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Special Libraries Association

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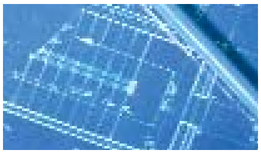
table of contents

FEATURES



Columns and Departments

information outlook

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We Need Your Help as We Plan for the Future

This year's annual conference theme was "we're talking impact," and this year the association and our division planners delivered the goods. This conference delivered more than 5,200 attendees to Toronto with an accompanying snap of excitement.

What made this conference better? I think the answer lies in the convergence of talent, experience and passion that all the players brought to this meeting. Everyone seemed charged and "in charge."

This year the conference received great local coverage thanks to our association team and our members—from the "welcome SLA signs" seen at Canadian customs and immigration to the knowing wave through that U.S. citizens received from their own customs officers when they heard we had "attended that SLA library conference." The conference was covered in major Toronto newspapers and, thanks to Michele Melady, our member at CBC, we enjoyed radio coverage during drive time on Wednesday morning, June 8. Juanita Richardson, chair of the Conference Planning Committee, secured from the Mayor of Toronto a proclamation naming the week of June 6 Special Libraries Week.

Those attending the conference and voting at the business meeting made it possible for all those who can't attend to vote on association initiatives electronically in the future. Based on the positive vote to change the bylaws, members will now be able to be heard electronically in making decisions affecting their lives in the association. This is a big step for inclusiveness and access. In addition, members also passed an amendment to the bylaws that enables the alignment of the fiscal and program years. This change will provide leadership with an opportunity to manage and match reporting and budgeting more effectively. Most of our chapters and divisions have already made decisions about the new terms of officers, either shortening an interim officer's term of office to six months or lengthening the term to 18 months. The target date for complete execution is January 2007.

For those of you who couldn't join us at conference this year, much of the action was captured in our first conference blog and may of our colleagues were official bloggers capturing activity through photos and narration. The blog is still open for readers to review and comment. See it at www.sla.org/conferenceblog. (Note to self: Remember to conduct oneself appropriately at open houses as bloggers may be lurking ready to capture copy at future events.)

This obvious confidence was contagious in my opportunities to speak with members. This year our Association executives and I want to collect enough information to enable us to define and craft our message to employers, the information industry, and the community at large, communicating our values and our value. We will do this through a series of task forces, which will probably demand the talents of at least a 100 of our members (most of whom I am still looking to volunteer) to help shape our future. While you will certainly see more in-depth coverage about these task forces, they are as follows:

The Allies and Partners Task Force, which will work in conjunction with this year's Professional Value task force. This group will profile other members of the information industry who share our professional values thus creating potential partners and members of our association.

The Contributing to Executive Growth Task Force, which will identify those skills necessary to our members to become senior executives, thought leaders, and policy makers within their organizations.

The New Visions Task Force, which will complement the executive growth group and concentrate on what the association should do to recruit and retain those members who are new to the profession and the association, thereby enabling SLA to confront the future challenges of the profession with confidence and to provide for leadership succession.

The Recognition Task Force, which will investigate the opportunities for acknowledging the work and success of our members and those we admire more frequently and at different stages throughout their careers.

The Research Now Task Force, which will call for and facilitate research going on among our members. This process speaks to our initiative of communicating our value. The task force will look for new ways to fund and publish research quickly through matching our corporate and academic members in research partnerships.

The Chapter Model Project, which will investigate chapters with large geographically dispersed members to provide management/membership styles that chapters can try on as we attempt to make chapters overall more fun to participate in and easier to manage.

These task forces will, as part of their charge, look to who we are and what we value. They will examine the conditions and issues that will influence future trends and present future challenges. We can communicate our value once we have a clear sense of it and confidence in the way we can tell it.

What I recognized this year and particularly at this conference is that we are on our way to becoming a modern association, one that is professional, confident, and with its eye on the big picture. We are recruiting, to both association staff and the Leadership, people who are experienced and passionate about their professions.

Associations are odd animals in that the members are the owners, customers and part of the workforce. For many years this meant that we were often at the mercy of our own learning curve. While that curve is never flat, it seems to be looking less steep. There has always been tremendous talent on the association staff and within the membership, and I think it's looking smarter every day.

Pam Rollo

Cooney Taught Me Well

To the Editor:

What a delight and pleasure to read the article about Jane Cooney in Information Outlook [June 2005].

Jane hired me to work at the Canadian Library Association when I was but a mere slip of a librarian. Most of what I know today about leading, managing, accountability, and providing quality service I learned under her skilled tutelage.

Jane has retained her passion for libraries and librarians throughout her career. Throw in her thoroughly practical streak and sense of humor and you have that irresistible presence and what can only be described as a "class act."

It is no doubt she will continue to inspire those she touches on a daily basis. I was lucky to have had that experience.

Terri Tomchyshyn
Librarian/Manager
Department of Defense
Ottawa, Canada

Good Going, Pam

To the Editor:

Delighted to see your new column "Web Sites Worth a Click" and even more delighted to see Pamela Lanier's Bed & Breakfast Guide (www.lanierbb.com) in the first feature (February, 2005).

Pam was my client and neighbor many years ago when we were both just getting started. I helped her create an organizational structure for the inn listings and also worked on category design. She was an early technology adopter. I remember developing dBase programs to resolve the letter-by-letter alphabetizing problem (St. Anthony and Saint Bridget). Pam has an exceptional product and a terrific team. I still use her B&B guide. It's the best in the business and I'm glad I had the opportunity to work with her.

Katherine Bertolucci
Taxonomy and Information Management Consultant
Isis Information Services
Phoenix, Arizona

Odd Ads

To the Editor:

Elsevier has been running a series of ads in Information Outlook that I find a bit odd. They have a picture of people in a small area (space capsule, high energy laser) and one of the people in the picture is labeled a librarian.

The tag line of the ad is "never underestimate the importance of a librarian," yet the first line in the advertising text denigrates our profession. It says, "Okay, chances are you won't actually find a librarian...in space, firing a high-energy laser," etc. It goes on to say that we are still a vital part of the team, but I think this limits our profession. Statistically they are right, and the statement is factual. However please leave me to my Walter Mitty-like dream. Some day I could, as a librarian, fly into space, fire a high-energy laser, explore the depths of the ocean, whatever.

Michael Zimmerman
Bain & Company Inc.
Irving, Texas

A Familiar Debate

To the Editor:

I enjoyed reading [John Latham's Information Management] column, "Competitive, not Just Competent" in the April issue of Information Outlook.

It reminded me of the time I worked for Dean F. Davies at the University of Tennessee Medical Units in Memphis, when I was an intern in the MLA/NLM internship program at UT in 1971-1972 (my how time flies). Dr. Davies was a professor in the department of preventive medicine. This was the time when multiphasic screening was becoming technically and economically feasible in the medical profession, and there was a great deal of emphasis being placed on determining "normal values." The problem was that there was a great deal of disagreement amongst the medical profession of what was the correct "normal value," and this was further muddied by the fact that the public—to say nothing of physicians—began to equate "normal" with "healthy," in spite of the fact that a statistical "normal" merely means the most typical value.

Dr. Davies always thought that we needed to talk about "normative values," i.e. values that were indicative of health or of lowered risk for disease, versus "normal values," i.e., typical values in the population. While disease can certainly occur even when one has "normative values," it is at least less likely.

The same thing is true for competitive and competent. Regardless of one's level of competence, one must also possess some degree of competitiveness to be successful in an organization. I think this is most important for library managers who must successfully compete for the organizational resources needed for the library to do the job that the organization needs it to do.

Jim Tchobanoff
Information and Library Management Consultant
Arden Hills, Minnesota

Moving On

To the editor:

Life moves pretty fast for the career college librarian. Last month we were MCCAL (Minnesota Career College Association Libraries) and today we are CCLM (Career College Libraries of Minnesota). Why the name change? Being associated with the MCCA was a great beginning, but it limited us to what librarians we could accept into our organization. Last month's vote determined that it was time to open membership to all Minnesota career college librarians. The change has had positive results. Since we have changed the name, we have heard from other librarians who are interested in who we are and what we are doing.

Note: You don't have to be from Minnesota to contact us. We welcome inquiries from librarians everywhere.

If you are interested in finding out more about CCLM check us out online at: www.cclmn.org.

Melissa Aho, MLIS, MS
Minnesota School of Business

IMLS Report Focuses on African American Museums

A new publication, "African American History and Culture in Museums: Strategic Crossroads and New Opportunities," is available from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

The report is the result of a day-long forum where 30 leaders in the African American museum community and the museum community at large explored the evolving role of African American museums, their contributions, and their challenges.

The session was a critical listening opportunity for IMLS staff and will be used to help make connections between IMLS programs and the needs of the African American museum community. A clear outcome of the meeting was that IMLS must continue to work closely with the African American museum community to raise awareness about its existing grant opportunities and to create new ones.

"African American museums are catalysts for deepening appreciation and understanding of the African American experience and they play an essential role in the creation of scholarship, the stewardship of collections, and the development of public programs," writes IMLS Director Robert Martin in the preface of the report. "As such, these museums are a vital component in the ongoing effort of our country to create 'a Nation of Learners'—an effort that is the central mission of the IMLS."

This report, along with other discussions and consultations, will also help guide IMLS in the development of a new grant program that seeks to recognize and support the role of African American museums in communities across the United States as authorized by The National Museum of African American History and Culture Act.

To obtain free copies of the report, e-mail the Institute of Museum and Library Services at imlsinfo@imls.gov, or access it electronically from the agency Web site at: http://www.imls.gov/pubs/pdf/African_American_Museums.pdf.

Australia/New Zealand Selects Its First Info Pro of the Year

The winner of the inaugural SLA-Australia/New Zealand Information Professional of the Year Award is Nerida Hart, Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra.

This award, sponsored by Dialog, carries a prize of AUD $2,000. It was to be presented to Hart in July.

Hart was selected for her achievements in reinventing and developing the department's library service and aligning the service to organizational objectives while delivering exceptional service.

A "special mention" certificate will be awarded to Carmel O'Sullivan, Blake Dawson Waldron, Queensland. Her nomination reflects her commitment to sharing her expertise and knowledge through mentoring and training, her work in promoting information literacy and lifelong learning in her organization, and the writing of numerous articles and papers.

The award is open to all information professionals, such as corporate librarians, independent information consultants, knowledge managers, and others working and living in Australia or New Zealand.

It is sponsored by Dialog, which offers awards in a number of countries to help information professionals gain increased recognition for the contributions they make to their organizations and their communities. Dialog is offering this annual award in Australia and New Zealand for the first time in 2005 to mark the launch of the Australian and New Zealand Chapter.

web sites worth a click

By Cybele Elaine Werts

The exciting news is that your trusty columnist Carolyn Sosnowski has had a baby, so she's taking off a few months. I'll be filling in until she gets back. Just so you know, I made our trusty editor promise I could do a column soon on information specialist humor—so that's something to look forward to in the steamy summer months!

This month I compiled some great articles on internet search strategies.

Internet Search Tips and Strategies by Robert Harris

www.virtualsalt.com/howlook.htm

If you want a general overview on how the Internet works, what's out there in the big bad world of the Web, and how to utilize search terms in the most effective way, read this article.

Overview (from the article)—The Internet has an enormous quantity of information, with thousands of newsgroups and billions of Web pages. The two questions that face any information seeker are, (1) How can I find what I want? and (2) How can I know that what I find is any good? This article treats the first question. A companion article, "Evaluating Internet Research Sources," treats the second. Through the use of a little creativity, some patience, and a few search engines, you will be able to find just about anything you want. Many of the search tools and tool types mentioned in this article are available at "World Wide Web Research Tools."

Choose the Best Search for Your Information Needs

www.noodletools.com/debbie/literacies/information/5locate/adviceengine.html

This article includes a very practical table that lays out various options for search engines. For example, were you to ask, "I need a few good hits fast such as an organization's homepage," it would tell you which search engine to use. There's also an Acrobat version you can download.

A Primer in Boolean Logic

http://library.albany.edu/internet/boolean.html

There are lots of articles on Boolean searches, but I liked this particular one because the pictures explain things very clearly. A Boolean search is simply a search that uses AND, OR, and NOT. Nothing fancy, really!

web sites worth a click

Evaluating Web Pages: Techniques to Apply & Questions to Ask

From UC Berkeley—Teaching Library Internet Workshops
http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html
The old adage that if it's in print it must be true is one kaput adage. In fact, because the Internet is such an open environment, anyone can print anything they like. On the good side, it's not too difficult to determine if a source is credible. This article will help you do exactly that.

Style Sheets for Citing Resources (Print & Electronic): Examples & General Rules for MLA, APA, & Chicago & Turabian Styles

From UC Berkeley—Teaching Library Internet Workshops
http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Style.html
All good information specialists cite their sources, but considering how things change on the Internet this can be a wee bit confusing. This article show several different styles that you can use for citing Internet sources.

