

## **Integrating the Internet into Library Life<sup>1</sup>**

Paul S. Ulrich

Zentral- und Landesbibliothek, Berlin

The traditional role of the library in Europe is to collect, catalog (i.e. record), store and circulate books; the librarian is a manager or administrator of these books. As a civil servant his activities are primarily defined by administrative and not necessarily public-related characteristics. He records that information which makes a precise identification of a work possible: for an auditor. The information found on the title page is noted down (even though very few readers ever really look at the title pages); recording information about the content is irrelevant and secondary, since this does not really assist in identifying the book when an audit is performed.

The library is a storehouse for media, a type of warehouse. Although it possesses books, it does not own the information in them, it does not own the copyright; it has the right of use.

As we know from economics, storage is the most uneconomic part of the production chain. When companies must administer large stocks, they try to organize this as effectively as possible. The best way to compensate for negative aspects of storage is to develop by-products and/or additional services. One produces demands so that a turnover is created for that which is in storage.

Such conditions are at their worst when it comes to periodicals in libraries. We spend very much money for magazines, binding them later costs even more and then they remain stored unused on expensive shelves because no one knows what is in them. Instead of providing extensive indexes for them, we encourage the behavior of our users, who ask for "books", not information. We ourselves are to blame that magazines are "shelf warmers" in our libraries: we don't publicize their contents.

As librarians we have little experience developing and marketing increased-value services. But it is just these abilities which we need in order to survive in the modern information society. In the past libraries were considered trustworthy repositories of information. This was our value. In the electronic information society we must position our role more prominently in the foreground, attract even more attention. We must prove that we really have the ability to deal with information and that we are serious competitors in the information society market place.

Traditional library users were attracted from the immediate vicinity of the library. This public tended to be heterogeneous. The librarians selected books which would be attractive for the familiar public, for users the library desired, users the library wanted to serve. Conversely, little was done to entice other citizens – particularly those belonging to minorities – into the library in order to gain them as users.

The two most prominent minorities among the users of my library are politicians and businessmen. But it is not at all surprising why they do not come to the library: we neither provide enough of the information which they need, nor do we aggressively seek to entice them into the library. In times of tight budgets, it is not surprising when politicians and

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businessmen make decisions to reduce funding for libraries: libraries haven't impressed on them the value which a library, an information center, can have for their professional needs.

For members of other minorities our behavior, our image is not substantially different: in spite of all our statements that we are open to everyone, that we are there to serve everyone, we both ignore and exclude many potential users.

Since 1 May 2002 there is a new law in Germany: the Law for the Equalization of the Handicapped. This law is intended to secure a barrier-free access to information for the handicapped. Experiences with similar laws in the USA and Great Britain indicate that the effect of this law will be much greater, than it at first would appear.

If we critically examine our environment, our work, we will notice that in the past we have erected very many barriers between the information we have and our users. If we really want to be a barrier-free library, we must dismantle not merely the obvious barriers, but all the barriers which exist, all the barriers we have either consciously or unconsciously erected. We must make information we have as well as our services really accessible for everyone. We must refrain from using librarian tricks to hide both information and services so that no one knows that they are present.

In the new information society we have to deal with different technologies, which, however, I do not wish to either over or under rate as aids for accessing information. Our task now is not so much to talk about these new technologies, but rather to see them as incentives to extract new possibilities, to get us out of our rut, to gain new perspectives, to find new partners, to offer new services, which in the past were not possible.

Technological developments (for example, printing, audio media, the telephone, the telefax, the computer, CD-ROMs, multimedia) have always effected libraries. Technology continues to progress with increasing speed, and libraries and librarians must constantly adapt to the new developments.

Libraries and librarians are relegated to running after technological developments and cannot steer nor influence the direction these developments take. These influences not only come from the areas of entertainment, edutainment and infotainment, they also come from other libraries. When library users, journalists and politicians hear that new technological developments have been introduced and are being used in other libraries, then they expect that their local library will also take part in these developments. This race with the new technologies and the possibilities associated with them force us to reevaluate our role. We must consider how we can best shape our future. If we do not use the developments to our advantage, the very real danger is that others will make the decisions for us and we will no longer be involved in deciding where we want to go, which services we want to offer and which services we are able to offer.

