

Reference Librarian: Technologist or Scholar?
Columbia University, March 12, 2004
Session 1: Honoring Tradition, Embracing the Future

Anne Kenney, Cornell University Library

- Research libraries can learn from behavior of information consumer
- Users want info mall: self-service, satisfaction, seamlessness
- Top sites on the Web – www.alexa.com
- Noted commonalities among popular sites: ease of use, personalization, communication, contextualization, integration
- Noted positive features of research libraries: content, authority, formalized sharing, equitable access, common technology, vetting, searching/sorting mechanisms, linking capabilities
- Noted negative features of research libraries: complicated interface, lingo, non-intuitive, assume user knowledge, lack of collaboration, lack of federated searching, rigid categorization, little recombinant use of info, human intensive, limited external links, poor marketing
- Next steps for research libraries: improve sense of community, repurpose data to serve user needs, more links to external sources (BorrowDirect), track use and delivery of info and make adjustments

Bob Kieft, Haverford College Library

- Tradition vs. new world order: time-tested methods in question
- Google represents life on the Web: helps find things, order and arrangement is opaque
- What is a reference source?
- New edition of Guide to Reference Books (Sources) is a metasearch: a highly self-conscious teaching tool that incorporates the Web
- The online edition will link to local catalog, reviews, can partner with publishers
- Reference librarians can occupy a central place in Internet age; the information in the Guide is arranged and interpreted, not just arrayed

Jessamyn West, Rutland, Vermont Free Library

- Evolve or Die; Evolve and Die: false dichotomy of technology
- There is strong pressure to evolve technologically but must face reality: budgets, needs of a public library
- Don't want to lose the value of knowledge, experience in "rapid evolution"
- Need to be responsive to public's needs; partner with community

Notes by Anice Mills, Undergraduate Librarian, Columbia University