Cybele Elaine Werts, a regular contributor to Information Outlook, is an information specialist with the Northeast Regional Resource Center. NERRC is a part of Learning Innovations at WestEd, a research, development, and service education agency. She can be reached at cwerts@wested.org. The NERRC Web site is www.wested.org/nerrc and her personal Web site is www.supertechnogirl.com.

You're the Expert Share What You Know

Here Are *Information Outlook*'s Major Topics for 2005

We're always looking for new authors for *Information Outlook*. That's one way we get new ideas, and learn new ways of doing things.

The editorial calendar below shows major topics we want to cover for each issue in 2005.

Please note: The editorial calendar is only a starting point. We need more articles on more topics than we've listed below.

If you want to write on a topic that isn't on the calendar, or on a topic that isn't listed for a particular issue, we want to hear from you. For example, articles on topics like marketing, searching, and technology will be welcome throughout the year. We want to hear all of your ideas for articles.

Also, our descriptions of the topics may not fit your approach. If you have a different idea for a topic, let us know.

November

Trends in library design. A library is more than a collection of books and periodicals. How can design make a difference for your clients? Or, with increasing digitization of information, are the days of physical libraries nearly through?

E-publishing.

December

Purchasing. How do you get the best deal for your company's information needs?

Deadlines

In general, we need to receive completed articles six weeks prior to the month of publication: for example, October 15 for the December issue.

However, we prefer that authors inquire before submitting a manuscript. If you are writing for a particular issue, your query should be early enough to allow for writing the article.

For more information on writing for *Information Outlook*, see www.sla.org/content/Shop/Information/writingforio.cfm, or write jadams@sla.org.

SLA
Connecting People and Information

Exit Interviews Can Provide Valuable Feedback

By Debbie Schachter

As a standard part of your work as a librarian and manager, you should always be seeking and receiving feedback on your performance, both on the individual and departmental levels. Maintaining an interest and willingness to change, based on the feedback of employees as well as customers, is an essential ongoing activity for all managers. Often this is accomplished through the performance management system or annual performance reviews, where you have the opportunity to give and receive feedback to and from your employees.

There is one key opportunity to receive employee feedback that is not always realized, though. That occasion occurs when an employee chooses to take a position elsewhere; therefore, you have one final opportunity to formally receive an employee's feedback to help you to improve their position and the library's work environment.

This particular information-seeking activity is known as the exit interview, and it is an HR best practice that many organizations try to implement. You probably hold informal discussions with parting employees, but do you make a formal practice of soliciting their feedback? Few organizations really seem to understand and act upon the valuable information obtained through the exit interview, however. Your human resources department may have a policy and procedures on holding exit interviews, or you may need to devise a policy specifically for the library. Regardless, if you understand the value of feedback and are willing, it is very easy to hold formal exit interviews with departing staff to help the development of your library.

There are many reasons for holding exit interviews, and it's not only to find out why a particular staff person is leaving the organization. Obviously, an employee's reasons for leaving a position in your library is something you should want to understand, and it may not always be simply that they found a better position elsewhere. The exit interview may even be the opportunity to retain an employee you don't want to lose. If you are willing to understand the reasons why the employee wishes to depart, and are able to offer some change to their position that will suit both you and the employee, your exit interview policy will have paid off.

In most cases, the exit interview provides an employee with the opportunity to make some retrospective suggestions on how their particular job, or the library generally, can be improved. It should be thought of as a positive learning tool for the librarian or department manager. From the employer's perspective, this is the opportunity to obtain information about how employees perceive the library and why a particular employee wants to leave. It is a learning opportunity for the organization to address employee concerns and to correct ongoing problems. Particularly if you begin to see a pattern of departures—such as the exits of good staff members you would have preferred to retain—providing an exit interview opportunity for the employees may reveal underlying problems within the library or in the organization at large that you are unaware of.

Types of concerns that you may need to address include non-competitive pay rates, underlying problems between fellow employees, a lack of responsiveness of library management to employee suggestions or opinions, or a sense there is a lack of interest in staff development. Again, these are the employee's perspective only, but should provide some signals of where small problems may begin brewing among other staff.

One important reason for having a policy of holding exit interviews is that it shows all staff, not just departing staff, that you care and are interested in making the library a better place to work—provided you are willing to listen to constructive criticism and to act upon staff input to make the workplace better for everyone. This response should lead directly to improved staff development, training, retention, and succession planning. It creates a positive statement to staff that you want to improve the situation.

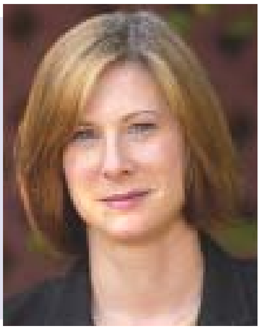
From a personal development perspective, the process will help you develop your management skills, through overtly soliciting feedback and by determining how to act upon it. It will develop your communication and human resource management skills. Overall, the ability to seek out and respond to suggestions and even criticism without feeling threatened will make you a better manager.

How to Conduct the Interview

First you need to determine whether your HR department conducts exit interviews. Depending on the size of your organization or staff, the employee may have more than one exit interview.

For example, the library manager may hold an exit interview with each departing

Debbie Schachter has a master's degree in library science and a master's degree in business administration. She is the associate executive director of the Jewish Family Service Agency in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she is responsible for financial management, human resources, database and IT systems, and grant application management. Schachter has more than 15 years' experience in management and supervision, technology planning and support, in a variety of nonprofit and for-profit settings. She can be reached at dschachter@jfsa.ca.



staff member and a member of the HR team may also conduct exit interviews to seek feedback on the larger organization. Or you may be expected to do so at the department level only.

Ideally—and of course this depends upon the size of your library—the exit interview should be conducted by someone other than the employee's supervisor. This is for the obvious reason of obtaining feedback on how well supervisors are performing their functions and how they are viewed by their staff. In smaller libraries you may be the direct supervisor and manager, so this may not be possible.

An important point about the exit interview is that it is voluntary only. If a staff member does not want to have an exit interview, you should respect their wishes. Exit interviews are also only given to voluntarily departing employees. Someone who has been let go due to restructuring or other reasons may feel disgruntled towards the organization, and an exit interview will assist neither the departing employee nor the employer.

The exit interview should be conducted in person, although it may also be possible to provide a print questionnaire for employees who feel too nervous to provide feedback in person. You will lose a lot through the questionnaire process, though, because the exit interview really should be conducted as a conversation, with as many open-ended questions as possible. The timeframe for holding the interview should be as close to the date of departure as possible, but not on the last day, and that may include either during their notice period or up to a few months after the employee has left the library.

The types of questions you ask will depend upon what kind of information you want, but they should include the following types of questions:

- Questions relating to why they are leaving. Ensure that there are no discriminatory or harassment situations lurking. If you discover there are, immediately relay this information to the HR department for investigation. Let the employee know you are doing so.
- Questions on HR policies overall at the organization—including pay, employee development, career support, and so on.
- Questions about what would have made the difference between staying and leaving. Find out if there is one particular problem or barrier that seemed insurmountable, or whether there are a series of concerns.
- Questions on how the employee would change their particular job.
- Questions on the orientation and training they received when they first took on their current position.
- Questions on how the library and the organization overall can improve.

Use as many open-ended questions as possible during the interview. Your aim is to obtain suggestions for improvement in the library and in the position the employee is leaving. Find out how the employee feels about the larger company. It is possible that someone loves working in the library but isn't so certain about the mandate of the overall organization. Find out what might have been the one major thing that created the impetus for leaving, or what might have made them decide to stay. You may not be able to act upon all of the feedback, but being aware of potential problems will help you in library planning and staff retention.

Conclusions

Although it may be easy to do so, don't take any negative feedback personally unless you're beginning to see a pattern in employee departures. The whole point of the exit interview is to obtain the employee's perceptions, and do it only if you want to hear, learn, and change. Some employees may have a grudge against other employees, their supervisor, you, or the organization overall. But chances are most employees will go into the exit interview with a positive sense of support for the library's development. If you are clear about the exit interview policies and procedures and are seen by staff to be following through on suggestions, as appropriate, employee morale and the work environment overall will improve.

Even if an employee doesn't have any suggestions for general library improvement, perhaps they have suggestions for improving the position they're leaving. This will help you in your recruiting and training for a replacement staff member. If you are getting feedback that there's a problem with your management or supervisory skills, think about how you can modify your behavior and work on your skills.

Exit interviews, as with all human resource activities, are intended to improve the library through best practices. The exit interview is an excellent method to obtain feedback from employees who may have little to lose by telling you the truth. Sometimes you will need to take that feedback with a pinch of salt, but generally try to be open minded about what you hear and make sure to ask the right questions in the exit interview. It's not just about "Why are you leaving?" but "How could your job here be changed?" and "How can we improve the library?"

SLA 2005 Draws Almost 5,300

Annual Conference Registration Up by More Than One-Third

And a good time was had by all. A very good time, it seemed. And "all" came to a lot more people than last time.

We're talking, of course, about the 2005 SLA Annual Conference in Toronto in June. Attendance came to 5,283, surpassing the 2004 Nashville event by more than 37 percent.

More than 740 were first-time attendees. Participants represented 45 countries. "We had some fabulous speakers and an involved and energetic crowd. Toronto was a great city with friendly and helpful people," SLA Executive Director Janice Lachance said. "Overall, the 2005 Annual Conference was a huge success and raised the bar for our 2006 conference in Baltimore."

The conference's INFO-EXPO, the largest information and knowledge management exposition in North America, featured 262 exhibitors in 441 booths. SLA welcomed 59 new exhibitors this year.

By comparison, the 2004 Annual Conference in Nashville attracted 3,852 participants and the INFO-EXPO featured 235 exhibitors in 415 booths.

Flashback

SLA 2005 officially began on June 5 at the Metro Toronto Convention Center in downtown Toronto. The opening of the INFO-EXPO featured a Finnish "shouting choir" and actors in international costumes.

That evening, 25 members and six strategic partners received awards and honors in 14 categories at the 57th annual SLA Awards Ceremony and Reception. The emcee for the sold-out event was Ethel M. Salonen, SLA's 2004-2005 president. On June 6, internationally known business author Don Tapscott delivered the opening keynote address. The SRO crowd of more than 3,000 listened as Tapscott detailed the information professional's role in the era of "*The Naked Corporation*," the title of his most recent book. "People are getting unprecedented access to information. If you're going to be naked, you better be buff," he said.

Another large crowd gathered that afternoon for the unveiling of SLA's newest member service: Click University. The online learning system was designed expressly for the professional development and continuing education needs of information and knowledge management professionals around the world.

On June 7, international technology design expert Bill Buxton, in the second keynoter, held the attention of the capacity crowd, discussing the relationship between creativity and technological design. "We aren't in the midst of an information revolution," he said. "We're in a racket of noise and data overload."

Later, the newly renamed "President's Showcase" fea-

Outgoing SLA President Ethel Salonen, left, gives her successor, Pam Rollo, the symbolic "Necklace of Nations."

Past, present and future SLA presidents: Ethel Salonen (2004-2005), left, poses with Pam Rollo (2005-2006) and Rebecca Vargha (2006-2007).

tured up-and-coming author Dan Pink in an overflowing breakout room. Discussing the value of right-brain thinking in today's economy, Pink elaborated on and discussed his assertions in his most recent book *A Whole New Mind*.

At the closing general session on June 8, business guru Gary Hamel talked about *Leading the Revolution*, his latest book. Hamel—author of *Competing for the Future*, the best-selling business book of all time—is No. 4 on the Global Ranking of Business Thinkers, far outpacing icons such as Bill Gates and Stephen Covey.

He urged the audience, "Move from being custodians of information to catalysts for renewal."

New Leadership

At the Annual Business Meeting, SLA President Salonen presented 2005-2006 President Pam Rollo with the "Necklace of Nations," symbolically passing leadership. A new board of directors was also seated. And SLA's membership overwhelmingly approved measures to allow online voting and an alignment of the association's governance year with its fiscal year.

First SLA Conference Blog

For the first time, SLA staff and conference participants provided a detailed account of conference activities through an official weblog. The SLA conference blog provided commentary, photos, and event updates to participants on site as well as members who couldn't attend. It will remain open indefinitely at www.sla.org/conferenceblog.

SLA 2006

Next year's conference will be in Baltimore. The theme is "Baltimore—Where Tradition and Transformation Converge." Speakers will include public television's Gwen Ifill and Walter Mossberg of The Wall Street Journal.

Tapscott: New Roles for Info Professionals

Don Tapscott speaks at the SLA Annual Conference.

Information professionals are in the transparency business, and it works in both directions. There's the obvious role of finding information—plus a role in making their organization more transparent.

That's the emerging new business model, opening general session keynoter Don Tapscott told a nearly SRO audience Monday morning.

Tapscott, a business strategist, consultant, and educator—and author of the recently published book *The Naked Corporation*—said transparency is more than just disclosure.

"All the people are getting unprecedented access to information," he said. And, he added, "If you're going to be naked, you'd better be buff."

By that, he means that with more information than ever available about organizations, there's a need to maintain high standards of business practice and product quality and value.

"Transparency is not something to be feared; it's something to be embraced."

