Deep Sharing: 
A Case for the Federated Digital Library

By David Seaman

Libraries have reacted quickly to dizzying changes in the information landscape over the past two decades. The advent of digital technologies and the proliferation of content has created significant changes in how we store, find, and use information. Libraries have responded to these changes in various ways, including creating digital library services to support research and teaching, and digitizing and providing access to their collections. However, the current situation differs from the early adoption of typewriters, mimeograph machines, and slide libraries in several ways.

The current challenge is to create a virtual library of content that is accessible to all users who will never set foot in our physical locations. Libraries have reacted quickly to the dizzying changes in the information landscape over the past two decades, but the current situation differs from the early adoption of typewriters, mimeograph machines, and slide libraries in several ways.

Libraries are collaborative by nature—we freely share expertise, staff, and ideas, and information about holdings for our collective good. Shared cataloging is a striking example: a cataloguer in one library creates a record about a book to share in a central database rather than in his or her local system, and all libraries who share that information contribute to the collaborative catalog that books are indexed, which is often the first thing a user sees, and which is often the first thing a user sees. The creation of digital library content also requires significant resources, as the content needs to be digitized and preserved.

Innovative users need content that fosters discovery, engagement, and entertainment. Users of digital libraries want to find content that is relevant and useful to their specific needs and interests. Digital libraries must provide access to content that is both discoverable and usable. Libraries have responded to these challenges in various ways, including creating federated digital library services to support research and teaching, and digitizing and providing access to their collections. However, the current situation differs from the early adoption of typewriters, mimeograph machines, and slide libraries in several ways.

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