Increasingly we hear that the new technologies and in particular the internet will make libraries superfluous. Such arguments are not new, such doomsday forecasts about the future of libraries are archaic: they are regurgitated with every new development which occurs; they have, however, never been confirmed. What has occurred have been changes. What previously existed did not remain as it was, and that which came was always completely different from than which we anticipated and what the alleged experts forecasted. Changes should force us to question prevailing presuppositions. What we discover ought to lead us to new awarenesses of what we are doing; thereafter we must proactively redefine both our role and our activities.

Up to now libraries had regular opening hours. The user had to adjust his needs to the hours when librarians were available. Increasingly the concept of having regular hours when one is accessible is being questioned. When we place our services on the internet, these are

accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In order to order or renew books in our online catalogs, users are no longer forced to do this when the library is open, but can do it when they have the time and need. It is only a question of time when they will require even more from us, for example, providing other information services around the clock. Such and other questions have already raised by others and are already being pursued by some libraries with quite interesting ramifications for libraries and users elsewhere.

Naturally such changes are not possible if we retain existing structures and frames of mind.

A much-criticized aspect of the internet and technology is that there is an impersonal element involved: one communicates with a screen, with equipment. Such impersonality can also have positive effects, which one can use in order to offer meaningful services. When you dial a telephone number, you don't really know who will pick up the receiver, neither do you know where the person is who answers your questions. Call centers for companies are rarely in the same location as the company, often not even in the same country. The caller does not notice where his conversation partner really is. The person on the other end of the line is assumed to be a member of the company, although this is rarely the case. Callers generally regard the permanent accessibility positively.

Similar situations can also be carried out on the internet. Services which a library offers do not necessarily have to be performed by the library and/or by librarians in a specific library. In a global world, some libraries are always open somewhere or non-library specialists can perform services at home (via teleworking). The decisive element is that a network be developed in which libraries reciprocally provide user services.

It is therefore important that we begin to seize the initiative. It's up to us whether we are active participants in advancements or whether we continually chase after opportunities and continually cry that developments have left us behind. No matter what we do, however, we should not forget that whatever it is we do decide to do, it will always be compared to what others have done and what others are doing.

The project "Deutsche Internet Bibliothek" [German Internet Library <http://www.internetbibliothek.de/>] went online in April 2003. The "Librarians' Index to the Internet" [ <http://www.lii.org/> ] was begun as link collection of a single librarian and was given its present name in 1997. As good as these link collections may be, both are and remain relatively unknown and consequently are not heavily used. They are perhaps utilized by librarians, the broad masses have no idea that they exist.

The hobby of two engineering students at Stanford University in California, David Filo and Jerry Yang, is just the opposite. In 1994 they created "Yet Another Hierarchical Official Oracle": a classified directory of the internet. Word-of-mouth advertising (today one would call this viral marketing) made it known by everyone and it is still considered to be the most important link collection on the internet, the most important attempt to catalog the internet: Yahoo! This clearly librarian activity was not done by librarians; it was others who had the idea and converted the idea into deeds – and in the process they made a lot of money. Yahoo! set the standards. Whether what Yahoo! does is good or bad is not important. Yahoo! is the yardstick by which all competitors are compared. When we librarians place a classified listing, a link collection on the internet, we are compared and compete with Yahoo!. We have ceded the role of pioneer.

When people think of books or music on the internet, very few people think of libraries. They go to Amazon to order the media on-line, or they get their songs directly from the internet. These sources are always available, they are never closed. Furthermore, Amazon has the interesting advertising-effective service: "Customers who bought this book also bought: ...". Thus visitors to Amazon are made aware of additional related titles which they possibly know

nothing about. And our catalogs? Although we have the possibility of doing something similar (“Readers who borrowed this book have also borrowed: ...”), we have slept here as well. Our catalogs do not offer additional, supportive information, they provide no additional assistance for our users. If a book is not available we merely provide the opportunity to reserve it. We answer the questions and not necessarily the needs.

Equally frustrating for users who have become accustomed to Google’s single input field for querying the whole internet, the interfaces of our catalogs for querying our relatively small holdings are totally confusing: many fields to choose from and the use of library terminology which nobody, except perhaps a librarian, understands. This produces negative publicity for the library and underlines the fact that we are neither modern nor easy to use. Such negative experiences are counter-productive and are much more difficult to combat than positive experiences.

Since the introduction of the internet in libraries, a transformation has taken place: Online services are used by people who do not necessarily come from the traditional environment of the library and who do not correspond to the profile of the traditional user. These people may not have known about the library in the past, but by virtually encountering libraries and their services, new connections, new expectations, new demands and new possibilities for satisfying these needs emerge.

