

TechnicalitiesTM

Information Forum for the Technical Services Professional

Reality Check.....➔

The Value of Technical Services

By Lauren E. Corbett

What is the value of the work done in library technical services to researchers, to librarians, to someone using Google? To me, it seems relatively straightforward to help people at the university understand that someone must order, pay for, and make collections available for use. But I also would like to make it clear to people everywhere that there is value added for a larger, even worldwide, community of information-seekers when copy catalogers and cataloging librarians in any library



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create bibliographic records, make data corrections, or add missing bits of data. Any one particular bit of data could lead to success in finding that perfect book, video, or piece of music when writing a paper or preparing for a class discussion. Grander yet, if I think beyond my own liberal arts niche, how about the doctor or lawyer who finds that critical information at the moment of need, enabling application of a new life-saving procedure or identification of the precedent that clinches the case, resulting in the lock-up of a dangerous felon? I am certain of the strong value of technical services, but how in today's assessment-oriented climate, do I (or we) actually demonstrate and articulate that value, not only to people who are key decision makers for funding and hiring locally, but also more generally? I have pride in my professional expertise and I would like

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Dollars and Sense.....➔

Contrasting AACR2 and RDA

By Sheila S. Intner



Sheila S. Intner

In recent years, the potential for information retrieval in all kinds of venues has expanded beyond all expectations. Once information seekers could examine the handwritten records of the holdings of one library collection; then, union catalogs made it possible to see the holdings of several collections; and, still later, online bibliographic networks provided millions of records from thousands of collections all around the world. As I got to thinking about the changes in library

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librarians can provide access to far more information than if every library had to pay to purchase, maintain, and preserve all the same resources.”

None of this is new information for contemporary librarians. We understand the constraints within which we work and the opportunities that collaboration and resource sharing present. To ignore these is to place our mission and values at risk. With apologies to John Donne, I offer the following:

No library is an island entire of itself;
every library
is a piece of the whole, a part of the
main;
if a single library fails to meet the
needs of its users,
we are all the less. Any library's
failure diminishes all,
because we share the same mission.
And therefore never send to know for
whom
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

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The Value of Technical Services

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to easily lead a stranger on a plane to understand how technical services is beneficial to every person.

How to Demonstrate Value

Convinced of the need to demonstrate value, but at a loss as to how to proceed? I often have heard “What’s in it for me?” (WIIFM) suggested as a frame for creating the best presentation for an audience. I think demonstrating value in meaningful way means making an emotional connection with any receiver of information, which is why a message must be adjusted to get the attention of each particular audience. For a conference presentation, the context is a given and the intellectual aspects of any message probably will connect with self-selecting audience members who are drawn by common interests and concerns. A different approach is called for when opportunistically seizing a moment to connect with a key decision maker or when trying to spark interest in someone disconnected from the topic. To be able to demonstrate value to a dean, a provost, and a U.S. senator, clearly, having a single elevator speech is not enough; perhaps a pocket(book) full of them is necessary.

The intellectual content of an elevator speech is generally the easier part since we tend to talk about what we know. But to make a sale or to persuade someone to take an action, there is an emotional component. As a college student, I sold books

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door-to-door for the Southwestern Company and in the sales training I learned an old adage, “Sell the sizzle, not the steak.” In other words, for someone to receive and retain a message and perhaps ultimately take an action, a person has to be attracted with multiple senses, helping recall emotions (ideally, positive ones). The concept of the steak as meat, and even the picture of the meat, do not have the same effect as recalling a past experience that evokes the sight, aroma, sound, and context (e.g., a fun gathering of family or friends), leading to a watering mouth and a hankering that must be satisfied. As an example, think about TV advertisements: remember how Kool-Aid Man showed up when kids were having fun, and he rescued them right when everyone was hot and thirsty?¹

Understanding the concept is one thing, putting it into practice can be more difficult, especially when trying to apply it to work instead of food, but if you have had a student or faculty member express appreciation for help in finding just the exact information needed and at the very moment it was needed, you have seen that emotional connection for those researchers. In technical services, being somewhat removed from that immediate connection, I think about another old TV advertisement, for BASF Corporation, because it was masterful at selling the sizzle of the importance of what happens behind the scenes.² The basic message was that BASF did not make the products that consumers depended upon, but that BASF was a hidden part of what made those products enhance their lives.

