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The library: A distinct local voice?**by Charles Lyons**

Abstract

Librarians collaborating with their patrons and using technology to tap deeper into the reservoirs of local knowledge within their communities? Creating and becoming active participants in locally-focused online communities, blogs and wikis? Leveraging local search engines and creating their own customized locally-focused search engines? Libraries mapping information relevant to their communities? The librarian as local expert specializing in the hyper-local content not captured elsewhere? It may not be the norm, but it's already happening. This paper examines the library's place as a local information provider — highlighting local activities that libraries are currently involved in and suggesting some ways that libraries can become better recognized as places to turn for local information. The convergence of a few factors make this topic timely:

- Libraries are well-positioned as community-focused institutions that have a history of helping preserve, organize and promote access to local information.
- The importance of and demand for local information seems to be growing.
- The Internet is becoming more "place-conscious," enabling improved ways for disseminating and accessing local information.

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Introduction: The crazy house, HSBC and the local library

"We're just as much a part of Springfield as the church, the library or the crazy house." Belle, justifying the existence of her burlesque house to local resident, Marge Simpson. From The Simpson's episode "Bart After Dark", 1996
(<http://www.snpp.com/episodes/4F06.html>)

In 2003, two global, multi-billion dollar companies battled over the right to use the phrase "the world's local" in their advertising campaigns. InBev ("The World's Local Brewer") and

HSBC ("The World's Local Bank") eventually settled out of court and agreed to share the phrase, but the incident reflects the value many companies see in being viewed as "local." Other companies have used local slants in their advertising campaigns, including MetLife ("As Local as Main Street"), Century 21 ("Your Local Experts"), and KeyBank ("Community is Key"). Similarly, Applebee's ("Eatin' Good in the Neighborhood") decorates its restaurants with memorabilia from the community and Starbucks stores host events featuring local bands and authors.

Certainly, HSBC, Applebee's and others can be considered local only by the loosest of definitions (even in comparison to burlesque houses). Companies grope for "localness" in order to shed some of the negative connotations that come with being big, unresponsive, lumbering and cumbersome. Being local means catering to the community. Local companies strive to be contributing members of their communities; they care about their communities. Local institutions are trusted by their patrons, the local members of the community. In contrast to many global corporations that spend a great deal of time and money portraying themselves as trusted local members of each of the hundreds of different communities in which they do business, libraries are, by their very nature, uniquely positioned as truly local institutions.

A central mission of libraries of all types is to serve as important institutions within their communities, providing educational, communal, and informational services. A recent impact study in Chicago concluded that libraries provide: "free community space, connections to the local economy, a sense of ownership by the community and, above all, a level of community trust" (Urban Libraries Council, 2005). Indeed, being local may be one of the core components of the library brand. Cathy Wilt (Executive Director of PALINET), when asked about libraries and their relationships with their local communities, wrote that "Libraries are highly regarded, treasured community assets, a characteristic of our library brand that Carla Hayden, executive director of the Enoch Pratt Public Library (Baltimore, Md.) accurately states is highly under-utilized" (SirsiDynix, 2006).

One way the library can take better advantage of its seemingly quite valuable, highly sought-after and perhaps under-utilized local brand is by redoubling its efforts on becoming a more widely-recognized and valuable place to turn for local information. Many libraries make the provision of information about the community a priority, but the Internet is enabling improved ways for disseminating, sharing and accessing information that informs local knowledge and, in turn, raising people's expectations around their ability to easily access a wider variety of local information. The Pew Internet & American Life Project, for example, has described how "many Americans are using the Internet to intensify their connection to the local community" (Horrigan, 2001) and noting the "rise of local searches — that is searches related to geographically distinct places" (Rainie, 2005).

An opportunity is emerging for libraries to build on the community focus they have always embraced and become more involved with the flow of local information — both as producers and coordinators of local data. Local search engines, government entities, local media (newspapers, television, radio), and the locals themselves (the residents of the community) are just a few of the sources that contribute to the wide range of information swirling throughout a community. By leveraging new technologies and reinvigorating their efforts on storing, organizing and creating information about their communities, libraries can build on their status as valuable and trusted local community assets and become, if not the principle soloist, a distinct voice among a whole chorus of local information providers.