The drivers of transparency, he said, are:

Technological. Faster Web connections, portability of communication devices, greater bandwidth all make it easier for people to get information about companies, products, and services.

Economic. Enabled by technology, organizations are becoming less vertically integrated and forming networks of partnerships.

Demographic. The children of the Baby Boom have grown up digital. "They aren't scared of technology. It's just there."

Socio-political. Technology has created a global community and enabled grass-roots communication about organizations, their practices, their prices.

Tapscott is president of New Paradigm Learning Corp., which he founded in 1993, and adjunct professor of management at the Joseph L. Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto.

Go Back to School at Click University

Conference attendees crowd into the SLA Marketplace to hear about the new online university.

SLA used the annual conference to unveil its new online learning system—the first of its kind designed specifically for library and information professionals.

Click University (clickuniversity.com) is an online learning community created expressly to meet the professional development and continuing education needs of librarians and information professionals worldwide.

Use of Click University is reserved exclusively for SLA members.

"In the past, the options for 'info pros' pursuing career development were limited—mainly seminars and conferences requiring travel, registration, tuition, and fees that often proved cost-prohibitive," said Executive Director Janice R. Lachance.

"Click University obliterates those barriers," Lachance said. "This means every SLA member can get top-notch, university-level courses anywhere, anytime; complete the work at their own pace; and at a price that's right for them."

Click University offers 10 course libraries with a combined total of 320 courses. Six-month and yearly subscriptions are priced between $19 and $249.

Significant funding for Click University's launch was provided by Elsevier, which contributed $60,000 to the effort. Future development will be supported by SLA and its Professional Development Campaign.

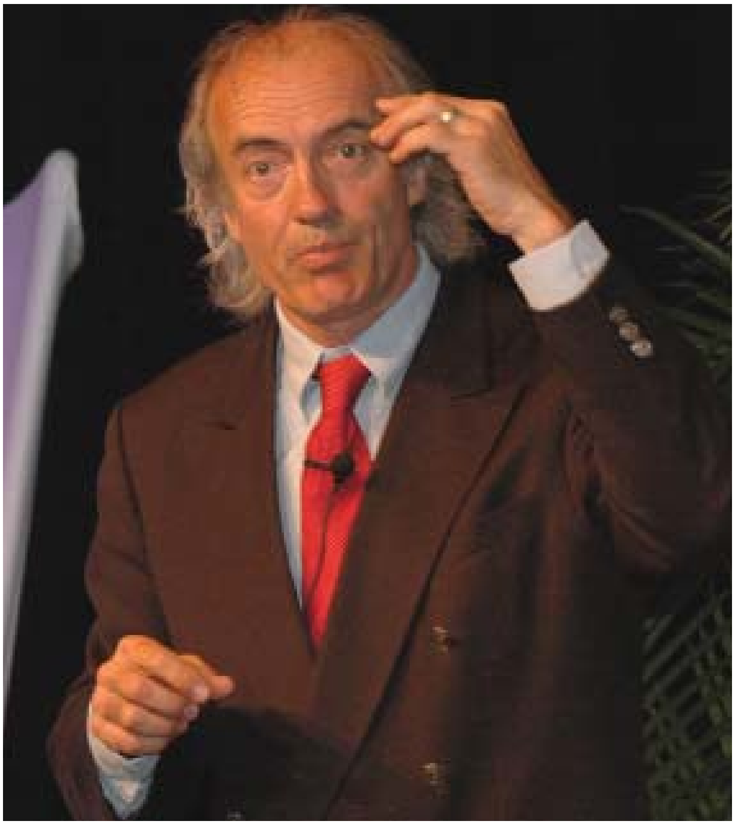
The online university will continue to grow and expand a dynamic library of e-courses. The course catalog currently concentrates on core skills, such as software and technology use; management, communications, and leadership strategies; and effective practices and methods for the collection, sharing, and use of information and knowledge in the modern working world.

"The launch celebrated Click University's birth, but it will grow, mature, and develop," Lachance said. "As innovation leaders, we must be agile, responsive, and let customers 'build out' the product. Our customers'—SLA members'—usage and feedback will determine Click's direction, redesign, and expansion. They will tell us where they want Click University to go, what it should be when it grows up, and determine its framework and services."

SLA has partnered with the WISE consortium (Web-enabled Information Science Education), which contributes greatly to the course offerings. Led by Syracuse University and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, this growing consortium is composed of 13 information science programs—10 in the United States, two in Canada, and one in New Zealand. The consortium of distance education leaders harnesses the power and potential of the Internet to share classes, students, and resources. Students at participating universities can take online courses from other consortium schools and receive credit at the institution where they are enrolled.

In addition to Click University's library of courses, Click students are eligible for a 50-percent discount on individual Syracuse University e-courses, and a 10-percent discount on Syracuse graduate degree and certificate program courses. Click also offers Drexel University courses at a 20-percent discount. SLA and Drexel are continuing talks that could expand the partnership and educational offerings.

Okay, he moved some, but mostly this guy got paid for making like a statue in the exhibit hall.


Bill Buxton makes a point during the Tuesday general session.

Members OK Electronic Balloting, Align Fiscal-Governance Years

SLA members voted overwhelmingly to approve two sets of amendments to the association's bylaws—one to allow for electronic voting by members, and the other to align the governance year with the fiscal year.

The votes were cast at the SLA Annual Business Meeting, held during the annual conference in Toronto in June. Several hundred members attended the business meeting and voted almost unanimously to approve bylaws changes to permit e-voting. No one voiced opposition to the proposal.

"Online voting is the future of association democracy," said Janice R. Lachance, SLA executive director. "It allows for greater membership participation, recognizing and accommodating the reality that many active, valuable members sometimes cannot travel to our business meetings."

SLA is now accepting bids for a secure remote electronic voting system. The association plans to have a system in place before the end of the year.

Members also demonstrated strong, widespread support for aligning the association's governance year with its fiscal year. Starting in 2007, SLA's governance year will begin in January when the fiscal year begins. The governance and fiscal years will run concurrently from January through December.

Previously—and until the change takes effect in 2007—the governance year was defined as June to June. Each successive year began at the end of the annual conference.

"Adjusting this nonalignment will result in more transparent financial and operational management for the long-term good of the association," Lachance said. "It reduces reporting requirements, which will make it easier to attract volunteer leaders."

SLA President-Elect Rebecca Vargha, who takes office in June 2006, will serve an extended term to allow for the transition. Vargha will serve until the succeeding president takes office in January 2008. Individual units are determining their own transition of terms and officers to align the governance and fiscal years.

New Caucuses

At its first meeting, on June 8 the 2005-2006 SLA Board of Directors approved two new caucuses: the Inclusion Caucus and the Architecture, Building Engineering, Construction and Design Caucus.

Here are the specifics of the two new caucuses.

Architecture, Building Engineering, Construction and Design Caucus

Scope: Seeks to serve information professionals working for public and private organizations in the building and real estate trades. This includes, but is not limited to, architecture, building engineering, construction, interior design, landscape architecture, development, public works, historic preservation, urban planning/urban design, planning, and real estate. Convener: Dennis Hamilton

Inclusion Caucus

Scope: Will offer coordination of and partnering for the initiatives of various SLA units addressing diversity challenges as well as the collection and dissemination of information and best practices from our membership. Where the activities of other units are aligned with the scope of the Inclusion Caucus, the caucus will link to and promote the efforts of the other unit. Co-Conveners: TBD

To join, a member should contact the membership department (membership@sla.org) for the caucus to be added to their existing membership. Caucus dues are $12 annually.

A shouting choir from Finland helped draw a crowd to the grand opening of the SLA INFO-EXPO.

Conference participants check their e-mail and catch up on their blogging at the Cyber Connection.

Participants fill the up escalators to get to the just-opened exhibit hall.

New President Challenges SLA

Pam Rollo rehearses her inaugural speech.

SLA President Pam Rollo, in her inaugural address at the June 8 general session, challenged SLA members to help "communicate our value as a profession and to enable our members to take their place as thought leaders and policy makers within organizations."

"I would like our efforts to be devoted to defining and constructing a message we can communicate to employers, the information industry and organizations at large which explains what we do and why it's valuable," she told an audience of about 2,500.

"We begin by learning and documenting our experiences both anecdotally and empirically. Consequently, I am making a call for research to begin, to be collected, analyzed, and communicated."

First steps, Rollo said, would be to:

- Evaluate professional values.
- Identify others with similar values who may become partners.
- Prepare senior members for executive roles.
- Improve networking opportunities for members in "overwhelmingly huge chapters."
- Recognize and congratulate excellence among the membership.

Rollo said she plans to begin forming task forces to work on the year-long project.

The correct attitude, she said, is: "We cease to be suspicious of innovation and understand that all of life is a pilot program."

Earlier in the session, outgoing President Ethel Salonen recapped her year in office.

"We made it so," she said, using her trademark reference to Captain Picard's words in Star Trek: The Next Generation.

Accomplishments include the change to DBA as SLA, the professional development campaign, the start of Click University, simplification of board activities, establishment of task forces on natural disasters (in response to the South Asia tsunami) and professional value, creation of divisions for competitive intelligence and government information, and the recently passed bylaws amendments to permit electronic voting and to switch to a January-to-December governance year.

New Taskforces

Meeting with unit leaders earlier in the conference, Rollo called on members to get more involved in association activities.

In her "Guide to the Big WOW" at the Leadership Development Institute session, Rollo said she wants to center the association's talents on its role as a member advocate, and everyone can be involved.

"If somebody wants to have an impact on the association, they're going to have an opportunity," she told the group of about 100 unit leaders.

"We can only want it to be grand and to investigate what 'great' looks like to us as an organization," she said.

In addition to continuing the task forces on professional value and natural disasters, Rollo announced her plans to form several more. They will focus on:

- Research Now. Working with the SLA Research Committee, this group will collect both empirical and anecdotal information and make recommendations on topics for more study.
- Allies and Partners. This body will investigate ways to expand membership by acknowledging values and identifying others who share them.
- Executive Growth. This group will define the skills leaders needed to reach their goals and the means to provide training in those skills.
- New Visions. Recruiting and retaining new members—and concentrating on future issues—will be this group's charge.
- Recognition. This task force will look for new ways to recognize and reward members for advancing the work of SLA.
- Chapter Models. The goals for this group will be to boost local networking and to bring more "fun" into chapter activities.

The State of SLA

The following was excerpted from the State of the Association address given June 8 by SLA Executive Director Janice Lachance:

As I walk you through a look at where we've been, where we are now, and where we're headed as an association, I'd like to color the conversation by reminding you of our vision: We are THE global organization for innovative information professionals and their strategic partners. To clarify things, consider our mission: We promote our members through learning, networking, and advocacy initiatives.

We're striving to be a broader, more inclusive community of information professionals, industry representatives, scholars, and leading thinkers. We are building that community by promoting interaction between and among members of the profession, representatives of the information industry, educators, thinkers, government officials, and policy makers through better learning experiences; the fostering of networking and collaboration; and emphasizing the importance of the community that occurs as a result of such interaction.

With our vision and mission in mind, let's look at the details of our overall performance.

Fact number one: We are a learning organization. We exist to provide a place where you can gain experience and knowledge easily and affordably. As of Monday, we became the first and only association in the world to provide the library and information profession with its own online professional development system. Click University sets a new standard for career development and transformation. I'm told that we can typically expect the education we receive from formal degree programs to benefit us for about 5 years. That means you must continue to seek out professional development opportunities throughout most of your career, if you are to continue your growth. Monday's launch marked the birth of Click University, so please keep watching its development over the next year as we make it a truly comprehensive toolkit for the profession.

In many organizations, launching Click would be enough, but in the past year we have also redefined our Virtual Learning Series, developing twin courses each month to deepen your skill development. And we've done this while cutting the price in half.

Fact number two: Globalization is vital for success. In the past year, we've organized our newest chapter in Australia and New Zealand, a vital market for growth in the profession and our community. I visited members in the region earlier this year, some of whom are in the audience today. They are simply terrific. I can happily report that they are excited and eager to become a powerful force in SLA.

Fact number three: Community builds relationships that last. SLA seeks to create the kinds of interaction that adds value to your career, but also to your life experience. Nowhere is this more obvious than our Annual Conference. Just being here this week energizes us and helps us to realize that, when we pay our membership dues each year, there really is a global network standing by to help us, to support us, and to challenge us. Over 40 nations are represented here at SLA 2005, so I hope you've made the most of your time here by making YOUR network truly international!

Yesterday, the membership approved amendments to the association's bylaws that will allow electronic voting in future board elections and bylaws changes. This is a significant move, as it will allow

Three days before her State of the Association address, Executive Director Janice Lachance, right, joined President Ethel Salonen for the grand opening of the exhibit hall.

us to build stronger community in the profession by allowing ALL members to be involved in shaping the future of the association. It's a perfect example of how YOU are helping to make community a priority for SLA.

