents, despite their enormous growth and volume, they lack permanent retainability (Holley, 1995). As such, a highly critical attitude is required of librarians in assessing the quality and academic relevance of these documents (Penn Report, 2002). It would be hasty and unwise to state that we no longer need print materials because electronic media have become so prevalent. We must be aware that archival technologies for permanent preservation of electronic content have not yet evolved, nor have extensive user studies identifying and analyzing user population and media usages come about as of yet (Penn Report, 2002).

On the other hand, as Bart Harloe (1994) asserts, print materials, deeply rooted in the system of academic communication, will not become extinct expressly because of their seasoned and unique viability. Yet, as print collections are enormous in their quantity, their immediate relevance to user needs and their currency must be maintained continuously. There exists already a dyadic system within the selectivity-based content management that serves this purpose: (1) coordinated topical relevance on one end of the continuum; and (2) pruning on the other. Froehlich (1994) suggests that topicality constitutes the centrality of relevance. The following example illustrates the functional meaning of topical relevance. Suppose that Professor John Doe specializes in biographical studies of political figures in diplomatic history of Japan from 1912 to 1945. This topical condition comprises five elements: (1) a comprehensive term, "Japanese history"; (2) a defining term, "Diplomatic history of Japan"; (3) a delimiting term, the chronological range; (4) a primary target term, "Political
figures"; and (5) a secondary target term, "biographical studies." The comprehensive term points to the widest possible range of publications spanning antiquity to the present. Although the defining term narrows the scope of the comprehensive term by framing a certain aspect of the concept expressed in the comprehensive term, the range of the publication coverage remains unchanged. Unfortunately, topical relevance in the balanced collection format stops here. However, selectivity requires a deeper level of topical probing. Only when the defining term is further refined by the delimiting term and matched by the target terms, does the establishment of topical relevance to Professor Doe's specialization result. Subsequently, this well-coordinated topical interface determines items to be selected as well as the appropriate method to be applied for the purchase of the selected items (let it be an approval plan or a title-by-title purchase). Qualifying item selection and acquisition with well-coordinated topical relevance to user needs marks a well-grounded beginning of content management by selectivity.

For topical relevance to be highly effective, it must be paired with pruning. As an integral part of content management, pruning consists of two types: intuitive and evaluative. In intuitive pruning, librarians deselect items according to their assumptions that certain items are irrelevant to user needs. In evaluative pruning, a set of criteria is formulated first by the consensus of librarians; then, items are deselected according to the criteria. The criteria, for example, may read: "Monographs published and acquired between 1980 and 1990 with circulation frequency none between 1992 and 2002." This statement comprises: 1) a specific format of material in question; 2) a specific chronological range of publication and acquisition; 3) a specific circulation frequency; and 4) a specific chronological range that frames the circulation history. While intuitive pruning remains a blind assumption, evaluative pruning provides for intelligent and methodical deselection based upon criteria.

CONCLUSION

Unlike comprehensive and/or balanced collection management, content management builds on topical relevance and the equal consideration of all media as user options, with the ultimate goal of meeting the immediate needs of specific users. The realization of user satisfaction requires a qualitative resource management—one based on a quality driven user-librarian interaction. In this process, selectivity prevails.

Users are a group of individuals with uniquely identifiable needs in their pursuits of knowledge. The academic community is an amalgamation of these individuals, each of whom comes with varying needs. As research libraries exist to serve their academic communities, they are highly committed to identifying each individual user's needs in order to provide the most effective and appropriate means for that user to satisfy his or her aims. In my view, a user-based qualitative content management, built upon the cornerstone of selectivity, is the best way for research libraries to express their commitment to the academic communities they serve.

WORKS CITED