Local heritage and community information: Key strengths for the local library

"Libraries build social capital and encourage civic engagement by developing community partnerships, facilitating local dialogue, and disseminating local data." Nancy Kranich, American Library Association (ALA) President, 2001-02

A consequence of globalization is the graying of local color — the blurring of the unique characteristics that define localities. As the world becomes more interconnected, cultures can be subsumed, instead of supplemented, by the influences of other cultures. "Glocalization" has come to describe a culture's ability to combine the local and the global, to maintain a local identity in the face of growing global influences [1]. Glocalization, while an awkward word, is a succinct way to describe a key role libraries play in their communities as local

information providers. A lofty example of the glocalizing potential of libraries was put forth by James Billington, Librarian of Congress, as a “free and locally accessible world digital library” that promotes understanding among different communities while helping them “assert, with increasing forcefulness, the uniqueness of their own indigenous religions, cultures and historic identities” (Billington, 2005). A world digital library is still just a goal, but the numerous local history and heritage projects spearheaded by libraries — from the American Memory Project (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>) to the Louisiana Digital Library (<http://louisdl.louislibraries.org/>) to the Bethlehem (Pa.) Digital History Project (<http://bdhp.moravian.edu/home/home.html>) — are key ways that libraries help preserve local cultural and historical identity.

Libraries have also long embraced local information provision of a more practical nature. Community Information (CI) is characterized as “everyday information” that “helps people cope with the problems of daily living and facilitates community participation” (Durrance and Pettigrew, 2002). Some of the common types of CI collected by libraries include information about employment opportunities, local businesses, social services, education, local government and community organizations. Durrance and Pettigrew have extensively studied libraries’ role in providing CI and their research is finding that while “some fail to focus on the information that sets that library apart from all other libraries, information about their particular community,” many libraries are striving to be “key players in increasing the flow of CI” (Durrance and Pettigrew, 2002).

A typical role libraries play in their communities is as central access points for CI that would otherwise be dispersed throughout a community. Originally, libraries’ CI resources were paper-based, but more recently libraries have started leveraging the Internet to enhance access to CI. An immediate step was to put records for CI resources in the library’s online catalog. While important and worthwhile, putting local resources in the catalog can make them hard to find and many local information seekers may not think to look there. Many libraries pull the locally-relevant sources out of their catalogs and highlight them on their own separate pages. These pages serve as local guides that include helpful descriptive text and are also more customizable than the often stiff entries in a catalog [for examples, see the New Haven Free Public Library (<http://www.cityofnewhaven.com/Library/NewHavenSites.asp>) and the Champaign Public Library (http://www.champaign.org/your_community.html)]. Libraries have also focused on creating and maintaining their own locally-focused Web-based directories of local establishments and calendars of local events (see Rogers, *et al.*, 2005). For examples, see the Pasadena Public Library (<http://catalog.pasadenapubliclibrary.net:81/>), San Francisco Public Library (<http://sflib1.sfpl.org:83/>), and New York Public Library (<http://leopac.nypl.org/ipac20/ipac.jsp?profile=dial--2&menu=search>).

These community information resources, along with local heritage projects, are important ways that libraries are taking steps toward making their Web sites as much about the community as they are about the library itself. Traditionally, libraries have been “far more likely to place information about the library on the website than they were to provide information about the community” (Durrance and Pettigrew, 2002). By striving to make the “About the Community” link as common and prominent as the “About the Library” link on their homepages, local libraries can demonstrate a stronger community focus and, potentially, connect more directly with their patrons. Additionally, the Internet is offering up some newer approaches that libraries are just beginning to leverage to help them assert, with increasing forcefulness, the uniqueness of their communities.

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Search engines: Increasing local findability

“So far, Google does local (communities, neighborhoods, clubs, etc.) poorly. Libraries are pretty good at this space — so far good libraries have a handle on that local connection — physically and psychologically. Can this be sustained?”
Stephen Abram, 2006

“Local search” is a term applied to the subset of search engines that focus on geographically specific information. Local search engines started out as essentially just online versions of printed phone books, yellow pages and business directories. While perhaps not the most glamorous of publishing sectors, yellow pages publishing is still a multi-billion dollar industry and these directories have always been a key resource for anyone looking to identify people and businesses in a local area. As these directories moved online, the big search engine companies like Google (Google Maps at <http://local.google.com/>), Yahoo (Yahoo Local

at <http://local.yahoo.com/>), MSN (Live Search at <http://intl.local.live.com/>), and Ask (AskCity at <http://city.ask.com/city>) realized they could enhance them by integrating additional content, mainly maps, but also images, links to relevant web pages, and user opinions.