Fact number four: Advocacy promotes our value and our values. Since I joined the staff at SLA Headquarters, we've made international outreach one of our highest priorities. By participating in conferences around the world, communicating our message to a variety of audiences, representing your interests in the making of government policy, establishing partnerships, and investing resources that communicate your value and the profession's values, we have begun to reposition SLA as a global force, an advocate for change, and a calculated risk-taker.

Fact number five: Society can benefit from our work. Any profession must always consider its impact beyond the realm of its practice. There are global implications in the work you do, but there are great possibilities for generating positive results that help our fellow global citizens.

We're now actively engaged in a number of projects that are pushing the boundaries of our impact in the world. The study on the future of librarians in the workforce—funded by the U.S. Institute for Museum and Library Services—is underway. SLA, along with our partners at the University of

2005-2006 SLA Board of Directors

From left, Ethel Salonen, Rebecca Vargha, Roberto Sarmiento, Anne Caputo, Cindy Romaine, Lynne McCay, Pam Rollo, Gloria Zamora, Susan Klopper, Dan Trefethen, Patricia Cia, Agnes Mattis, Renee Massoud, Janice Lachance.

2004-2005 SLA Board of Directors

From left, Pam Rollo, Jesus Lau, Cindy Hill, Lynne McCay, Jacquelyn Knuckle, Ethel Salonen, Gloria Zamora, Susan Klopper, Dan Trefethen, Patricia Cia, Renee Massoud, Janice Lachance.

North Carolina and the University of Pittsburgh, will be working on this endeavor over the next two years. The results could help us determine our future course in preparing the profession to be competitive and adaptive to change.

And SLA was the only library association invited to apply for a training grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. In partnership with the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science and the U.S. Government Printing Office, we've proposed a pilot training program for librarians and information professionals to serve as trainers and information resources on emergency preparedness and disaster response. The program would involve recorded and live virtual training via Click University, along with some in-person experiences, to prepare our community for what could be a great public service that might have far reaching and global implications.

Fact number six: Smart financial management makes it all happen. At this point last year, our projections indicated that we might end the year in a deficit position. But the Board of Directors and staff mobilized to seek out new revenue streams and cost savings, and we ended the year with a small surplus. It was great to see that kind of coordinated focus, but all of us agreed that the time had come for smart planning and goals, and for innovative ways to generate revenue. Combined with a modestly growing global economy, as well we are very optimistic about this year's financial performance. More important is that, with the birth of Click University, we have created a very important revenue stream for the future.

Fact number seven: Growth is the hallmark of a thriving SLA. An organization succeeds only if it is moving forward. We aim to set the standard for growth in the global community of information professionals. But growth requires multiple investments —and money is only one of them! It also requires a commitment from you, the heart and soul of the profession. It requires support from the information industry, our partners in progress. It requires a laser-like focus on the specific growth needs and opportunities that will keep our momentum building and our watchers interested.

What does the future hold for SLA? I see us making great strides through expansion of membership in key areas of the globe. I see the birth of Click University as a seminal point in our history, as we can now offer affordable learning experiences for information professionals worldwide, anytime, anyplace. I see more private and publicly funded research and development opportunities around the world—U.S. based grants are great, but what about Canada, Europe, and Oceania? We seek to be the first and only association to do lots of great things, and we need you to help us get there.

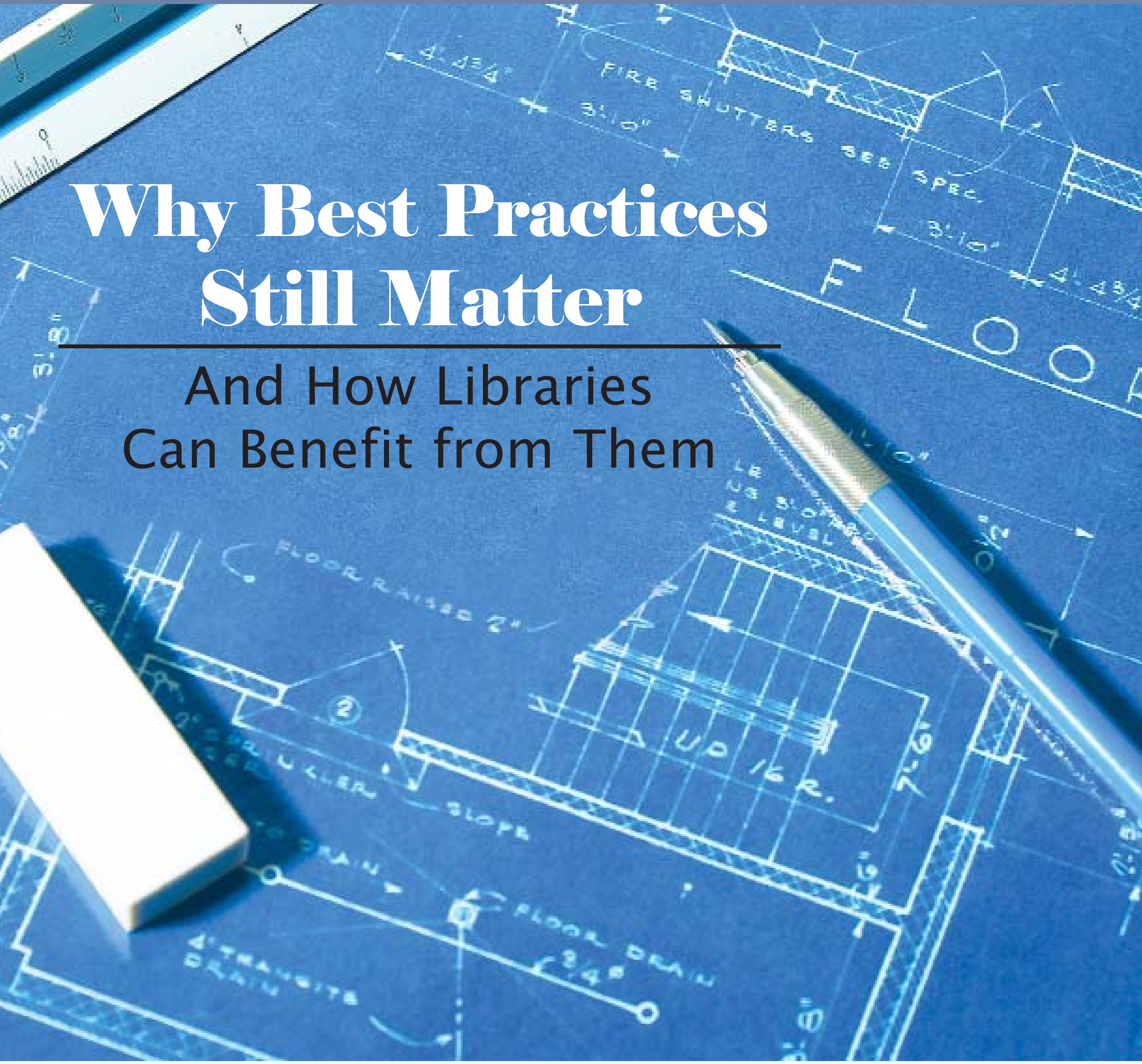
Why should we think small? As my old boss President Clinton said once, "Big things are expected of us, and nothing big ever came from being small." To strive for great things, we must be motivated, energized, and mobilized for the future. So my mantra for this year is "Enthusiasm is contagious!" Rather than simply hoping for optimism to beget opportunity, let's make it happen. Let's show the rest of the world that we are an association with a bright future

Class of 2005

Award winners honored at the conference are, from left, seated, Judy Russell, Lolly Gasaway, Gayle Lynn-Nelson, SLA Executive Director Janice Lachance, SLA President Ethel Salonen, Sylvia Piggott, Barbie Keiser, Phebe Poydras; second row, John Latham, John DiGilio, Tamika McCollough, Carol Ginsberg, Karen Melville, R. Paul Ryan, Susan Fifer Canby, Dav Robertson, Tom Rink, Dick Wallace; back row, Suzi Hayes, Hope Tillman, Brandy King, Tony Stankus, Mathildah Sakala, Carol Berger.

Why Best Practices Still Matter

And How Libraries Can Benefit from Them



By Susan J. Leandri

Every type of organization in every industry should be interested in best practices. The reason why is obvious: We all want to get better at what we do. And, as the term suggests, best practices can help us find our way to the next level.

Best practices are simply the best ways to perform a specific business function or process, such as developing or marketing a product. They are performance standards that others seek to emulate. Unlike a developing theory, idea, or trend, best practices have been proven to return desirable (and often measurable) results.

Librarians can enhance their service offerings by helping their customers access best practices information and use it to drive innovation. (See sidebar.) Similarly, they can leverage best practices to achieve internal improvements.

A corporate or academic library, for instance, might research best practices in customer service as a means of improving service to its customers. This would usually involve exploring what similar libraries are doing: What services do they offer? How do they raise awareness about their capabilities? How do they find out what resources or support their customers need? Adapting others' successful practices to meet your own needs can lead to significant operational improvements.

But while it's natural to look to peers for improvement ideas, best practices transcend organizations and industries. For instance, a hotel and a hospital can apply many of the same customer service practices, even though the healthcare and hospitality industries do not appear overly similar on the surface. But, in fact, a hospital found ways to dramatically improve patient satisfaction by studying how a luxury hotel treated its guests.

The concept of looking outside one's industry for creative inspiration and breakthrough ideas is one of the most intriguing benefits of best practices and a key reason why the study of best practices remains a vital strategy for business improvement.

If your library is looking for ways to become more efficient and effective, and provide you customers with added value—and what organization isn't?—following are some principles you can use to identify and apply best practices.

Collaborate with others through best practice groups or forums. A frequently used method for locating best practices is the establishment of a best practices group or forum. For many organizations, such as libraries, a professional association (such as the SLA) can serve this function. Associations promote the exchange of in-depth and highly specific ideas and practices that have been used successfully by other organizations. By sharing this type of "here's-what-happened-here" detail, every participant's situation is potentially enhanced because best practices get better as they are passed around and fine-tuned.

In addition to professional associations, libraries may want to form information sharing alliances with similar facilities—for instance, a group of representatives from academic libraries might meet occasionally to share best practices. Or, in the interest of trying to gather a broader range of perspectives, a group might bring together participants from both corporate and academic libraries. In addition to face-to-face meetings, best practice groups can network through conference calls, e-mail, discussion threads, and research reports. Information gleaned through these experiences can then be adapted to the needs of each participating organization.

Develop an internal system for scanning internal and external sources. Another simple, low-cost way to identify best practices is to develop a system through which staff members scan a multitude of sources in search of practices they can apply to their operations or provide to their customers. For example, one information professional might take responsibility for scanning industry periodicals; others take turns attending conferences or workshops. Other sources of best practices information are discussions with vendors who can tell you how your peers are using various resources, and consulting firms that provide pre-sifted best practices information tailored to your needs. And of course, for librarians who are attempting to provide best practices to their customers, there are always ideas to be found by keeping an eye out for applicable ideas in the broad external environment.

Here is an example of the power of scanning the external environment for best practices. When scores of Michigan schoolchildren were stricken by an outbreak of hepatitis, the state called the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to quickly isolate the cause before others fell ill. At the same time, executives at General Motors Corporation (GM) were trying to figure out how to significantly reduce the cost of warranty repairs. When company executives heard how quickly the CDC tracked and solved the hepatitis outbreak, they arranged a meeting to learn about the agency's methodology, hoping it could guide their own improvement efforts. GM eventually used ideas from the CDC's disease-tracking methods to create a standardized system for reporting parts breakdowns across the dealer network, and quickly realized the benefits. After running data through computer systems modeled after the CDC, GM noticed a surge in complaints about air conditioner performance in a new line of cars and minivans. Within three days of spotting the trend, engineers had identified the source of the problem and shipped samples of the defective parts back to the supplier. Within ten days, GM was producing the vehicles free of the air conditioning defect.

What are best practices?

Best practices are simply the best way to perform a business process. They are the means by which leading companies have achieved top performance, and they serve as goals for other companies striving for excellence.

Best practices are not the definitive answer to a business problem. Instead, they are a source of creative insight for business improvement. Adapting best practices to your specific needs can dramatically affect performance—leading to breakthroughs that save time, improve quality, lower costs, and increase revenue.

Susan J. Leandri is managing director of the Global Best Practices? operating unit at PricewaterhouseCoopers (www.pwc.com). Global Best Practices, www.globalbestpractices.com, is an online knowledge resource offering best practices, business risk, and benchmarking tools. She can be reached at susan.j.leandri@us.pwc.com.

Seek opportunities to benchmark. As tools for performance improvement, best practices and benchmarking are most effective when used together. Benchmarking is a means of comparing an organization's operations—usually a specific business process—with the performance of others. These comparisons can be either qualitative or quantitative in nature—that is, they might examine specific practices used by peer organizations (a qualitative perspective) or statistical data that reflect performance issues (a quantitative perspective). For instance, libraries might compare budgets based on the number of people they serve. A library that promotes best practices to its clients might identify opportunities for internal departments to participate in benchmark studies. An IT department might benefit from comparing total IT costs as a percentage of revenue, while a legal department might be interested in comparing its hourly internal billing rate or degree of task automation.