When a library places its OPAC on the internet, not only do the number of circulations increase, but also the number of interlibrary loan orders. If online information is offered, then inquiries may come from all over the world. We are acting within a global infrastructure and see what implications being globally visible means for us: new users, new services, new demands, new responsibilities.

But when it comes to providing information on the internet we have problems. Libraries were always considered to be places where one could find information. Places where one could interact with humans who helped find information. A library was a place where one had confidence. One went into a library because there were librarians there who helped one find the information one needed, who understood the needs of the user.

The stated goal of Google is to one day reach the point where they can say: if you did not find anything with Google, the information doesn’t exist. Whether this will actually occur is beside the point, the challenge has been raised. Other contenders are likewise trying to establish themselves as providers for information seekers. Google currently has the fee-based service, Google Answers [ <http://answers.google.com/> ], where so-called experts answer questions. Another recent contender is Wondir [ <http://www.lii.org/> ], a service, where one can ask questions and visitors to the web site provide answers – a kind information stock exchange.

In the age of the internet we are increasingly losing this image. Why does one need a library, if one can find everything with Google? Since our OPACs are part of the invisible web, the information contained in them is not found with a Google search. But even if the content of the OPACs could be searched by Google, the technical terms, the key words the library uses rarely correspond to the search words used by the surfers. (Incidentally, with the merging of Google with Amazon’s “Search inside a book” service, the search engine A9 – <http://a9.com/> – another competitor for access to information, another mediator for discovering where information can be found has joined the market.)

Even the presentation of our services in internet is not particularly successful. (Here it should also be mentioned that it is very rare when searching the internet for information on a specific topic that one is directed to a library – although libraries have the information. Because of this the internet surfer doesn’t realize that the information which he needs is also in a library.) A

company with the advertising effectiveness of a library would have gone bankrupt. We sell our services poorly. Our advertising behavior is amateurish. Could it be that we don't want to be successful? Or even worse, can we deal with success if we have it, can we cope with being really successful?

A library in a town with 20,000 inhabitants which has 50% of the inhabitants as users would most definitely be regarded as being successful. If, however, 50% of the inhabitants in Berlin (the number of inhabitants is about 3.5 million) were to use the Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin (Berlin Central and Regional Library), there would be no possible way to handle the masses. Even with its 7000 visitors a day, the Berlin library is not as successful as that library in a town of 20,000!

Using this point of view, a successful presentation on the internet becomes even more important.

Similar to Shakespeare's seven ages of man, the activities of libraries on the internet also have three ages:

1. Childhood: Take – use what others have made available. Using interlibrary loan, making queries with search engines and subject catalogs, using the internet to access databases (including library catalogs), and email;
2. Adolescence: Take and present oneself – Putting information about oneself on the web (internet pages, "about us", hours of operation, rules and regulations, one's own OPAC);
3. Maturity: Giving and taking – structuring external information for others (creation of a clearinghouse), creating databases for extended use (e.g. for reference services – also in co-operation with others), creating services for others, active participation in mailing lists, offering services with others.

Perhaps one of the most important possibilities which the internet offers us is the ability to develop new services by networking with others (and not only just libraries). Particularly in the USA consortia are being formed in order to offer even more effective services with existing (or even reduced) staff. Initially such consortia were created with libraries in a geographical area (e.g. in a county or a state), but increasingly the geographical boundaries are being dispensed with. Libraries all over the world are joining together to offer services around the clock, seven days in the week (so-called 24/7 services). The advantage is that offerings which are placed on the internet by libraries are accessible around the clock, but library staff is seldom always available. By working together internationally, somewhere in the world some staff members are always on-call and provide at least initial assistance.

Reference mailing lists (e.g. Stumpers or RABE) offer great advantages for those difficult questions one cannot answer oneself: by working within an international framework of people willing to assist others answer difficult questions, not only are the individual librarians (and the users in their respective libraries) helped, but a powerful resource is created. Furthermore, the various time zones create an environment where potentially someone is always "on call". When I leave work in Berlin at the end of the day, librarians in the USA have just come to work. If they can answer questions for me, the answers are waiting for me the next day when I begin work.