The result is that local search engines are becoming powerful sources of local information and while they have not yet created a seismic shift in the provision of local information, the teacups are rattling. Recent data from comScore Networks, an organization that analyzes and measures search patterns, found that “63 percent of U.S. Internet users (or approximately 109 million people) performed a local search online in July, a 43-percent increase versus July of 2005” (comScore, 2006) [2]. Indeed, it is likely that local search engines will only continue to grow in popularity as they develop further and are integrated more seamlessly into “regular” search engines (*i.e.*: more local items will be commingled in regular search results). [3]

Certainly librarians can embrace local search engines and become expert users of them, leveraging their power to suit the local needs of their patrons. Libraries can also help the local cause by facilitating and promoting access to local search engines: “users need to know that these locally focused resources are now available. Instruction should include how to take advantage of local functionality and content. Tips on reading results screens should also be included. In the reference area, knowing how local search works can open up a new content resources for users. Using specialized local search tools allow users to answer common everyday questions” (Plosker, 2004).

Furthermore, libraries can create their own localized Internet search tools; this does not mean re-creating the Google wheel, but harnessing the capabilities of search tools and focusing them on each library’s local needs. A good example of this is MyCommunityInfo.ca (<http://www.mycommunityinfo.ca/>), a local information resource for Ontario residents (the site is a collaborative effort with the London Public Library and Middlesex County Libraries as two of the eight primary sponsors). The site provides a search tool that uses Google technology to search a selection of relevant local Web sites (currently about 150 local government and community organization websites focused on Ontario). The result is a locally focused Google, playfully dubbed Coogle, Community + Google (Cummings, 2005).

Free applications like Rollyo (<http://www.rollyo.com/>), Swiki (<http://swicki.eurekster.com/>), and Google Co-op (<http://www.google.com/coop/>) are making it increasingly easy to create locally-focused customized search engines that only search selected sites relevant to each library’s community. Indeed, Google has already partnered with CityTownInfo (<http://www.citytowninfo.com/>), a site that aggregates local information (statistics, articles, photos, comments from residents), in order to facilitate the creation of geographically-focused customized search engines. By leveraging search tools, libraries can avoid the frequent and time-consuming maintenance needed to keep guides and directories up-to-date (*i.e.*: information and links need to be updated as new data comes out or as links change). Moreover, as search continues to become the dominant way that people find information online, creating search tools that enable and empower locals to find community information themselves instead acting as the intermediary is an important step libraries can take to increase their relevance with local information seekers.

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The long local tail: The library as purveyor of cabbage

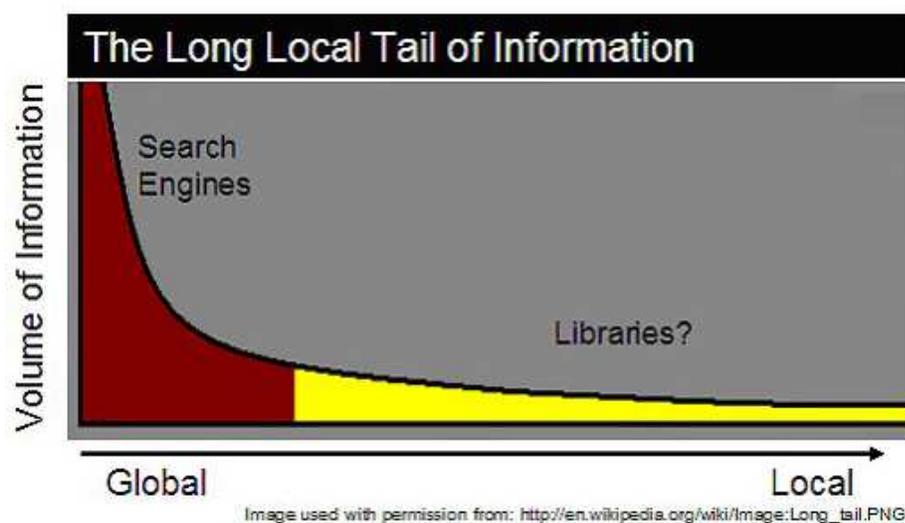
“By all means, we should use the web to stake our claim on a particular information niche and make ourselves known to our peers. But more importantly, we should use it to stake our library’s claim to the right to exist, by providing information that is absolutely critical to our community, right now, and then promoting it like crazy.” Marylaine Block, 2003

Kimchi is a spicy and colorful cabbage dish popular in Korea. Unlike InBev’s beers or Starbucks coffees, the piquant kimchi dish has yet to become popular around the world — it is local fare, the type of food not often found on the menu at Applebee’s restaurants. Marvin Zonis, *et al.* point out in their book *The Kimchi Matters* that kimchi is a great metaphor for describing the unique characteristics that help define local areas and that a paradox of globalization is that, as the world becomes more interdependent, the kimchi can be of global interest: “local dynamics now have global political, business and economic repercussions”

(Zonis, *et al.*, 2003). Identifying and understanding the kimchi in local areas is now fundamental for globalization to succeed; serving up large portions of kimchi is a way for libraries to succeed in globalizing world.