Benchmarking studies can also differ in scope. Two common approaches are universal and competitive benchmarking. In the business world, universal benchmarking compares a company's results with those of high performers, regardless of their industry, size, location or products. Competitive benchmarking involves making comparisons with peers (e.g., manufacturing companies or retail businesses).

From a library's perspective, a variation on universal benchmarking might be to compare one's practices and performance with libraries of every size and from all sectors, while an industry-specific approach might limit comparisons to a representative sample of similar libraries. Organizations sometimes undertake their own benchmarking projects in an effort to uncover specific types of information. Professional associations are another source of data. Many provide off-the-shelf resources that allow libraries to compare their practices and performance with peer organizations.

How Librarians Can Become Best Practices Advocates

The concept of best practices should not apply only to the operation of the library or information center. Other business units or departments can benefit from studying and adopting best practices. Librarians are in a natural position to become advocates for best practices in their organizations and active conveyors of best practices information.

They can do this by helping their organizations access best practices and use them to improve performance. When information requests are received, librarians can ask if there is a need or interest to learn more about best practices that might apply to the project at hand. This allows librarians to increase their impact, enhance their services, and contribute to organizational improvements. Here are some additional tips for becoming a best practices advocate:

- Establish a working definition of best practices.
- Communicate the goal of providing best practices to your clients.
- Identify the appropriate staff to manage best practice services.
- Adopt a method to collect and evaluate best practices. (For example, identify the resources most likely to address the areas of interest and develop a process for mining these resources for best practices.)
- Develop a template for sharing the information in a clear, consistent way.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the best practices service on a regular basis and identify opportunities to improve.

Use brainstorming to uncover innovative ideas. One of the best ways to encourage innovative or breakthrough thinking is through brainstorming sessions. Make it a habit to bring staff members together to engage in the free, unrestrained exchange of ideas. These sessions are usually used to identify specific strategies or solutions to organizational challenges. Encourage staff to apply ideas that have been successful in other environments or contexts.

Share best practices. To have an impact, best practices must be regularly disseminated, and applied when confronted with a business challenge to avoid reinventing the wheel. Effective organizations try to share best practices as a natural part of daily work life. This creates a cycle of creating new knowledge and finding better ways of working.

Still, some individuals may be reluctant to share lessons learned because they're embarrassed by project failures or prefer to hoard information so that others don't outperform them. Managers will want to dispel any reluctance or fear employees may have and make it clear that knowledge sharing is a business imperative. This leads to an environment in which everyone readily transfers what they know.

The Need to Keep Improving

In today's uncertain business world, every department and individual within an organization has to continually become more innovative, efficient, and service oriented. Libraries are certainly no exception—in fact, as most information professionals know, they may have to work even harder than other departments or functional areas to demonstrate their value. Best practices promote this never-ending quest to become more effective. And whether you find best practices within your industry or from an unexpected, outside source, they're sure to spark ideas for improvement.

How Search Engine Marketing Tools Can Work for You

Or, Searching Is Really All About Finding

First of three articles

By Terry Brainerd Chadwick

How does one go from being a librarian and independent information professional to a specialist in search engine optimization (SEO) and marketing? In my case, it was almost inevitable.

As the Internet became more and more of a repository for crucial information, an increasing amount of my work involved sifting through hundreds of Web sites, searching for pertinent information on a wide variety of projects in a very short time. Because it was so hard to find the information on many of those Web sites, my frustration kept growing. I knew there were Web sites out there with great information—I just couldn't find them. When I did find a Web site, I couldn't find the information I was looking for in it.

I'm a searcher. I know how to search and where to find information. I understand how search engines work. The problem? The companies and organizations behind these Web sites didn't understand how to have their information found by the people who were looking for it. Shortly after this realization, I started working on search engine promotion and optimization. So what does a search engine optimization specialist do?

I am currently the SEO specialist at EBSCO Subsidiary Web Services (ESWS), a department within EBSCO Industries Inc. that provides Web design, development, maintenance, and Internet marketing for the company's 20-plus subsidiary divisions. These Web sites include businesses involved in real estate, hunting and fishing supplies, office and retail products, promotional displays, and publishing. My responsibility is to develop the sites into search-engine-friendly, easily indexed, highly ranked resources. I am also responsible for

Terry Brainerd Chadwick is a former corporate librarian and independent information professional turned search marketing specialist. She became involved with search engine optimization and Web design 10 years ago, after becoming frustrated with searching for information on hundreds of Web sites a day for her competitive intelligence and market research projects. She is a past president of the Oregon Chapter of SLA.

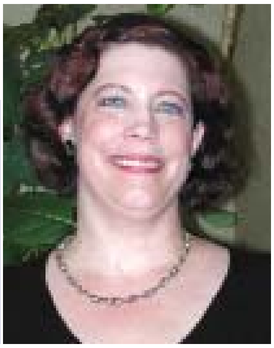


Figure 1

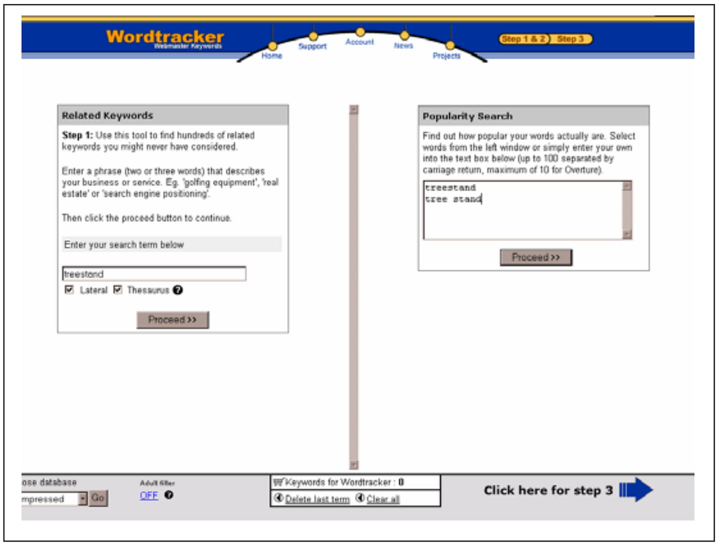


Figure 2

How special librarians can use keyword research tools

- To find out how your competitors use industry terms, check the standard search engines. To learn how potential customers search for your products and services, use Wordtracker or another keyword popularity tool.
- Overture's View Bids Tool is useful in gathering competitive intelligence. It tells you which keywords your competitors consider important.

making sure the Web sites easily convert visits into leads and sales.

When I start on a new project, I first conduct an SEO survey. Questions include the following:

- What are your goals for the company, its products, and the Web site?
- What are your expectations and how will you measure the success of the project?
- Who is your audience? Who are the customers and competitors?
- How do you describe your products and services (i.e., what keywords would you use to describe them)?
- What kind of Internet marketing have you already done?
- Is your Web site database driven? What kind of server does it run from? Does your site use JavaScript, Flash, PHP, CGI, ASP, .NET, or other scripting and programming languages?

Using the information gathered in the survey and continuing to ask questions as needed, I start my research. This includes reviewing the Web site and other company marketing materials to see how they describe their products and services, reviewing competitors' Web sites, and conducting a keyword search and site-saturation analysis. I pull this information together to create an evaluation of the site's search engine friendliness.

Search engine marketing (SEM) is more art than science. Each search engine has its own formula for ranking search results. These algorithms change often, primarily to make results more relevant to the searcher but also to derail spammers who try to use the algorithms to make their pages rank high regardless of their relevance. There are, however, a few general best practices in search engine marketing. Most of these are useful for anyone who wants to have a user-friendly Web site.

1. Use unique and descriptive titles on all pages.
2. Use plain ASCII text on your Web pages.
3. Use alt text to describe images and nontext elements.
4. Include a keyword-rich text description at the tops of pages (which the search engines read).
5. Provide unique descriptions and keyword metatags on every page.
6. Use text links with keyword-rich descriptions in your navigation and content.
7. Add relevant, high-quality links from other sites to your site.
8. Adhere to Web standards; follow usability/accessibility guidelines.
9. Use keywords in URLs.
10. Avoid using redirects or refreshes.
11. Do not duplicate pages, sites, or content. If you have similar/duplicate pages or sites, choose one for the search engines; exclude the search engines from the others.
12. Make sure your dynamic pages are search engine friendly.
13. Restrict the use of splash or doorway pages (pages that are graphics/flash only or pages filled with keywords for search engines, not humans, and that redirect to the real Web site).
14. Do not cloak (show the search engines pages/information that people won't see).

Major SEM Tools and How I Use Them

There are many tools to help you optimize Web sites. They can be grouped into four categories: (1) keyword research and analysis; (2) Web site saturation and popularity; (3) back end tools (including Web analytic tools and HTML validators); and (4) Who Is tools.

Keyword Research and Analysis

The three major goals of an SEO project are to (1) make sure the site can be indexed in the search engines; (2) find the most relevant and popular key terms and phrases for the site and its products; and (3) use those key phrases on the site in a way that will generate and convert traffic.

Remember that the "most relevant" keywords aren't necessarily the ones favored by the industry. You need to determine what words people use to search for your products and services. Researching how high your company's Web site ranks on a given search engine is useful only if you are using the same keywords that potential customers will use. Numerous tools are available to help you capture actual searches, giving you relevant estimates of the popularity of various words and phrases.

Wordtracker™ (www.wordtracker.com) is my favorite keyword research tool. Enter any keyword or phrase to determine how many people have searched using these exact same words. Wordtracker reports the number of searches on the phrase in the past 60 days; the estimated number of searches per 24-hour period; the number of Web pages containing the phrase; and the most effective key phrases based on the popularity of the word and the amount of competition.

A limited trial version of Wordtracker is available (AltaVista is its test database). The fee-based version includes major search engines, pay-per-click engines, and directories. Pricing is available on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly basis. One-year subscriptions are approximately $260.

Wordtracker provides data from the full database or by individual search engine. It currently offers keyword popularity information for the following search sites:

Google	Yahoo Directory
MSN	Open Directory
Yahoo	Looksmart
Lycos	Overture
AltaVista	FindWhat
Teoma	Searchboss
Hotbot	Bay9
AlltheWeb	GoClick

Reports from individual search engines contain information on the number of competing pages and keyword effectiveness.

One reason I like Wordtracker is that it gives you a list of 300 related terms and thesaurus listings for the keyword you test. You can use the popularity side of Wordtracker by directly transferring a term from the Related Words list on the left to the Popularity Search Box on the right. You can also enter a term into the Popularity Search Box to find out how many times it appears in the Wordtracker database. This database includes all searches conducted within the past 60 days.

Wordtracker provides a variety of search options, including these:

- Compressed search. Removes unnecessary characters (+ , -, ") and compresses all forms of the term to lowercase. For example, "POKEmon" and " + pOkEmon" become "pokemon."
- Simple search. Finds the term with words before and after (also taking into account capitals and the plural form). For example, enter "hello" and get "when i say hello," "hellos," and "hello dolly," but not "othello."

Figure 3

Wordtracker Search Options: Top 10 Results for "start"

Compressed	Count	Comprehensive	Count
we didn't start the fire	641	lets get it started	1084
head start	573	let's get it started	1002
start using cgiproxy	472	remote car starter	882
start internet business	386	starting over	792
start an internet business	383	the starting line	785
internet business start up	355	remote car starters	739
how to start a business	354	starting a business	626
start your own business	340	Startrek	606
start your own internet business	338	we didn't start the fire	420
remote start	320	starting a small business	402

Exact Keyword	Count	Precise Keyword	Count
start	195	start	195
START	33		
Start	29		

Overture (actual queries for past month from Overture Database, not Wordtracker Database) Keyword	Count	Simple Keyword	Count
starting a business	56579	we didn't start the fire	420
start	43052	start using cgiproxy	387
dsl start verizon.net	23964	start internet business	386
welcome start	20320	start an internet business	383
head start	18031	internet business start up	355
start new search	17590	Head start	353
start your own business	12352	Start your own internet business	338
how to start an internet business	11840	how to start a business	314
remote start	10645	how to start an internet business	311
start using cgi proxy	10551	remote start	297