For those who are unfamiliar with these mailing lists:

RABE [ [http://www.hbz-nrw.de/produkte\\_dienstl/fortbildung/rabe/set\\_rabe.html](http://www.hbz-nrw.de/produkte_dienstl/fortbildung/rabe/set_rabe.html) ] is a German-language mailing list where questions, which one cannot answer, are passed on to others in the hope that someone actively participating in the list will know of the resources necessary to answer the question and be willing to contribute their time and knowledge for the

benefit of the other members. Of course German-language does not mean that all the participants are in Germany. Quite the contrary: many librarians in Goethe Institutes scattered all over the world participate in RABE; likewise there are German-speaking librarians in the USA who also send and answer questions. RABE was modelled after the English-language mailing list Stumpers [ <http://domin.dom.edu/depts/gslis/stumpers> ].

The problem with such a mailing list is that potentially all 700 (or more) participants will all start looking for the answer at the same time. This is a great waste of valuable professional time. On the other hand, it provides a basis for accessing non-cataloged knowledge or skills which individuals have.

Even more interesting are attempts to steer the questions to just one competent library. This is done in a simplified manner by the Deutsche Internet-Bibliothek (German Internet Library), where 70 public libraries have banded together to provide answers to questions. The question is randomly forwarded to one of the participating libraries. There is, however, no attempt to steer the question to a library with the special resources which are most applicable to the content of the question.

An even more extensive service is provided by QuestionPoint ( <http://www.questionpoint.org/> ), which was developed by the Library of Congress and other renowned international libraries together with OCLC in the USA. Local libraries forward the unanswerable questions to libraries with profiles corresponding to the content of the questions, furthermore, there is a chat reference service module which can be offered by consortia organized on a local, regional or even international level.

Chat reference is developing into a promising service. In many libraries in the USA where chat reference is offered, this service is heavily used by in-house users who do not want to relinquish their PC workstations to go to the reference desk. Another possibility is using chat for communicating among staff members.

Library presence on the internet is assumed these days. It is extremely important if not a prerequisite for survival. Innumerable web pages have been created in order to emphasize and prove this presence. What is offered not only reflects traditional library services, it also reflects the traditional ways libraries have presented their services in the past. Much energy and work has been invested for the organization and realization of the internet presentation. At best the effectiveness of this presence is proven with a counter indicating how many visits the page has had.

The essay "What makes a Great Web Site?" informs us that "original content is the most important trait of a great web site", i.e. it is not enough to find a niche in the information offerings and to fill it with original information, one must dominate this niche.

And what do libraries offer: opening hours regulations, organisational structures, library profiles, selected lists of books and other media in the library, and naturally the OPAC. Although such information is useful, it is not "original content". Such information has its place, however, it should be considered supplemental to other, original offerings and not to be the main offering.

In order to survive and to remain competitive, libraries will have to give additional thoughts about possible new services for the internet, which only they and no one else either can or want to offer. The library which discovers and effectively markets an unsatisfied need will suddenly find itself so successful that it will have to struggle with its own success. Being successful brings obligations, and if one does not respond to these obligations, the services will gladly be taken over by those who willing to invest time, money and staff in order to develop and to capitalize on a service begun by someone else. Our competitors on the internet

(both commercial and other libraries) are attentive and constantly look for interesting ideas of others which can be creatively developed and repackaged in order to reap big profits.

Whoever places a page on the internet, whoever offers a service on the internet, automatically competes with everyone else on the internet, whether he wants to or not. All offerings, all international offerings (i.e. also offerings in the USA, Europe, Russia, the Middle East, Japan, Africa etc.), irregardless whether they are from individuals, companies, libraries, governments or organizations, compete with each other; they all want one thing: "visitors", as many visitors as possible. In particular they want regular visitors, not merely because they reflect satisfaction with the content of the offering, but because satisfied visitors recruit new visitors. Regular visitors are thus the most valuable visitors one can have, since they advertise our services without us worrying about it. It is thus not surprising that everyone these days is trying to create portals in order to increase the attractiveness of their services as a means of being central shopping centers serving all needs of the visitor.

For several years increased emphasis has been placed on "viral marketing" when discussing effective strategies for utilizing the internet. Viral marketing is the utilization of word-of-mouth propaganda for a marketing strategy. Applied to the web it means that others propagate what one offers, either by word-of-mouth propoganda or by making links to my services. The more others on the internet link to my site, the greater is the probability that someone will be made aware of this service and consequently make use of it. Furthermore, this results in a better position in search engine placings (part of the success of Google is the applicationi of this philosophy in presenting the results of a search – "page rating"). It is thus extremely important that as many points of encounter are created; the more points of encounter are created the greater is the probability that the presence will be discovered. This probability increases exponentially with the number of points of access on creates.