Kimchi is a long tail dish. The “long tail,” one the busiest of buzzwords, [4] refers to the eclectic, niche stuff that can be found beyond the mainstream, beyond the stuff that has broad appeal to the masses. The gist of Chris Anderson’s *Long Tail* theory is that, taken as a whole, the wide variety of quirkier fare can equal or even surpass the hits, blockbusters and best-sellers. The long tail is receiving so much attention because the Internet is enabling new ways to tap into (and take advantage of) its vast array of offerings. Amazon.com, for example, is a long tail business because while it relies on best-sellers to make money, a significant portion of its sales also comes from selling more obscure titles. While Anderson tends to focus on big companies dominating their respective tails (Amazon for books, Netflix for movies, iTunes and Rhapsody for music), the Internet also opens doors for smaller players that can travel further down the long and winding tail. David Jackson calls this the *Competitive Impact of the Long Tail* — that the big megasites may lose customers as “people discover niche content websites that more precisely address their interests” (Jackson, 2005).

Striving to more precisely address the interest in local information about their communities is a way for libraries to distinguish themselves from other local information providers like search engines (see Figure below):



For local libraries, the long tail means that there’s plenty of grist for the local mill — not only “local books and other info that may not make it to the shelves of the local B&N” (Anderson in Albanese, 2006), but also the wide variety of kimchi already collected by libraries, such as locally-relevant texts, images, videos, maps and recordings; genealogy resources; local newspaper and magazine clippings; obituary lists; cemetery records; naturalization records; even post cards and other more obscure items (this wide-ranging list of local resources comes from the Hoosier Heritage Digital Library at <http://www.hoosierheritage.net/>). One of the predictions from *Outsell’s Information Industry Outlook: FutureFacts 2007* is that the “Library becomes go-to for local and unique collections” (Healy, 2006). Indeed, the library’s focus on community combined with the fact that it is unbiased, unburdened by profit motive and often laden relevant information gathering skills, can often make it the only go-to for a community’s kimchi.

Expecting a search giant like Google whose oft-quoted mission is “to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful,” to provide in-depth local information on your community is like relying the walls of your local Applebee’s restaurant for local heritage information — they both just scratch the surface. Likewise, Wikipedia can be a good resource for information about cities, but what about smaller towns or the often more amorphous neighborhoods and communities within and around those cities? By making it their mission to organize their specific community’s information and making it accessible online, libraries can strive to create hyper-local resources that get more granular and detailed. While in the end, it will likely be the search engine that leads local information

seekers to the library's site, it can be the library's local resources that provide the more pertinent, specialized, unique and hard-to-find local information. Librarians, as informed local experts who live and work in the community, can strive to cover the long local tail more thoroughly and with more insight.

Libraries can further distinguish themselves as local information providers by doing one of the things that local establishments do best. Unlike a Google or an HSBC, the library's strength is as a mom-and-pop shop, not a superstore. Libraries can let Google be like HSBC — more product, less customer care — and focus on providing the high level of service that can improve and enhance people's access to local information. Writing about the competition academic libraries are facing to be the information provider of choice on campuses, Steven Bell concludes that libraries should "adhere to the basic values that make academic library communities strong," values that include "focusing on personal attention and quality customer care" and "humanizing a service whose foundation is supported by technology" (Bell, 2002). Similarly, as accessing and sharing local data becomes increasingly technology-driven, libraries can carve out a niche by embracing one of the hallmarks of localness and strive to humanize local information provision.

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Online communities: Socializing local information

"Ask MetaFilter (<http://ask.metafilter.com/>) is part of the world-wide information tool kit that includes the library, Google, NPR, cereal boxes, people on the bus, and flyers stapled to telephone poles." Jessamyn West, 2006

The human element is especially important in local information provision — with all the local data that is becoming available online, probably the most valuable source for local information continues to be other people. It almost goes without saying that "the locals," the people who reside in a community, know that community best [5]. "Go where the locals go" is a common guiding principle for out-of-towners looking to get a taste of local flavor and it is common sense that newcomers to an area ask existing residents for advice about the community. But even finding other locals is becoming a common online activity. Online communities and social networks, where people get together virtually to seek out and share information with other like-minded people are becoming increasingly popular, valuable and trusted sources for information [6].