How then do librarians make that

kind of pitch, demonstrating our value and perhaps gaining active supporters or at least winning admirers? First, know the audience(s), second know what to say to whom, and third know how to say it. For a good general example, see “What is the Most Popular Irish Book?” by OCLC’s Lorcan Dempsey, published in the *Irish Times* in June 2017.³ His piece is crafted for an Irish general public with an interest in reading. A bit closer to home, let us look at how the American Library Association advocates for libraries in Washington, D.C. and how the Association of College and Research Libraries is working on demonstrating value, as models for what we could do in technical services.

Ramping Up Advocacy For the Librarians, By the Librarians

American Library Association

The American Library Association (ALA) has a Washington, D.C. office (since 1945) and has an Office for Library Advocacy, plus a current public awareness campaign called “Libraries Transform” and an “Advocacy Implementation Plan” (2015).⁴ In 2009-2010, ALA President Camila Alire had an initiative called “Frontline Advocacy,” supported by a webpage with excellent tools, tips, and resources.⁵ ALA President Roberta Stevens immediately followed with “Frontline Fundraising” with an online toolkit.⁶ Most recently, ALA Past President Julie Todaro’s “Advocacy University” was about helping librarians learn how to advocate.⁷

During Todaro’s presidency, the election of President Trump and a resulting concern that Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding

could disappear entirely seemed to be a crucible moment for me.⁸ Knowing that some LSTA funding in 2016 was granted in direct support of technical services, for research covering advances with name authorities and digital preservation, I found myself utilizing online tools to request that my congressmen support the funding and I even sent e-mail to my co-workers explaining how they could easily do the same in a few clicks.

This happened because ALA got my attention in how they communicated—through my trusted network of professional associates—and it was clear what action I was urgently being asked to take, and the barrier to taking action was low. E-mail messages were already crafted and a few clicks were all that was required (but I seized the opportunity to tailor the messages before I sent them). Additionally, I found that doing this still fit my self-image as a persuader behind the scenes rather than a visible protester. Advocacy is different than activism.

Association of College and Research Libraries

Outside of legislative aspects of advocacy, the Association of College and Research Libraries’ (ACRL) “Value of Academic Libraries” is an advocacy model for a different audience, one narrowed to my library type, but not clearly to technical services. This impressive initiative is broad in its reach. *The Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report* is “a review of the quantitative and qualitative literature, methodologies and best practices currently in place for demonstrating the value of academic libraries” intended “to provide academic librarians with a

clearer understanding of what research about the performance of academic libraries already exists, where gaps in this research occur, and to identify the most promising best practices and measures correlated to performance.”⁹ A program within the initiative, called “Assessment in Action: Academic Libraries and Student Success” was designed “to strengthen the competencies of librarians in campus leadership and data-informed advocacy.”¹⁰ A road show for the program, a traveling day-long workshop, is tailored training enabling participants to apply the program to their own situations. To launch a research agenda as the next wave in the initiative, *Academic Library Impact: Improving Practice and Essential Areas to Research* was just published.¹¹ University administrators are definitely a target audience for the results of these efforts.

Association for Library Collections and Technical Services

Looking now at technical services specifically, the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services (ALCTS) is a newer participant in the library advocacy arena, but is ramping up as well, in the two primary areas I have been describing above: legislative and non-legislative. The ALCTS Advocacy and Policy Committee was catalyzed by an unexpected engagement with the U.S. Government’s appropriations process in 2016, during which the ability of the Library of Congress to update the “illegal aliens” subject heading was called into question.¹² The Committee is currently working to identify which legislative topics are likely to be of the most interest to ALCTS members, primarily using the ALA Washington Office’s

District Dispatch and other updates from our committee representative member to the ALA Legislative Assembly (which is an advisory group to the ALA Committee on Legislation, the body that has full responsibility for the ALA’s legislative program). Topics identified to date, besides appropriations, include access and preservation of government information, copyright, equity of access and scholarly communication, network neutrality, privacy and confidentiality, and open access. Committee members also want to determine an appropriate quantity of information to distill to the ALCTS Board and members (to avoid the deafness that can follow bombardment). The Committee also is weighing which channels of communication to use: for example, e-mail to the ALCTS Central list for calls to action (such as asking Congress to support LSTA funding) and perhaps short articles in *ALCTS News* in the future.

In the non-legislative vein, the Advocacy and Policy Committee ran the contest in 2016 that resulted in a new ALCTS slogan of “Creating the Future, Preserving the Past.” (The next time someone asks you what your line of work is, try answering with the slogan as a way to pique curiosity!) ALCTS is entering a strategic planning period and if ALCTS could emulate ACRL’s success with the “Value of Academic Libraries,” the key questions are what audience(s) to target, what primary message(s) to convey, and how to make the emotional connection with those audiences.