What must we do:

- Define what needs exist.
- Define which services are to be offered.
- Win appropriate partners so that the project can be realized
- Advertise so that the services are used
- Expand the services so that they become effective self-advertisements.

Libraries must define:

- what do they want to offer, what can they offer
- who do they want to address
- what does the competition offer
- what new services do they want to offer, either alone or with others
- what don't they want to offer
- do they have the necessary means
- how can they effectively publicize the services

It is easy to forget for whom one works. A library collects and makes literature accessible for its users. One should also expect this to carry over to what they offer on the internet: The internet services should be offered for both the old, familiar, traditional user as well as for potential, new, unknown users. The use of the internet for the self-promotion of the library is

of secondary importance. A web offering addresses two different kinds of visitors, each with its own needs and requirements:

1. "normal" (i.e. local) users, in other words, those who actually use the services of the library, and
2. "other" (i.e. global) users, in other words, those who administer web pages with linking services. Search machines, directories and clearinghouses are therefore also "users". Since references from outside increase the visibility of a service, they are priceless partners for reaching those for whom the services are intended, for those searching for interesting services which can enrich their information needs.

Although the "normal" users are without a doubt the reason for most library services, it is the second kind of users who guarantee the long-term success of an internet offering.

Strategies how one can be successful on the internet are presented in countless books, essays and training courses, all promising to deliver the secrets to give one an edge over the competitors. What is discussed, however, are predominantly formalities, which are valid, but which generally overlook fundamental points. For example, it is assumed that the creator of a web page knows what he wants to offer, that he has and can successfully do this in the traditional (i.e. printed) manner, and that he already knows what his potential customer wants.

Being successful means:

1. One must offer something which is needed
2. That which is offered must be found – when it is needed
3. What is offered must be looked at when it was found.
4. The offering must animate one to return

Before one realizes his own offering, it is advantageous to think about who the potential visitors will be. The internet is used in order to get information comfortably and without an unnecessary expenditure of time. Comfortable means: from home or at work. Without unnecessary expenditure of time means: one does not have to spend much time or money in order to get the necessary information.

Thus the prime goal of a web offering should be a user-oriented, time-saving navigation concept which makes it possible for the user to reach his goal with a minimum of detours and distractions. Those who surf privately on the internet pay twice for what they get: the time they invest getting to the information they are interested in, and the money they pay to the telephone company and internet provider for the time they are online.

Everyone knows the problem with automated telephone information systems which present a list of possibilities, which one must listen to and then decide which of the points offered corresponds to his problem; once one has made a selection, a new additional list is presented, etc. etc. The caller spends much time (and extensive telephone fees), before he gets to where he can have his problem solved – perhaps. This is not very "customer friendly".

Unfortunately, we do not know how many potential customers hang up out of frustration with such time-consuming runarounds. Nor do we know how much money the companies earn in the course of such "games". On the internet the visitor wastes no time when the process of finding what he was looking for takes too long – he clicks on the back button of his browser, and a potential customer is lost forever.

By the way, such games have been played by librarians for a long time. Consider the see references in a card catalog. The user uses the catalog in order to find a call number with which he can locate a book in the library. Instead of finding a call number on all cards, he is referred to another card, where (perhaps) the call number will be found. Unfortunately, all too

frequently he is directed to a card referring him to still another location in the catalog. And if the desired card has by chance been misplaced or for some reason is not where it should be, then the ensuing annoyance is pre-programmed. (The related experiences on the internet are the "error 404's - file found"!)

The fourth of Ranganathan's five laws of library science is: Save the time of the readers.<sup>2</sup> This law is not only limited to the time which a user spends in the library, but includes the expenditure of time a user needs for all services which a library offers – also for our services on the internet. Here we librarians still have much work ahead of us. Our time is not the yardstick for what we offer, but the time of the users! We must reorient ourselves and place the user in the center of our services.

One needs only to think of one's own behavior while surfing: if a search lasts too long, if we must wait too long until a page appears on the screen, if the information we are looking for cannot be located immediately, we give up and go somewhere else. We are impatient and behave like most TV viewers: instead of zapping from station to station on the remote controls, we zap about on the Internet by clicking the backspace button of our browser. All the while we constantly complain about how long time it takes to find information on the internet.

