

Chapter 20

Librarianship Presence in Virtual Worlds

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ABSTRACT

Librarianship has stereotypically been about books, communities, and the connection between the two. With the emergence of new media and technology, the concept of books has expanded to include information of all types and in multiple formats: eBooks, DVDs, videogames, electronic databases, et cetera. Meanwhile, the idea of community has stayed the same. For example, public libraries primarily serve communities defined by geographic lines; academic libraries serve their campus communities. In non-profit, medical or corporate libraries, communities are defined by their organization's particular mission. However, now that virtual worlds are becoming mainstream, librarians are redefining community, just as they redefined books. With the emergence of virtual worlds, librarians are encountering virtual patrons, and communities defined by virtual lines that defy physical boundaries. This chapter discusses the librarians and organizations that are moving librarianship into virtual communities, as well as the first library initiatives in online worlds.

INTRODUCTION

In the “real” world, the field of librarianship is feeling the challenge of communities that consist of a plethora of users with access to information via the World Wide Web and other emerging technolo-

gies, twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. In response, over the past decade, librarianship has undergone tremendous change. Library professionals evolved from having expertise primarily with traditional print-based resources to having a brand new skillset based on expertise with digital resources. Managing technology became a prerequisite for managing information resources,

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and librarians were suddenly poised to explore new technology, including Virtual Worlds. Most librarians consider it their mission to serve the information needs of their communities, and it is no great leap to see a community defined by a virtual space, rather than by geographic boundaries. As Greenhill (2008) shows, “more than 500 librarians have been experimenting with providing library services within Second Life” (p. 377). Moreover, according to Czarnecki (2008), “it is predicted in a recent report by Gartner Inc that “80% of active internet users will be in a virtual world by the end of 2011” (p. 1). Librarians’ colonization of virtual worlds is important both to virtual users, and to the field of librarianship. Librarians bring much needed services to these users, and at the same time, carve out a new way to serve the information needs of users who are surrounded by information all the time. The purpose of this chapter is to document and discuss major initiatives in the field of library science, that are taking place in, or related to virtual worlds.

This chapter is divided into four parts. This first is background information about librarianship and a short explanation of how librarians began exploring virtual worlds. The second part, “By, For And About Virtual Worlds: New Initiatives For A New Space” is comprised of initiatives that exist solely in a virtual world, and initiatives that exist solely for the purpose of managing or preserving virtual worlds. Included in this second section is a discussion about the following initiatives: Info Island, the Digital Preservation Project and Mystery Manor. This section also includes a general discussion about virtual library collections and Information Literacy. The third part of this chapter, “Extending Library Spaces Into Virtual Worlds: Reinventing *Local*” is comprised of virtual world initiatives that are extensions of their real life library services. Included in this section is a discussion of library programming in Second Life (SL), libraries that carve out informational spaces in virtual worlds, ISTE and other organizations that extend their services into Second Life, and

finally, the use of virtual worlds by librarians for professional and social networking. The fourth, and final, part of the chapter describes future research directions. The chapter concludes with challenges librarians have faced in their new roles in virtual spaces.

PART I: BACKGROUND

Although the “shushing” librarian stamping books is iconic in the United States, the reality is multi-pronged career path, one that rarely involves a stamp pad. Librarian titles range from having everything to do with the community: outreach, public services, etc, to having everything to do with managing collections: cataloger, metadata specialist, archivist, serials librarian, to name a few. And of course, library managers might spend more time on budget or human resource issues than on traditional librarianship. Many libraries are divided into circulation, reference, media services and administrative areas. Public libraries often have separate rooms for adults, young adults and children. Over the recent few years that librarians have been exploring virtual worlds, they have initiated projects that reflect this diversity in career paths. Reference and information services, children’s programs, collection development, archival work, virtual world preservation and myriad other librarianship-related projects can all be found in virtual worlds.

Additionally, librarians can be found in a few different virtual worlds, since Second Life has recently been a virtual hotbed of activity. In a chapter contributed to *Virtual worlds, real libraries: Librarians and educators in second life and other multi-user virtual environments*, Grover discusses how Second Life is one of many Multi-User Virtual Environments (MUVes) that are making inroads in school, library and work settings, for children and adults. The chapter includes discussions about public librarians and school librarians who have also written about and

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