Who Is the Target Audience for the Value of Technical Services, What to Say, and How to Say It?

ALA tends to (logically, based on the numbers in the membership) lean towards swaying supporters for public libraries in Washington, D.C., with some messaging aimed towards the public at large as the constituents of the legislators. ACRL clearly is crafting a body of evidence about the value of libraries for university leaders. Complementary to ACRL’s work, “Provosts’ Perceptions of Academic Library Value & Preferences for Communication: A National Study” (due for publication in May 2018 but available online now as a pre-print) could help with tailoring an elevator speech to make the WIIFM connection for that key university decision maker.¹³ But where does technical services fit into the picture? Library type does not necessarily matter for making a good case for technical services to multiple audiences. The article “Asserting Catalogers’ Place in the ‘Value of Libraries’ Conversation” covers a range of audiences and needs and thus makes a wonderful beginning!¹⁴

I also think that those of us who work in technical services need to come up with something similar to the American Library Association’s “Quotable Facts about America’s Libraries,” but I think it would be better delivered as an infographic.¹⁵ Last year an infographic that OCLC’s Sustainable Collection Services prepared about the impact of storing print collections struck me as a good example.¹⁶ I have been noticing an increase in cleanly organized infographics with percentages and other uses of data visualization lately to convey quickly a message to a target audience. For how-to help, I like the looks of a Jisc Guide on data visualization.¹⁷

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One significant obstacle to producing that type of marketing tool for technical services is having the data, and it seems that we lack relevant data on how what we do makes a difference for researchers around the world. "Asserting Catalogers' Place in the 'Value of Libraries' Conversation" emphasized this, too. I suspect that many library users are aware that the library provides specialized databases, but outside of that, people think that Google is the reason that searching works. They probably do not realize that librarians around the world start from some basic data from publishers and add a myriad of details in a codified, standardized method to fuel their discovery of information. Technical services librarians need to tell that story to the stranger on the plane, to the decision makers who pay us our salaries and fund our work, and to Congress, to reap the dividends of respect and of resources to continue helping the citizens of the world achieve great things for humanity. And now my call to action is prompted by the recent release of the remaining Kennedy papers: ask not what your association can do for you, but what you can do for your profession.

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cataloging, this idea seemed even more relevant than I first imagined. One of the principal changes is the adoption of the new descriptive cataloging rules—*RDA*—replacing *AACR2*.¹ This column is devoted to exploring some of the possible effects of this change on success in searching library catalogs.

From One Medium at a Time to One Element at a Time

AACR2, faithful in overall form to its predecessors, treated descriptive entries as a whole, starting with books (no surprise there!) and eventually adding maps, music, sound recordings, manuscripts, films and videos, digital formats (with a group name that changed over time from "machine-readable data files" to "computer files"), two-dimensional images, three-dimensional objects (designated "artefacts" and "realia"), and portions of larger units, otherwise known as "analytics." At first, rule-makers tried to fit all media other than books into the original book model, with minimal modifications for their physical differences from books and other variations in the eight elements that *AACR2* considered an entry unit.

Under *AACR1*, *AACR2*'s immediate predecessor, each media group was considered separately from the others, emulating but not necessarily adopting the book model.² This resulted in catalog entries that described individual members of a group adequately, but that could not be interfiled with book entries. During this period, a library might have had several different catalogs, for example, one for books, one for films, one for music, etc.

Toward the end of the 20th century, international cooperation on standards

for description addressed this issue, and came up with a new model called International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD) that did not mandate book-related rules for all resources. Instead, it created an eight-element standard entry model into which the details needed to describe different types of resources could be fitted. ISBD mandated the elements, their order within an entry, and the location of information sources for each element, but no specifics for any media group. The standard was sufficiently flexible and open that media groups as different from one another as manuscripts and e-books, photographs and educational kits could utilize the model. Nonetheless, rapidly proliferating new media and crossover media groups continued to pose problems for catalogers and catalog rule-makers alike. These problems might have been one of the issues that prompted the Joint Steering Committee to jettison media groups as description's basic unit.

One of the most visible changes is the shift from viewing the description of a resource as a whole to viewing its description as a combination of its parts. This principle has important implications for retrieval potential.

RDA'S "New Look"

RDA is a great deal more complicated than *AACR2*, which was, itself, more complicated than its predecessors. Unlike *AACR2*, which had two sections—the first containing chapters for books and book-like printed things, maps, manuscripts, etc., each of which had subsections for the eight bibliographic elements, followed by a second section, containing several chapters for creating headings for names and titles,

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