Connecting People and Ideas

By Drew Brookhart

Libraries offer a lot of things other than books. Programming for all ages, volunteer opportunities, skill building education, and community are a few of my favorite aspects of public library service. However, the heart and soul of the library is information and for a lot of topics books are still king of the hill. They have been edited and reviewed, a process that ensures their quality. This is even true for electronically published books. However, books can be tough to discover and despite the higher quality of information they provide they also require more time and attention than other formats like video and audio.

I am certainly prone to browse the internet. I especially enjoy reading small news and sports articles from a variety of online outlets. The vast majority of the articles are free or they are in a newspaper that allows me to read ten free articles each month. Like a digital locust I move from one source to the next. Most of this free information is not worth the pixels it is printed with. It is appealing because it is so easy to reach, so easy to discover. As a librarian I spend a lot of time thinking about search, discovery, access to information, and the quality of information. At Columbus Public Library we purchase content after reading reviews. We guarantee our readers that we have first-hand knowledge of the quality of the information. There are a lot of great books being published today, more than ever before in human history. In our community more people are reading them, collectively we read over 200,000 books last year. The question for Columbus Public Library is: with all of this content at our finger tips how can the library best compliment all of the free, quick, easy to find online information? The answer comes in two parts. The first part is quality and we have that covered, the information available through Columbus Public Library has been vetted by professionals. The second part of the answer is discoverability. The library needs to make it easier to discover the great resources it holds.

The Columbus Public Library has done several things to help people discover its great content. We have launched a new online catalog that makes searching easier. We have connected that catalog to software that will recommend books based on subjects, authors, and themes. Where Columbus Public Library could really make its collection a stronger tool for our community would be making content discoverable with a Google search. Example, a Google search for 'replace brake pads 2002 Ford F250' would return a result for the Chilton auto repair database available with your library card. A web search for 'newest Stephen King book' would return a link to the Columbus Public Library's copy of *Finders Keepers* on the shelf or available online. This sort of connected collection is becoming possible through advances in linked data. Linked data is all around us now and it's actually what makes browsing the internet so much fun. By allowing search engines to harvest and index library records it is becoming possible to make a collection of library resources a highly relevant, good quality, easy to find, stop on the internet.

The Columbus Public Library continues to strive to provide the best library experience possible. Whether that experience is on the web or in our physical building we are working toward a first rate experience that is fun. Thank you to the Columbus community for supporting your library's mission of Connecting People and Ideas.