

UKSG 35th Annual Conference and Exhibition

Glasgow 26 - 28 Mar 2012

For librarians, there are few events more popular in these islands than the annual conference of the UK Serials Group (UKSG) and so it proved once again in 2012, with hundreds of attendees. Ireland was well represented with delegates from a variety of academic libraries and, indeed, some of the exhibiting vendors were also Irish.

Thematically, the conference touched on many of the issues which currently preoccupy our profession – bibliometrics, data repositories and open access, data-driven decision making and academic publishing. One that resonated particularly with me was Marshall Breeding's *The Web-Scale Library – a Global Approach* which graphically and starkly drew attention to the sheer complexity of the systems infrastructure within which most libraries are forced to operate. For librarians, working so assiduously to satisfy the needs of our users, it can be quite sobering to take a step back and see just what an impediment our array of systems, open and proprietary, can actually be. Interestingly, Breeding reiterated the popular contention that most Library Management Systems will continue to converge in terms of their functionality and services – but will be distinguished by how open they are. However, it is hard to see whether we are being faced in this regard with greater choice or greater restriction.

As is frequently the case, the plenary sessions were broadly 'big picture' and much of the meat of the conference was to be found in the breakout sessions, which generally offered real world examples. The level of candour from presenters was welcome and most were quite happy to discuss honestly what worked and didn't with their respective projects – which is always welcome.

It is impossible to attend all sessions, but several notable highlights were:

Mobilising your e-content for maximum impact by Ruth Jenkins (Loughborough University) and Alison McNab (De Montfort University) which gave a very honest account of just how difficult it can be to offer mobile content in a time of DRM, varying platforms and multiple media types. Importantly the speakers gave due credit to the role librarians will continue to play – offering context in an era of 'responsive design'. The speakers

gave a very candid evaluation of the variety of mobile apps available and ably illustrated the paradox that arises when publisher agnostic users are shoehorned into publisher based mobile apps.

Resource discovery services – evaluation and implementation by Liz Stevenson and Colin Watt (University of Edinburgh) again was notable for the openness of the speakers to talk about the myriad of difficulties which they had encountered in selecting and implementing a new resource discovery tool. In fact, this presentation quickly assumed the guise of 'support group for people grappling with next generation product x / y / z' and certainly proved very enlightening. Anyone who has ever been involved with such a project can appreciate the merit of their cautionary note – 'it's important to do something, but bear in mind it will never be perfect'!

Patron-driven e-books: the promise and the (potential) pitfalls by Anna Grigson (Royal Holloway, University of London) also painted a very honest picture of the pros and cons of PDA – a trend which has flourished in the USA for some years and is increasingly being used on this side of the water. Anna structured her talk with great clarity, focusing on 'the problem' – 'the promise' – 'the pitch' – 'the practical' and 'the pitfalls'. While it is easy to think of this issue in simple terms of 'access' versus 'building and owning a collection' it quickly becomes evident that the variety of offers available from vendors merits serious consideration to ensure that the package selected is most appropriate for the type of library.

These are a fraction of what was available and the quality was universally excellent. Finally, it would be wrong not to mention Stephen Buck's (DCU) presentation of *The emotional consequences of the idealisation of the elderly married academic librarian (male) by the elderly unmarried academic librarian (female)* – a study which offered some unique (and, I hope fictitious!) insights into just what can happen when librarians meet ...

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