Figure 4

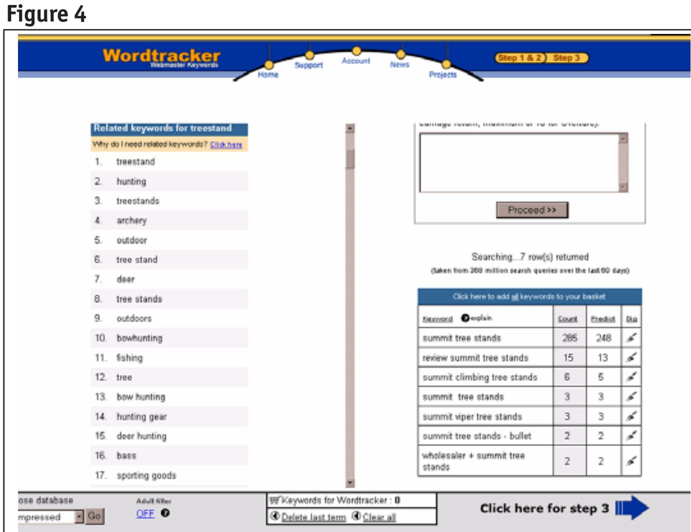


Figure 5

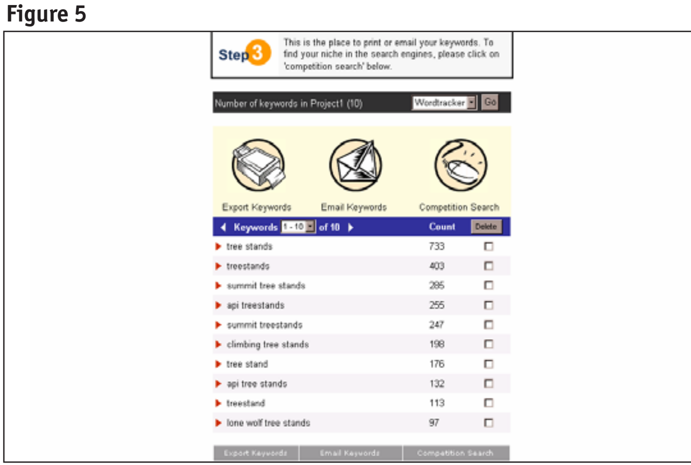


Figure 6

Figure 7

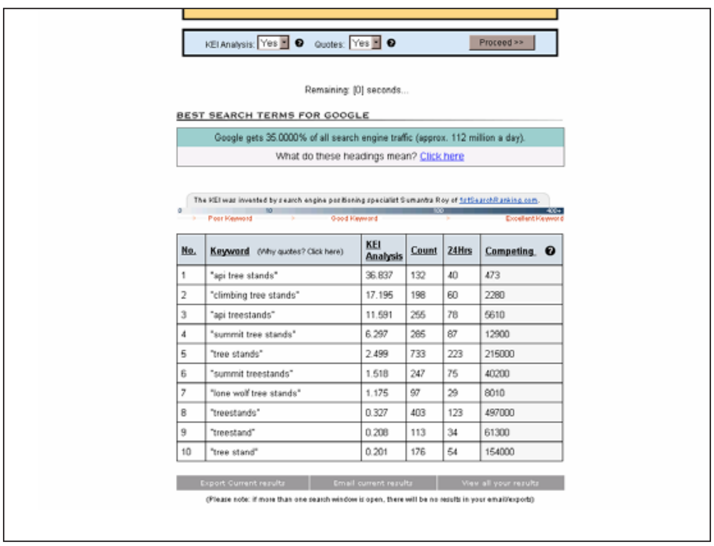
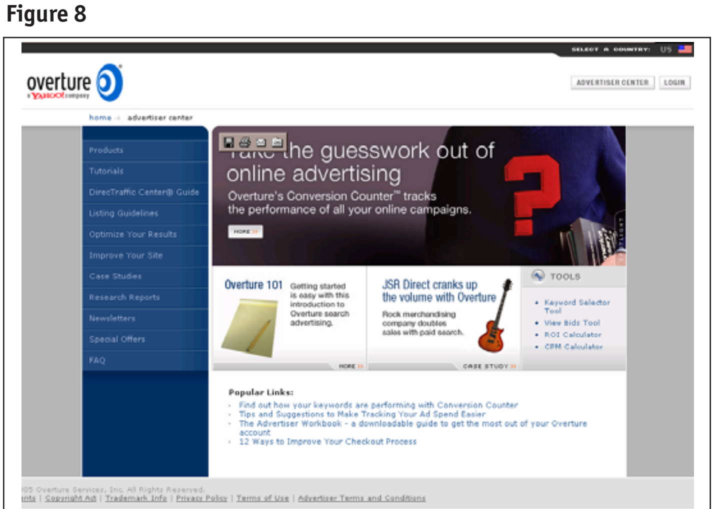


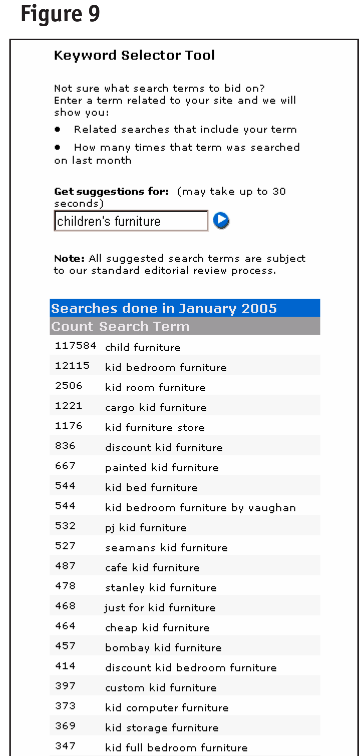
Figure 8



- Comprehensive. Allows word stemming both left and right of the term. For example, “hellontheroad” on the right or “othellos” on both left and right.
- Exact. Returns all the upper- and lowercase combinations for the keyword you have selected. For example, if you enter “HELLO,” you will get back “HELLO,” “Hello,” “HelLo,” and so on.
- Precise. Similar to the Exact Search, but returns just the term selected, compressing all its upper- and lowercase forms into one figure
- Overture. Uses the Overture Keyword Selector Term Database (see below for description)

Choose the search type based on the search engines you're targeting rather than the keywords you're targeting. For instance, when targeting search engines that place different weights on uppercase vs. lowercase words, use Simple Search.

Figure 9



The Comprehensive Search can be very useful in domain name research. The Compressed Search is the default search type and the one I usually use.

While Wordtracker is not the only keyword popularity tool available, it is one of the most comprehensive. Its main weakness is that it doesn’t use searches directly from the search engines it covers. Instead it uses searches from the metacrawler Web site Dogpile that searches most of the major search engines. Although this is a disadvantage in some ways, it is also a strength. Search term popularity numbers drawn directly from the major search engines include all the searches done by automated agents (also known as spiders and robots [bots]) to test search engine rankings. These bots launch searches on hundreds or thousands of keywords to check where sites rank. They’re not “real” searches done to answer questions. The bots don’t test rankings on metasearch engines, so the Dogpile results avoid the inflated effects of automated ranking tests.

The bottom line? Any tool you use will provide only estimates of what you can expect for your site and its products. If you use more than one tool, you can get a very good idea of what the most popular words are for each major search engine.

Overture, Yahoo’s paid placement service (www.content.overture.co/d/USm/ac/index.jhtml) provides several services to help its customers make the best decisions on choosing keywords and on pricing the bids they make for placing their ads in the

Overture network. Two of these services, the Overture Keyword Selector Tool and the Overture View Bids Tool, are available for free. While these tools are designed for people doing paid placement campaigns, they are also useful for search engine optimization.

When you use the Overture Keyword Selector Tool (http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion), search data are drawn from actual searches from a previous month from the Yahoo family of databases. When you search a term on the Overture paid placement service, it covers both singular and plural terms of the word as well as common spelling variations.

The tricky part is that this doesn't happen all the time. When I search for "children's furniture," the responses all come back with the singular "child" (e.g., the first response is "child furniture" with 107,894 searches for the month of October). I get the same response when I search for "child furniture" or "kids furniture." Yet when I search for "treestand" (1,732 searches), I get different results than when I search for "treestands" (7,062 searches) or "tree stand" (4,410 searches) or "tree stands" (11,299 searches). Another downside of Overture's combining of tenses and forms is that people often search for the same subject using similar terms or different forms of the same terms (as in the examples above). A very important part of SEM is determining which form of a word is used most often. Based on the numbers in this example, consider what would happen if you'd optimized your site for "child furniture." You'd be missing out on a lot of searches!

The Overture Keyword Selector is limited in that it doesn't show you multiple search engines or the keywords your competitors are using. Its advantage is that the data are compiled from actual searches from the Yahoo family of databases, not from a metacrawler as with the Wordtracker data. The Overture Keyword Selector is designed to help users of the Overture paid placement program. I use this tool as another way to check the overall popularity of terms.

The Overture View Bids Tool (http:// uv.bidtool.overture.com/d/search/tools/bidtool) doesn't really show keyword "popularity." It does, however, show you who your competitors are and what keywords they think are important, which makes it an excellent competitive intelligence tool.

Google's equivalent of the Overture Keyword Suggestion tool comes in a number of forms. The free, don't-need-to-register version of the Google AdWords Suggestion Tool (https://adwords.google.com/select) gives you expansions on suggested terms without providing an estimated number of searches. To get

Figure 10

Wordtracker Exact Search on Expansions on Variations of Child Furniture

Keyword	Wordtracker Database Count	Predicted Searches/Day
Childrens furniture	1060	965
Kids furniture	1055	960
Children furniture	322	293
Kids Furniture	76	69
CHILDRENS FURNITURE	32	29
KIDS FURNITURE	30	27
Childrens Furniture	28	25
Child furniture	23	21
childs furniture	22	20
Kids furniture	15	14
Childrens furniture	12	11
Child Furniture	9	8
Children Furniture	8	7
CHILDREN FURNITURE	2	2
Child's furniture	0	0
Children's furniture	0	0
kid's furniture	0	0