Online communities of all sorts are proliferating on the Web — from mothers sharing information about raising children to programmers sharing information about writing code — and geographically-focused online communities are becoming common as well. BuffaloRising (Buffalo, N.Y. at <http://www.buffalorising.com/>), iBrattleboro (Brattleboro, Vt. at <http://www.ibrattleboro.com/>) and Baristanet (Montclair, N.J. at <http://www.baristanet.com/>) are three examples of vibrant, informative place-based online communities. An opportunity exists for librarians to become more passionately local and to raise awareness of their local expertise by becoming more active participants (more vocal locals?) in these online communities — as contributors of content to the existing communities; as facilitators encouraging participation by the community in these resources; as marketers raising awareness of these resources; as trainers for local residents in how to use them; and, even as creators and maintainers of their own locally-focused online communities. SkokieTalk ("News for the people, by the people" at <http://skokietalk.info/>), for example, is an online community focused on the town of Skokie, Ill. and sponsored by the Skokie Public Library.

Furthermore, data from the *2007 Digital Future Project*, indicate that online communities are starting to rival the more traditional physical ones as important elements of community life: "43 percent of Internet users who are members of online communities say that they feel as strongly about their virtual community as they do about their real-world communities" (USC Annenberg, 2006). Libraries can take advantage of the fact that online communities can complement and encourage participation in physical communities (and vice versa). In many communities, the library is valued as an important physical place in the community, what Ray Oldenburg termed, a "third place" — not home and not work, but a place for socializing, community-building and sharing information [7].

Indeed, the physical communities created by libraries are often pointed to as one of their key strengths. The *2005 OCLC Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources*, for example, in addition to focusing on the library's rather sticky association with books, stresses the idea of the library as a physical "place," concluding that "information users see

libraries' role in the community as a place to learn, as a place to read, as a place to make information freely available, as a place to support literacy, as a place to provide research support, as a place to provide free computer/Internet access" (OCLC, 2005). As online communities become more important elements of community life, libraries can strive to create virtual communities that supplement their often already strong physical presence. So, for example, whenever election time rolls around, the library can not only be the physical place to get together on election night (http://burgerforala.blogspot.com/burger_for_ala/2006/11/election_night_.html) to see the results, but also the virtual place to discuss the issues in the weeks and months leading up to the election.

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Local library 2.0: Coming soon to a community near you

"I would love to see many public (and academic) libraries expand their roles as centers for preserving local history and culture, and I believe some of the 'Web 2.0' tools could be important to facilitate citizen participation in building and maintaining such living local archives." Walt Crawford, 2006

Collaborating with the community should be an integral component of any library's focus on local information. By tapping in to the community, encouraging and providing local residents with the tools to contribute and share their local insight, libraries can further enhance the flow of local information throughout the community. Local information is especially participatory in nature — the more who contribute, the better. Most of the community calendars that libraries maintain, for example, rely on steady input from the community in order to be comprehensive. Some libraries are also simply striving to make it easier for community members to contribute information to the library's local information resources. About Medway ("Making joined-up Citizens' Information a reality"), for example, is a community information portal launched by the Medway Libraries (U.K.) that stresses the importance of local input (for more, see Leech, 2005). On the main page, users are presented with a prominent button that says "Do you have information to share" and the tagline for the site is "Your Community Information Portal with information for, by and about Medway."

Libraries are also starting to leverage Web 2.0 technologies [8] to facilitate community collaboration. One example is the pictureAnnArbor site (<http://www.aadl.org/services/products/pictureAnnArbor>) from the Ann Arbor District Library whose mission is "to gather, capture and share information and images that reflect everyday life in our community" by giving people the "opportunity to contribute digital copies of your Ann Arbor photos and documents, and easily share them on the web." Another example is the Wyoming Authors Wiki (<http://wyomingauthors.pbwiki.com/>) established by The Wyoming Center for the Book, a state affiliate of the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress. From the site: "What makes the wiki different from an ordinary website is that you can contribute information about your favorite book author (including yourself!)." Similarly, the St. Joseph County Public Library (SJCPL) in South Bend, Indiana uses a wiki format to create the SJCPL Subject Guides (http://www.libraryforlife.org/subjectguides/index.php/Main_Page) that provide "locally focused information and services" and each guide includes a discussion area to facilitate community input.

In addition to facilitating collaboration, many Web 2.0 technologies simply make it easier to put information online and some libraries are leveraging them for local purposes: "In the past, the cost of even indexing the local newspaper may have drained too much of library's resources, but the Web and its search engines have provided a cheap and powerful solution for everyone with the will to publish" (Quint, 2006). The Dowling College Library Podcasts (<http://www.dowling.edu/library/newsblog/podcasts.asp>), for example, help the community stay connected with what's going on, not only at the library, but also at the college and in Long Island, N.Y. where the library is located. Atención San Miguel (<http://www.atencionsanmiguel.org/>) is an online community news resource self-published by the Biblioteca Publica in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. Online maps where data is displayed geographically using mapping technologies like the free Google Maps API (<http://www.google.com/apis/maps/>) are another way libraries can use Web 2.0 technologies [examples include Talis' Libmap UK (<http://www.talis.com/home/>), the British Library's London: A Life in Google Maps (<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/features/londoninmaps/exhibition.html>), OCLC's forthcoming WorldCatHoldings Map (<http://www.oclc.org/productworks/holdingsonamap.htm>); and, the Normative Data Project

for Libraries' Public Libraries Affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita(http://www.libraryndp.info/special_katrina.html)].

