



Comments From the Editor-in-Chief

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When the Western New York Library Resources Council (WNYLRC) Publications Committee first embarked on this publishing venture, very little research existed about multi-type library systems attempting to publish an all-volunteer online journal. With over 80 member libraries and library systems, the Committee members were concerned if it was even possible to publish a library journal that had topical appeal to different types of libraries: academic, school, public, museum, hospital, and corporate. We knew we needed some guidance and we were fortunate enough to know of local expertise in the publishing arena.

We spoke with Christopher Hollister from the University at Buffalo and Stewart Brower, formerly at University at Buffalo, and current Director of the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa Library who are co-founders of the successful online journal, *Communications in Information Literacy*. They were very gracious in answering our questions and providing some background information as well as their experiences in developing their journal. The one piece of advice that resonated with me is that the publishing group needed to find a niche in a publishing market that produces dozens of online and print scholarly journals.

After further discussion and analysis, and with the WNYLRC Board of Trustees' approval, the Publications Committee decided to stay with its original premise and publish a journal that highlighted services, programs, and products developed by libraries of any type that were exciting, different, and effective. The journal would showcase achievements that exemplified innovation in libraries. It would also provide

WNYLRC and participating members with an opportunity to enter the online publishing world.

Knowing I had to eventually write my very first article as Editor-in-Chief, I decided I should really understand the concept we wanted to convey. So being a librarian, I decided to look up the definition of innovation and here is what I found in the *American Heritage College Dictionary, Third Edition*: “In`no`va`tion – noun 1. The act of introducing something new. 2. Something newly introduced.”

I was disconcerted to see the definition of a concept that holds such promise and grand ideas reduced to a single synonym: new. Innovation is not simple and it can't be pigeonholed into a single word. To be truly innovative, an organization has to be able to stay one step ahead of the curve whether it's forecasting technology trends, determining a user's future interests and needs, or defining a niche product or service.

There is considerable risk involved in trying to innovate. Just because a library develops a new service, it does not mean it's particularly innovative or that it will be accepted by the end users. I assume any library contemplating a new service or program is examining the threshold of risk the organization can handle: how much staffing time do we want to allocate, how many dollars are required and how much can we afford to spend, and what outcomes are likely to be realized that are worth the resources invested? Libraries that do more than their peer institutions in meeting the needs of their users (or staff) tend to be the libraries that push the envelope.

Those libraries that fear the “stagnant pond syndrome” and are willing to embrace change as well as failure are also more likely to implement a service or develop a product that has not been offered before or offered in the same traditional manner as before. True library innovation has the potential to make a difference to our end users' library experience and perhaps improve their quality of life to some degree.

So what does innovation really mean for libraries? How do we measure innovation and what makes one library service or product more innovative than the next? Timing, addressing an unfilled need, good management skills, and working with unusual or non-traditional partners are keys to successful innovative projects. That is what we hope we have accomplished for this journal. Not only does the journal fit a niche in the field, but also it may very well define what innovation is for libraries by highlighting exemplary instances of new, different, and effective services, models, and processes.

The journal's call for papers announcements drew a large response from practitioners and researchers from all over the world. We are confident that the authors selected for our inaugural issue have provided the reader with exceptional case studies of library innovation that go above and beyond the *American Heritage College Dictionary* definition.

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