Figure 11

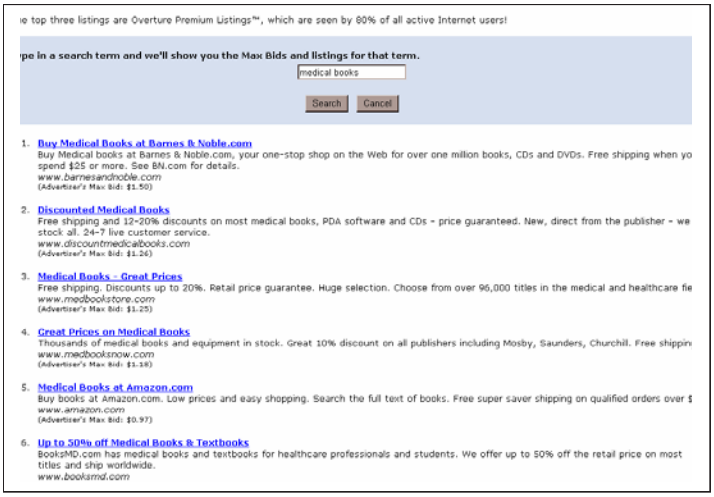


Figure 12

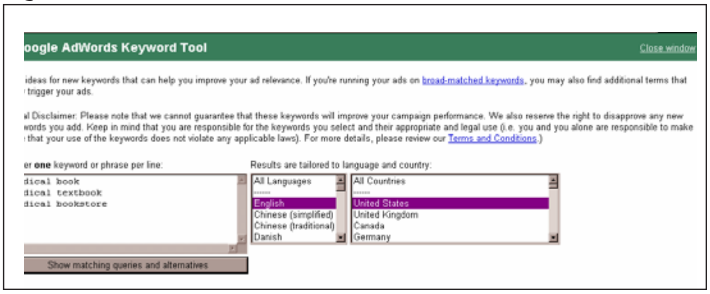


Figure 13

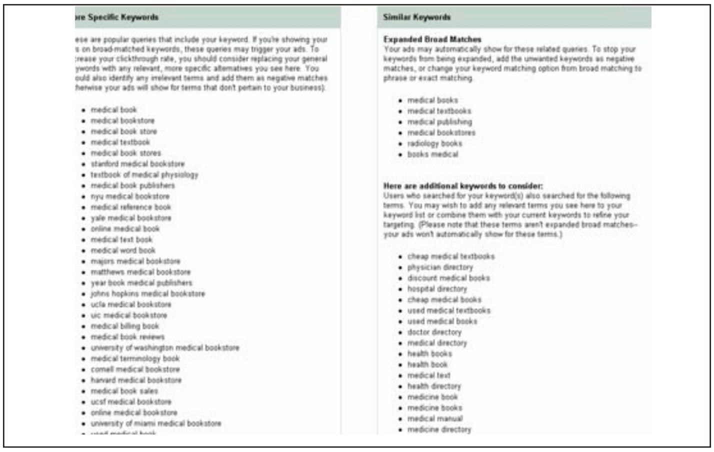


Figure 14

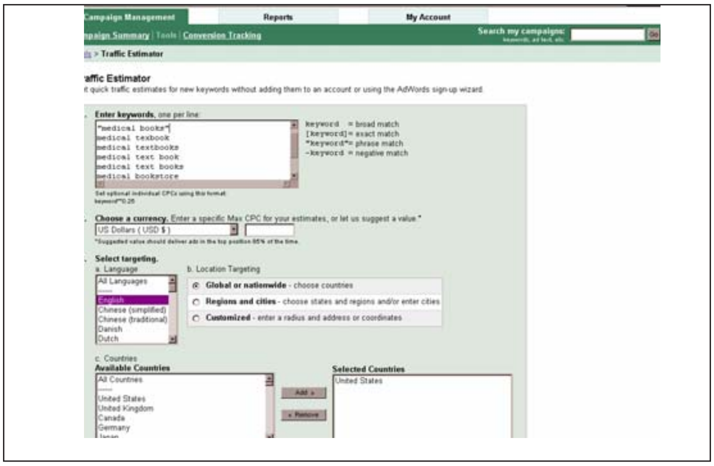


Figure 15

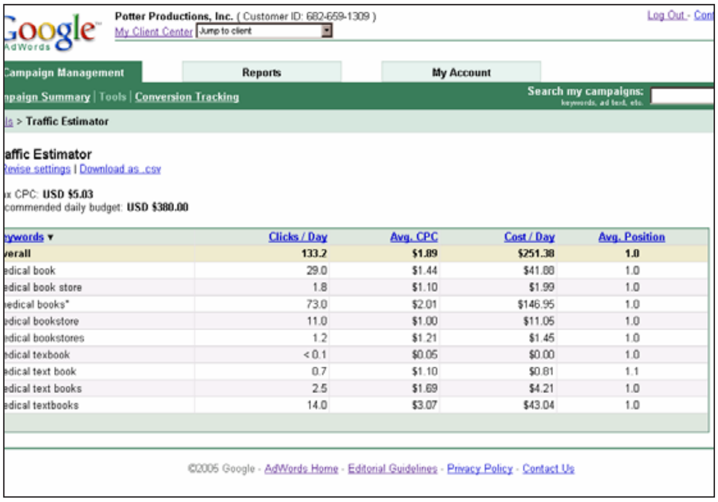


Figure 16

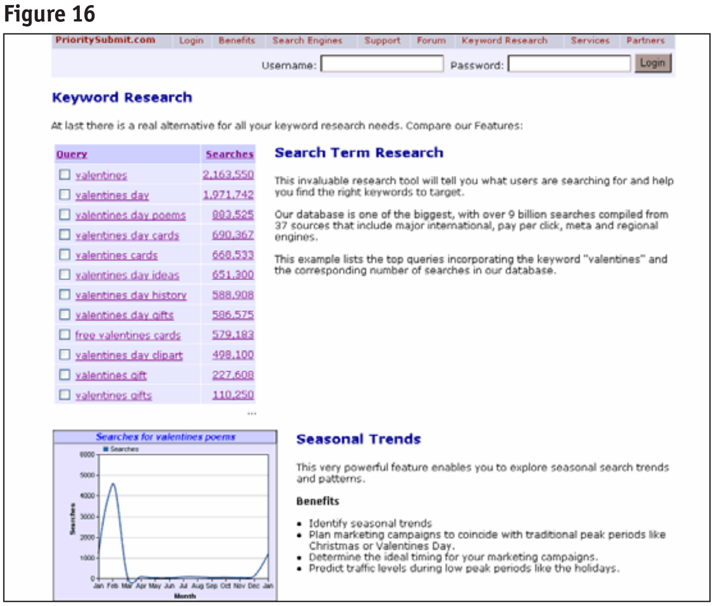


Figure 17

more information from AdWords, you need to register and set up an ad campaign, although you don't need to actually launch the campaign or make any payments.

Like the Overture Keyword Selector, AdWords is designed for paid placement, not search optimization. However, its Traffic Estimator feature determines the expected number of clicks per day for a particular ad position, providing a nice counterpoint to Wordtracker's and Overture's expected number of searches per day. Just because someone searches on a term it doesn't mean they click through to a site. This option helps in budgeting a paid placement program. It also assists in figuring out how many people you can actually expect to visit your site for any given keyword and ranking.

Although I use this tool primarily for paid placement, I also use it the same way I do Overture for search engine optimization, as a tool to check the overall popularity of terms.

Trellian's Priority Submit Search Term Research site (www.prioritysubmit.com/research.html) has a number of excellent optimization tools. Some of the tools are free with registration, but the unique ones are fee-based. The keyword analysis tool, while limited in its free version (you get only the first 20 results), has many valuable features. The database includes information compiled from 37 sources, including major international, pay-per-click, meta, and regional search engines. The Related option performs a lateral search to identify related terms, and the Overture option enables you to use the Overture search term database. You can also see the most popular and recent searches from the huge database. A unique tool shows seasonal search-trends, which can be invaluable if your products are seasonally based and you are searching off-season. Also unique in the paid service is an advanced search syntax that lets you exclude words from a search, include misspellings, and import keywords from metatags. I don't have access to the paid version of this tool, but we are considering getting it because of the unique aspects of the service.

Many searchers misspell the names of products, companies, and people. If people commonly misspell your company name, they may not reach your site when they search for you. The SearchSpell Typo Search Tool (www.searchspell.com/typo) shows the top typos for any term entered.

Clicking on a result takes you to a Google search on the typo to help you determine the Web page popularity of any given typo.

If you use SearchSpell with Wordtracker, you can see how often people actually search with these misspelled words. You can use this information as a guide in choosing alternate domain names and meta keywords. You can also use the information to develop innovative ways to bring these people to your Web pages.

The Referrer segments of Web site log files are an important part of keyword analysis. They show what keywords people are using to actually get to your site. As I've optimized sites in the past, I've frequently discovered valuable keywords in the log files that aren't listed as popular in my initial research. If you are getting a lot of Web site traffic based on a certain term, you don't want to eliminate that term during site optimization just because a third party tool says it isn't popular.

Almost all Web traffic or analytics programs have the capability to show search engine referrals. This is an excellent way to see which search engines send traffic to your Web site and to find out which keywords were used. If you aren't running paid placement programs, it shows the keywords you rank high enough for people to find your Web site in organic listings (unpaid listings with rankings determined by search engine algorithms). If you are running paid placement programs, those keywords are usually intermixed with the organic in search term referrals. However, some analytics programs differentiate between organic and paid search listings. WebSideStory's HBX™ is one of these.

The information in Figure 21 tells me that the most popular way to reach the Siegel Display Products Web site is by searching on a variation of the company name through organic listings and that paid placement is a major factor in bringing people to the site on product type searches.

The information in Figure 22 shows that people are finding Siegel Display through organic listings for the term "literature holders" on Google, but that paid placement ads are primarily responsible for boosting site traffic from other search engines receiving the same search term.

Wordtracker said that people search on the phrase "literature holders" about 38 times a day. Of this figure, 13 searches a day are on Google. This means that Siegel Display has a daily click-through rate of 6 percent overall and 8 percent on Google, which is considered pretty good. Although "literature holder" is not the most popular keyword for Siegel's products ("magazine rack" is searched about 289 times a day), it is a term I want to keep optimized for the site, working to increase organic rankings on the other search engines.

A good analytics tool will also show you the terms that convert to orders and sales. With this information, I can emphasize converting terms more than nonconverting terms when optimizing the Web site, or I can increase efforts to improve conversion rates on the popular but nonconverting terms. "Literature holders" converted 1.74 percent of the time in August 2004 for Siegel Display, compared with "magazine racks," which had a conversion rate of only 0.53 percent. This information, combined with other information tracked by the analytics programs, helps me determine which keywords and Web pages are working well and which need to be bolstered by optimizing content.

Figure 18

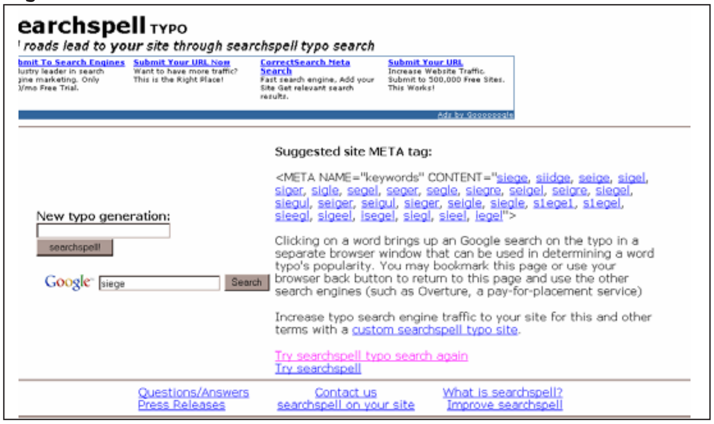


Figure 19

Number of Pages on Google with Misspellings of Siegel
Results 1 - 100 of about 161,000 for sigel
Results 1 - 100 of about 80,200 for siegle
Results 1 - 100 of about 128,000 for siegl
Results 1 - 100 of about 1,230,000 for segel
Results 1 - 100 of about 143,000 for seigel

Figure 20

Wordtracker Exact Results for Misspelled Words

Keyword	Wordtracker Database Count	Predicted Searches/Day
Seigel	24	22
SIGEL	6	5
Seigel	6	5
Sigel	5	5
Siegle	5	5
Segel	0	0
Siegl	0	0

Figure 21

Excerpted Example of HBX Top 10 Search Keyword Referrals

Search Keywords	*Visits*	*Paid*	*% Paid*	*Organic*	*% Organic*
Magazine racks	187	179	95.72	8	4.28
siegel display products	182	0	0	182	100
siegel display	181	0	0	181	100
Magazine rack	172	170	98.83	2	1.17
Pegboard hooks	122	29	23.77	93	76.23
siegel displays	79	0	0	79	100
www.siegeldisplay.com	79	0	0	79	100
Literature holders	74	28	37.83	46	62.17
sign holders	73	61	83.56	12	16.44
Pegboard accessories	69	4	5.79	65	94.21
Total visits 13,088	1,218	471	38.66	747	61.34

Figure 22

Excerpted Example of HBX Search Engine Referrals for Keyword Literature Holders

Detail: literature holders

Search Engines		*Visits*	*Paid*	*% Paid*	*Organic*	*% Organic*
MSN	31		24	77.41	7	22.59
Google	30		0	0	30	100
Yahoo	10		3	30	7	70
AltaVista	1		1	100	0	0
Total	72		28	38.88	44	61.12

coming events

July 2005

AALL 2005 Annual Meeting
American Association of Law Libraries
July 16-20
San Antonio, TX, USA
http://www.aallnet.org/events

August 2005

Sixth World Conference on Continuing Professional Development—Preparing for New Roles in Libraries
IFLA
August 11-13
Oslo, Norway
http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla71/calls-e.htm#cpdwl

World Library and Information Conference: 71st IFLA General Conference and Council
IFLA
August 14-18
Oslo, Norway
http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla71

September 2005

Hypertext 05
Association for Computing Machinery (ACM)
September 6-9
Salzburg, Germany
http://www.ht05.org

ASIDIC Fall 2005 Meeting
Association of Information and Dissemination Centers
September 11-13
Napa, CA, USA
http://www.asidic.org/meetings/fall05.htm

ARMA '05: 50th Annual Conference & Exposition
September 18-21
Chicago, IL, USA
http://www.arma.org/conference

9th European Conference on Research and Advanced Technology for Digital Libraries (ECDL 2005)
September 18-23
Vienna, Austria
http://www.ecdl2005.org

Your Career: A Straight Shot or a Shot in the Dark?
September 21
http://www.sla.org/virtualseminar

InfoX Conferences
Information Today
September 27-28
New York, NY, USA
http://www.infox-ny.com/

SARC III: Experience a Timeless Information Journey: Revolution and Evolution Continue
September 28
Williamsburg, VA, USA
http://www.sla.org/conf/ conf_sar

2005 LITA National Forum
September 30-October 2, 2005
San Jose, CA, USA
http://www.ala.org/ala/lita

October 2005

EUSIDIC Annual Conference
European Association of Information Services
October 9-11
Innsbruck, Austria
http://www.eusidic.org

Internet Librarian International 2005
Information Today
October 10-11
London, UK
http://www.internet-librarian.com

Part 1: The Principles of Conducting a Library Benchmarking Project
October 12
http://www.sla.org/virtualseminar

3rd International Evidence Based Librarianship Conference
Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)
October 16-19
Brisbane, Australia
http://conferences.alia.org.au/ebl2005

Internet Librarian 2005
Information Today
October 24-26
Monterey, CA, USA
http://www.infotoday.com/il2005

Part 2: Integrating Benchmark Findings Into the Information Product Development Lifecycle
October 26
http://www.sla.org/virtualseminar

ASIS&T 2005 Annual Meeting
October 28-November 2
Charlotte, NC, USA
http://www.asis.org/Conferences

November 2005

Part I: Unlocking Knowledge from Text
November 15
http://www.sla.org/virtualseminar

KMWorld & Intranets 2005
Information Today
November 15-17
San Jose, CA, USA
http://www.kmworld.com/kmw05

Part II: Case Studies and Implemention Roadmap
November 29
http://www.sla.org/virtualseminar

December 2005

Copyright for the Corporate Librarian: The Importance & Consequences of Copyright Issues in the Digital Environment
December 7
http://www.sla.org/virtualseminar

Communicating the Value of Your Service
December 14
http://www.sla.org/virtualseminar

January 2006

SLA Leadership Summit
January 18-21
http://www.sla.org/

index of advertisers

SLA Notices

Canadian Government Introduces New Copyright Legislation

Last month the Canadian government introduced a long-awaited bill to amend the country's Copyright Act. The bill addresses short-term copyright reform issues while the policy divisions of the government continue to work on medium- and long-term reform issues. This bill, numbered C-60, continues the ongoing reform process in which the last major amendments were made to the Copyright Act in 1997 (ironically, in a bill also numbered C-60.)