Perhaps the most common manifestation of the drift toward user-generated information is the blog. Blogs, of course, cover all topics, but community-focused blogs (sometimes called geo-blogs or place-blogs) are becoming increasingly viable and reliable sources for local information. MetroBlogging (<http://www.metroblogging.com/>), for example, is a network of community-focused blogs covering over fifty cities (with a glocal-ish tagline "Think Global, Blog Local"). Many libraries are blogging and most of them are (justifiably) blogging about the library — goings on at the library, new additions to the collection, profiles of library resources, etc. Librarians can add blogs to their arsenal of local information tools, by creating their own blogs to help keep patrons informed about the community (see the Darien Community Matters (<http://www.darien.org/communitymatters/blog/>) from the Darien Library in Connecticut or the Fort Wayne Area Artists blog (<http://fortartists.blogspot.com/>) from the Allen County Public Library in Indiana) and also by monitoring and linking to other locally-relevant blogs [Placeblogger (<http://www.placeblogger.com/location/directory>) provides a growing global directory of locally-focused blogs and BlogDigger Local (<http://local.blogdigger.com/index.html>) is an early attempt at creating a local blog search engine].

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The local landscape: Uniting an infosphere divided

"By bringing information created by a number of organizations including, but not limited to, the library together in one place the CN [community network] provides one-stop shopping for community information." Joan C. Durrance and Karen E. Pettigrew, 2001

Outside.in (<http://outside.in/>) is a new site that aggregates local information, mainly blog entries, but also other information: "We set out to create this experience for one overarching reason: to date, online neighborhood information has been a divided space ... The problem is: there's no single place that unites all those different voices, that grounds them in specific locations" (Johnson, 2006b). The site identifies local information using GeoTags or geographic metadata that can be added to online content. GeoTagging (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GeoTagging>) is, even in Internet time, still just a warm apple cooling on the window sills at sites like Outside.in and Flickr (so far, photos are probably the most commonly GeoTagged items and it is estimated that up to 10 million photos on Flickr have been GeoTagged). As technologies are developed to make GeoTagging easier, the Web will likely become even more "location-aware" and libraries can leverage these new capabilities to identify online information that is relevant to their communities and in doing so become more "place-conscious" themselves. Until then, the identification of locally-relevant information will continue to be largely a human endeavor and an activity well-suited to local librarians.

Indeed, as local data proliferates online, the importance of becoming a unifying force for the increasing amount of local information strewn about the Internet is increasing. Government data, to take one example, is an important source for informing local knowledge — the economic, statistical and demographic data provided by government agencies provides key insights into understanding local dynamics. Unfortunately, government Web sites can be pioneeringly complicated and relevant data is often scattered across many different sources. Shuler (2002) points out the dizzying fact that "According to the last U.S. Census Bureau's census of governments, there are 87,543 units defined as 'local'" and that there is little regularity in the publishing of government data at the local level [9].

Libraries have long recognized the importance of helping people untangle the often complex bureaucracy of local government data by creating directories that attempt to bring together all of the local government agencies related to their communities [see Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/stategov/stategov.html>), UC Berkeley (<http://www.igs.berkeley.edu/library/localweb.html>), Wisconsin State Law Library (<http://wsll.state.wi.us/wisco.html>)]. The Pikes Peak Library District, takes this a step further by sifting through the warrens local government data out there and culling out the bits relevant to its local community (Colorado Springs, Colo.) and putting them in a searchable database of economic indicators. Additionally, many Web sites are already in existence that attempt, with varying degrees of success, to aggregate government data from a variety of sources and libraries can leverage these tools to supplement their own local information resources [examples include TerraFly (<http://www.terrafly.com/>), neighboroo

(<http://www.neighboroo.com/>), DataPlace (<http://www.dataplace.org/>), StateMaster (<http://www.statemaster.com/index.php>), and ePodunk (<http://www.epodunk.com/>).