When, however, we place information on the internet, we give absolutely no thought to how long it takes the visitor to our site to find the information he is looking for. Here we should serve as a good examples and make time-conserving paths attractive and usable.

Simply stated, the internet is an enormous, disorganized heap of innumerable offers from billions of institutions and persons. Each of them believes that he has something important to offer. Each competes with everyone else in trying to gain the attention of all surfers, in attracting all information-seekers to what he has to offer.

"Although noone believes that anyone will call a company without knowing their telephone number, many, nevertheless believe that a web site will attract large numbers of visitors without it's address being known to the public."<sup>3</sup>

The situation is not really any different than it has been with printed material; this is a situation which librarians have dealt with for centuries: How does one find what one needs among all the printed products which exist? What has changed are production and distribution processes, but not the problem itself. Previously there were numerous hurdles which had to be overcome before a text became a printed product (one needed a publishing house and the production and distribution methods were time-consuming and expensive). With the internet almost anyone can publish whatever he or she wants, without large expenditure and nearly always without any control.

The market place has changed substantially. Previously it was the linguistic region which dominated the market. The market has now become international and precisely that which is lauded as being an advantage of the internet, i.e. this internationality, creates new problems which are not addressed. The multitude of languages competing with each other create a chaotic electronic babel and make finding information more difficult, not easier. Fashionable terms and abbreviations are widespread and make locating the essential information more difficult. The intentional abuse of words, the purposeful misleading of searchers is practiced by many commercial institutions in order to get searchers to sites they neither want nor need to visit. This intentional linguistic smog obscures what is intended to be clear.

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<sup>2</sup> The other laws are: 1. Books are to be used; 2. Each reader has his book; 3. Each book has its reader; and 5. A library is an growing organism. Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan. *The Five Laws of Library Science*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House 1963.

<sup>3</sup> Werner Höfer: "Detektiv im Web", in: *Internet professionell*, September 1999, p.29.

The growth of the internet cannot be stopped. More and more pages are produced every minute precisely because it appears to be so simple and because everyone wants all the apparent advantages of the internet for himself. Furthermore, libraries should not forget that each page which they themselves place on the internet also contributes to the problem of the internet being clogged with more pages. Whining will not help us. Whether we like it or not, even more, much more will be offered on the internet in the future; even more offerings will compete to attract the attention of the surfer, the searcher for information. We must not only learn how to deal with this situation, we must also learn how to use it to our advantage.

For the library this means that its role on the internet also must change. Previously the role of the library was that of a mediator between the producer (publisher) and the consumer (library user) of information. Libraries at most provided tools in order to facilitate locating the information they or others had. Librarians had little to do with marketing. The presence of the internet and the presence of libraries on it has shifted the role which libraries are being required to master. Libraries and librarians are no longer merely intermediaries in the flow of information, they are also creators of information offerings and consumers of the information offerings of others. Thus they also bear the responsibility of the success or failure of what they offer.

It used to be that we relegated the advertising and distribution, i.e. the business of information to publishers and book dealers. Without the business aspects the flow of information is, however, only haphazard, serendipity. It is precisely an understanding of the business side of information which libraries and librarians must acquire and practice in order to be and remain competitive in the international environment of the internet.

Librarians care little about the (dirty) business of selling information. It is enough for us to create a few points of access to the information we have and wait for those in need of it to come to us. We assume consumers know about us and that they will automatically come to us when they are in need of our services, our expertise. Unfortunately this attitude creates a false sense of importance. Even worse, it is a guarantee that our long-term viability will be in danger of being reduced and then discarded as being non-competitive.

The business of information is one of the most important activities of the on-line librarian. Anyone can put a page on the internet, but very few can create and market internet sites so that these sites can also be found! A product which is not sold is a senseless waste of resources (time, staff and money), because if the product is not found and used, it is worthless. There are thus two important components of every product: the producer and the user. A producer who does not consider and respect the needs of the potential customer, will have done his work in vain. Conversely, the potential customer who does not know about the product will not use it.

Paraphrasing John F. Kennedy: "don't ask what the internet can do for you, ask what you can do for the internet".

If we consciously develop services for users, if we consciously place users in the center of our endeavors, if we consciously position our services and not our self-presentation at the center of our activities, then we will notice that our libraries are even more alive and more valuable than they have ever been. We will notice that we do not have to be afraid of the new technologies, that we have solidified the reason for our existence and that we are an integral part of the information society.