WIPO Treaties

As mentioned in my column of January 2005, two new World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) treaties were introduced in 1996 to provide a minimum level of protection in digital-related copyright issues in countries that adhere to them. To comply with these treaties, countries must ensure that their laws meet the minimum standards in the treaties. Thus, in the U.S., the need for the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). One of the main purposes for Bill C-60 is to bring Canada's copyright laws up to the minimum standards of the two WIPO treaties. To do this, the bill includes the following amendments:

- The exclusive communication rights of authors are clarified to include control over the making available of their content on the Internet.
- Sound-recording makers and performers are granted the right to control the making available of their sound recordings and performances on the Internet.
- It will be an infringement of copyright to circumvent, for infringing purposes, technological measures designed to protect copyright works.
- It will be an infringement to alter or remove rights management information embedded in copyright material when done to further or conceal infringement.
- Rights holders are granted control over the first distribution of their content in a tangible form.
- The duration of protection of photographs will be the life of the photographer plus 50 years in all circumstances.
- Performers will enjoy full reproduction rights in sound recordings.
- Performers are given moral rights in their fixed and live performances.

ISP Liability

ISP liability is not discussed in the two WIPO treaties and is a matter for each country to determine on its own. Bill C-60 exempts ISPs from copyright liability when they are acting merely as intermediaries. When an ISP receives notice from a copyright owner that one of its subscribers is allegedly hosting or sharing copyright-infringing content, the ISP will be required to forward the notice to the subscriber, and to keep a record of relevant information for a specified time.

Educational and Research Access

The bill deals with specific educational and research access issues, while other issues are reserved for further amendments. The government will begin a consultation process on educational use of publicly available Internet material, while the following issues are dealt with in the bill:

- Students in remote locations will be able to view a lecture using network technology, either in real time or at their own convenience.
- Content that may be photocopied for students pursuant to a school's blanket license with a collective society (like the CCC in the U.S.) may be delivered to students electronically without additional copyright liability. This will be until a similar blanket license for electronic delivery is available from a collective.
- Academic articles may be electronically delivered through interlibrary loan.

Initial Reactions

Like all copyright legislation, Bill C-60 satisfies some but not all in the copyright community. The bill was co-sponsored by Canadian Heritage Minister Liza Frulla who stated, "These amendments strengthen our creators and cultural industries against the unauthorized use of their works on the Internet. This legislation strikes a balance to serve both our artists and users." But not all affected parties agree with the "balance" of the bill. The recording industry and ISPs are certainly happy to see their interests protected, though it's too soon to hear their comments on specific wording of the legislation. The library and educational communities, on the other hand, are likely disappointed to see limited provisions in their interest.

Lesley Ellen Harris is a copyright lawyer/consultant who works on legal, business, and strategic issues in the publishing, content, entertainment, Internet, and information industries. She is the editor of the Copyright & New Media Law Newsletter: For Libraries, Archives & Museums, *and the author of several books, including* Licensing Digital Content: A Practical Guide for Librarians. *She often speaks at conferences and teaches online courses on copyright and licensing. For more information, visit http://copyrightlaws.com.*

Michael Geist, a law professor at the University of Ottawa who specializes in Internet and e-commerce law, also points out some missing elements in the bill:

- Statutory damages are not addressed (and "are desperately in need of reform").
- Moving fair dealing towards fair use is not dealt with. "This was "recommended by a government study more than 20 years ago."
- "Elimination of crown copyright does not merit a single mention."
- "Greater transparency for Canada's copyright collectives, which collect hundreds of millions each year, but provide precious little information in how that money is spent or distributed, is not addressed."

Background of the Bill

The 1997 amendments to the Canadian copyright statute included Section 92, which obligated the government to do a comprehensive review of the law within five years. In response to this, in October 2002, the report Supporting Culture and Innovation: Report on the Provisions and Operation of the Copyright Act (the section 92 report) was tabled in Parliament. Wide public consultation followed that report, by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. On May 12, 2004, the committee released its Interim Report on Copyright Reform, which was re-adopted on November 4, 2004. On March 24, 2005, the Ministers of Industry and Canadian Heritage jointly tabled the government's response to the committee, including the Government Statement on Proposals for Copyright Reform. To view various copyright reform documents, see: www.pch.gc.ca.

Three Ways to Understand Professional-Grade Virtual Reference

By Stephen Abram

"When I think back to all the crap I learned in high school, it's a wonder I can think at all."

This is a quote from Paul Simon's "Kodachrome," a small line from an anthem of my youth that runs through my mind occasionally. Funny how something like that sound bite becomes a touchstone throughout one's life. I believe that songs are a form of play and invoke learning.

Ah, play. The way we originally learned everything! From playpen to sandbox and from sandbox to playground and on through the swings and kindergarten, we play—intensely. From kindergarten to classroom and classroom to work the intensity of play erodes until the system has wrung every last ounce of fun out of learning! Then again, maybe I am just feeling a little cynical today.

A friend, John Macaulay of the e-newsletter Results in Motion, reminded me of a study recently that noted that children laugh up to 300 to 400 times a day, but when we grow into adults laugh frequency diminishes to 10 to 15 times a day. This is just too sad. Basically, adults are woefully out of practice in the smiles, chuckles, and laughs department. Occasionally we hear echoes of parents who have said, "Don't behave like a child! I'm deadly serious when I say stop laughing so loud." (Those of you who know me know how this rings true to my ears!) So, track your current laughter frequency and determine if you are in a "laughter deficit." Then do something about it.

Make no mistake: Play is surely one of the most effective ways to learn. Contrast reading a manual to learn, for the sake of argument, the Web or your ILS, with just sitting down and playing with the features, functions and buttons and boxes. Without fail, and with only a few exceptions, the learning happens faster and sticks longer the more you play and explore. Indeed our bestselling manuals are now the ones that have a playful vigor—for us Dummies and Idiots!

Now remember the fast friends you made and lost in a day in the sandbox or wading pool. Learning new techniques for sand castles and splashing each other in new social game emulations. Such fun! I am not being just nostalgic for a simpler age or time of life. I truly believe that these simple (yet very complex) play dynamics lay the platform for the most effective experience-based learning. Why did we (or at least most of us) stop? Who made things so serious and told us that was the right, "professional" thing to do?

So in this column, I am asking you to try some play. Start out simply at first and work yourself up the ladder until you're continuously learning to improve your career knowledge. Then everything will CLICK! (Hmmm, where have I heard that before?)

Instant Messaging

In the SLA Toronto Chapter a small playful group started posting their IM addresses on the chapter electronic discussion list and offering to add any professional colleague to their buddy lists. Just to play! I added quite a few folks to my buddy lists too. I had been using IM for a few years with a few close colleagues, friends, and family, but now I was part of a larger world.

Sweet! I had social conversations and got to know a few local colleagues better. Indeed, I gained access to a larger, more diverse group to pick from when choosing whom to sit beside when we met face-to-face at meetings. My professional circle expanded. I also had a few one-on-one conversations about professional issues and we shared a few ideas about how to improve situations. Some were quite serious, and I hear that things improved. That's very good.

My experience was that it was a lot more personal, confidential, and targeted than the very public space of a chapter discussion list. I learned a lot more about this emerging very important communication medium by playing with my professional colleagues—additional extras that I hadn't learned with just my family and close friends. Now I am planning on playing at adding MP3 files and streaming media to my IM messages (just for fun, and a laugh, of course).

Skype

By now most people have heard of Skype, but many haven't played with it yet. Skype (http://www.skype.com) is free Internet telephony (VOIP) that just works. Skype is for calling other people on their computers or phones. Download Skype and start calling for free all over the world. For a small fee you can use Skype to call regular phones, too.

You can play with this with a friend and each learn more about Internet telephony than most of the people in your world. You'd be a more

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advanced information professional. Then, through your play, you see the potential—hey! I can call long distance for free and talk to experts in my subject area. The potential is awesome. I can see the Web site, hear the author, and interact, all at once!! Cool! And fun: it can be a small world after all—apologies to Disney World. Unlike IM, on Skype your friends and colleagues can hear you laugh out loud (LOL).

JYBE

Heard of JYBE (http://www.jybe.com/site/index.aspx)? JYBE is a plug-in to Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox that brings real-time collaboration to Web-based systems and content. Simply, the free version allows you to share your browser screen with others. You can create a "session" and collaborate with others for such things that you might have already experienced with such real-time collaboration tools as Webex or MS Live Meeting. JYBE recently announced integration with Skype. It's free like the park and swings, so you can play with it and learn as you go.

So, I've just laid out a play area in the free park that is the Web. The swings are IM, the slide is Skype, and the merry-go-round is JYBE. Playing regularly with these new toys creates an environment for us to learn and experience just a hint of what the virtual space of the future will be. I've learned about advanced co-browsing, VOIP Internet telephony, and rich multi-user, multi-featured conversation software. Now I am ready to really evaluate the features in a fully formed virtual reference product for my users to interact with me—where I can message, talk, push content of all types to them, and create a rich experience. Getting all these tools into an integrated framework for my enterprise—priceless.

Congratulations to SLA on the launch of Click University! This is the most important announcement that SLA has made in a decade. It's also the most strategic thing any association has done in our world in just as long! Check it out at www.clickuniversity.com.

Now we all have a safe place to play and learn! See you on the swings! Click.

Financial Management and Blogs

By John R. Latham

In my non-SLA life I am an adjunct faculty at the University of Maryland, giving my first course, Financial Management of Information Projects, in the Fall Semester. Rest assured that when the course preparation is completed, you will be subjected to a condensed version as a subject for this column, but in the meantime I am reminded of the importance of the new information professional seeing her/himself as a business professional as well.

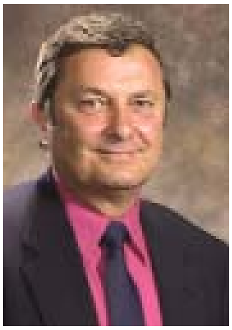
To many this may be preaching to the choir, but as I pointed out in my April column, it is a cut-throat world out there, and we have to prove that we are indispensable members of management within the organization. Whether you work for a corporation that lives for its earnings per share, or a government, academic—or non-profit organization, profitability or whatever your organization has to call it—is life and death to you and your information center or department. In any organization you will have a budget that you will compare with actual monthly results, and report on trends and variances, but that is history, and if things are not going well, it may be too late to act. You need to look at an organization's financial situation from the top down, and keep ahead of the game. Just because your area may be performing well financially does not mean that is the case for the organization overall.

Find out as many ways as possible to establish exactly what the financial situation of your organization is. I am not suggesting that you have to acquire the abilities of a professional financial analyst, but results are generally published internally and externally in the case of publicly listed companies. It helps to understand fundamental financial management terms such as working capital, cash flow statements, liquidity ratios, price earnings, and off-balance-sheet financing, as they can give you indicators to the financial health of your organization. If you aren't generating any cash, something is wrong, regardless of what the balance sheet looks like. Remember Enron. As information professionals, you won't have any difficulty in finding out what is being said about your organization in the financial press. In the government or academic world that may a little more difficult, but if anyone can find information about the financial position or future of your institution, you should be the one. If you smell a financial rat, engineer a meeting with one of your finance department colleagues under the guise of seeking his advice on your department's results, and find out what you can about the overall financial health of the organization. These guys are a cagey lot, but they generally feel under-appreciated, so lay on the flattery with a trowel, and they will open up.

The art to survival is being one step ahead, so if you find out that there are serious financial problems, concentrate on your results and the financial impact that you have on all other areas or departments. Prepare an ROI report and circulate it before you are asked for it. Keep a record of all testimonials from fellow employees, especially if they refer to the money or time your work saved them. You can easily convert their time into bottom line value. Keep your ears open in the lunchroom or coffee lounge. That's where you will hear about disastrous results, financial woes, or proposed funding cuts.

What's This Got to Do With Blogs?

There is nothing like actually using something to find out how useful it is. Blogs are not new, but helping set up and use the SLA Conference Blog taught me how simple they are to use, and how perfect for disseminating information without too much fuss. Your library or information center should not be without one. With the information from your ROI report, budget/actual comparisons, and testimonials, you can use your blog to continually keep the value of your services in front of senior management. A bit like Chinese water torture. Don't use the sledgehammer approach, but mix in the financial comments with all the other information on the blog. Like subliminal advertising, if you have enough examples, and say it often enough, noone will dispute the financial impact of your indispensable services.



As Darlene Fichter said in her introduction to her May 11 virtual seminar on weblogs, more and more libraries are using blogs to help market programs and services, publishing online newsletters, library construction news, and links to new resources. Others are using weblogs to publish their Web site or parts of a Web site taking advantage of the lightweight content management tools for business processes on the library's intranet. Make sure that you also use them to highlight how you and your services impact the finances and profitability or financial health of your organization or institution.

Business Management

As I consider financial management issues, I should refer you to Debbie Schachter's monthly Business Management column in Information Outlook, as she deals with subjects just like this, which are dear to my heart.

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