Libraries can also go beyond government data and identify and aggregate “community data in a way that links more information produced by other research, Web pages of communities themselves, digitized historical publications, as well as images and other visuals that help frame the development and complexity of a community” (Shuler, 2002). One way libraries currently link up information from a wide variety of sources is with Community Networks (CNs). While not all CNs have library involvement, libraries often serve as important access points to CNs and many of them are indeed spearheaded by local libraries [Durrance and Pettigrew provide case studies of three exemplary library-led CNs: Three Rivers Free Net (<http://trfn.clpgh.org/>) in Pittsburgh, NorthStarNet (<http://www.northstarnet.org/>) in Chicago and CascadeLink (<http://www.cascadelink.org/>) in Portland, Ore.]. CNs provide centralized access to many of the local resources described earlier: directories of local establishments (both profit and non-profit), calendars of local events, guides on local topics, and more. CNs like Monticello Avenue (<http://avenue.org/>) from the Jefferson-Madison Regional Library (Charlottesville, Va.) also offer up other services like e-mail for local residents and Web hosting for local non-profits and even small businesses.

Libraries can build on their experience with CNs and increase the depth and breadth of their local information provision by further broadening the scope of their local resources and redefining what information they consider to be locally-relevant. Just how wide a net to cast is up to each library. In addition to the local resources already mentioned, the library can strive to integrate community information from sources like the local media (newspapers, television, radio) and from a growing number of locally-focused niche content Web sites that specialize on specific types of local information such as city guides [such as Hello Metro (<http://www.hellometro.com/>) and Citysearch (<http://www.citysearch.com/>), local real estate information [Zillow (<http://www.zillow.com/>), Domania (<http://www.domania.com/>)], local news [Topix.net (<http://www.topix.net/>)], local commerce listings [Craigslist (<http://sfbay.craigslist.org/about/cities.html>), eBay (<http://www.ebay.com/>)], customer reviews of local establishments [Yelp (<http://www.yelp.com/>), Judysbook (<http://www.judysbook.com/>)], local events [Upcoming (<http://upcoming.org/>), Eventful (<http://www.zvents.com/>)], local videos [Turn Here (<http://www.turnhere.com/>)] and on and on.

The library’s role as both a guide map (“You are here”) and local shop owner on these crowded informational Main Streets is more important than ever. Libraries can become better recognized as places to turn for local information by both serving as sources of their own local information and also as central orchestrators among a growing number of disparate local resources (see Figure below):



+++++

Conclusion: Global village or Potemkin village libraries?

"We have this absolutely unique moment in time ... to transform the way the world perceives us, to build on the things that we do so well and set the stage for the next century of library service to the communities we serve." Leslie Burger, ALA President, 2006

"Libraries: Global Reach — Local Touch" was the theme for Barbara Ford's ALA presidency in 1998 (McCook, *et al.*, 1998) and the alternating currents of local and global captured by this theme continue to flow through today's libraries. In her inaugural remarks she described the "role of libraries and librarians in the global village" and invited librarians to join her in "going global." Today, the Internet is offering up new ways for libraries and librarians of all types [10] to explore the other end of the spectrum and define their roles in the global village by "going local." No library is located in a Potemkin village [11] and going local is way to connect the library to its place. In doing so, the library not only demonstrates its value to the community, but also demonstrates that the library values its community.

"Libraries Transform Communities" is the theme for Leslie Burger's current ALA presidency and as the Internet profoundly changes the ways that local information can be stored, accessed, and shared, libraries can take advantage of this opportunity to provide their communities with access to more relevant and usable local information and build on the strong foundations they have laid for themselves as local information providers, especially as providers of community and local heritage information. By leveraging technologies such as search engines, online communities, collaborative tools and self-publishing technologies to tap into local interest, libraries can increase their relevance in the community.

Local libraries can distinguish themselves as local information resources and strive to transform their communities by: embracing technology to enhance access to local information while also humanizing an activity that is becoming more technology-driven; specializing on the hyper-local niche while also broadening the scope of the types of local resources collected; facilitating access to a burgeoning number of locally-relevant resources while also creating their own; participating in and creating online communities while also building on their important physical presence; providing tools that empower the community to create, access and share local information on its own while also striving to become informed local experts themselves. 

About the author

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Notes

1. For more on glocalization, see Thomas Friedman's *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* and *The World is Flat* and various publications by Barry Wellman (<http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~wellman/vita/vitweb.htm>).
2. The Kelsey Group (<http://www.kelseygroup.com/>) provides more in-depth analysis and quantitative data for the local information space, including local search. They estimate that the revenue from the broader category of "directional media" (defined as local search engines, Yellow Pages, and classified advertising) will reach US\$119 billion by 2010 (<http://www.kelseygroup.com/press/pr060215.asp>).
3. Ask.com's newly revamped local search service, AskCity (<http://city.ask.com/city>), is especially successful at integrating a wide variety of search results into one search results page, including information from CitySearch, Evite, and Ticketmaster (which are all owned by IAC/InterActiveCorp, Ask's owner) as well as information from sites owned by other companies.
4. Tails are being insightfully pinned on informational donkeys of all sorts of these days. Indeed, part of the strength of Chris Anderson's *Long Tail* theory is that it resonates broadly and is applicable to many different settings "from politics to public relations, and from sheet music to college sports" (Anderson, 2006). For thoughtful discussions of libraries and the long tail, see Cohen, 2005; Mossman, 2006; Dempsey, 2006; and, Casey and Savastinuk,

2006.

5. The importance of actually being local cannot be overstated — the extent to which being local provides local expertise runs surprisingly deep and can manifest itself in unexpected ways. Steven Johnson's (2006a) latest book, *Ghost Map*, for example, explores aspects of local information flow through cities. For example, the book describes how, in the 1850s, as cities grew, cholera outbreaks became frighteningly common. For many years, the prevailing thought was that the disease (and many others) was caused by contaminations of the local air (then called "miasmas"). John Snow and Henry Whitehead were able to overturn this pervasive view and prove that cholera was caused by contaminated water, not air. Their success depended on a variety of factors, but Johnson stresses the importance of the "genuine local knowledge" they brought to the case, the "street level understanding" of the neighborhood that enabled them to dig deeper than the experts, the scientists and government officials who were also trying to solve the problem. Johnson explores other aspects of local information flow in the book and is also one of the founders of the local information aggregator Web site, Outside.in (<http://outside.in/>).

6. Online communities can also help show how librarians are "like me." The *ACRLog* (<http://acrlblog.org/2006/09/05/gaining-the-trust-of-students/>) recently pointed out a link between data from the Edelman Trust Barometer and the *2005 OCLC Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources* that indicate increased trust in information within communities. Both sources indicate that there has been a marked shift from trust in traditional authority figures (doctors, CEOs, academics) to trust in people who are "like me." According to Edelman, "the 'person like yourself or your peer' was only trusted by 22% of respondents as recently as 2003, while in this year's study [2006], 68% of respondents said they trusted a peer" (Edelman, 2006). Data from the *2005 OCLC Study* support the same notion regarding people's information-seeking behaviors. In response to the question "Who or what is that trusted source you most typically use," coworker, professional colleague, friend, and relative — people who are "like me" — all significantly outpaced librarian which came in last with only 2% of respondents. People are increasingly relying on others with whom they have something in common in order to get information. This is especially relevant for libraries striving to engage their communities — what do librarians have in common, how are they like, most of their patrons? They are all part of the same community. Becoming more recognized as local experts may be a way for librarians to connect with patrons and to increase credibility and relevance with their users.

7. It is perhaps worth noting that Starbucks, a particularly astute local/global company, has wisely latched on to the term "third place" and uses it in their marketing.

8. Like long tails, "2.0's" are sprouting from libraries of all sorts and compelling descriptions of Library 2.0 (Casey and Savastinuk, 2006), Academic Library 2.0 (Habib, 2006), State Library 2.0, and Public Library 2.0 (Chowdhury, *et al.*, 2006) have all been put forth. Public Library 2.0 (PL2.0) is especially relevant here and Chowdhury, *et al.* provide a more comprehensive 2.0 argument for local libraries. They describe how libraries can become "local knowledge hubs" where PL2.0's move beyond the more traditional role of "mediator between knowledge creators (authors, publishers, websites, online information providers) and local people" to become "a platform for the storage and dissemination of local community knowledge." The authors are developing a "common platform using open source technologies and standard metadata" that libraries will be able to leverage.

9. In an effort to help untangle government data in the U.K., the government there recently announced that "at least 551 government websites are to be cut to make access to information easier for citizens and businesses" (link via Panlibus at http://blogs.talis.com/panlibus/archives/2007/01/closing_web_sit.php).

10. While local information provision is more obviously relevant for public and state libraries, academic libraries can also make it a focus. Universities, much like the local-revering HSBCs and Applebees of the world, are striving to become more engaged and improve relations with their local communities and as Westney points out, an opportunity may exist for academic libraries to help facilitate campus/community relations or at the very least better align themselves with both the university and the local community by making local community engagement initiatives (which the provision of local information can support) a priority. For more, see Westney, 2006.

11. Legend has it that Potemkin villages (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potemkin_village) were fake communities, flat Hollywood sets, constructed to create a false sense of place to impress Katherine II as she toured her newly acquired lands in Crimea in the late 1700s. It is now generally accepted that the not only were these villages fake, they never really existed (they were never built), but the phrase "Potemkin village" carries on.

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