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Open Access Metadata, Catalogers, and Vendors: The Future of Cataloging Records

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ABSTRACT

The open access (OA) movement is working to transform scholarly communication around the world, but this philosophy can also apply to metadata and cataloging records. While some notable, large academic libraries, such as Harvard University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Cambridge, released their cataloging records under OA licenses, this is not the prevailing standard for libraries as a whole. In order for OA metadata to benefit users, libraries must release their cataloging records and metadata under an open access license. This OA metadata can reside locally or globally, both of which will be discussed in this article. Three main stakeholders can foster this process: libraries, vendors, and publishers. Working as a cataloger in a vendor's technical services department affords me a unique perspective on the potential role of vendors creating, promoting, and working with OA metadata to help libraries make their collections more discoverable and user-friendly. No matter what role vendors and publishers play, though, libraries and their catalogers must lead the charge in OA metadata and cataloging records in order to provide better information to users, while easing the burden of record upkeep through a collaboration of shared OA information.

INTRODUCTION

OA metadata enables sharing cataloging records in order to improve cataloging efficiency and quality as well as promoting timelier, more consistent access to information. It ensures that any library can obtain needed records in a timely manner to better their library and users, while also allowing libraries to contribute records themselves. The collaborative effort encouraged by OA metadata would benefit the cataloging community as well. This article will explore the topic of OA metadata, its possible growth potential, and the means by which to share records, and the future of cataloging in the light of OA metadata.

OA METADATA IN ADDITION TO OA

OA literature discusses the copyright of scholarly content rather than the metadata and cataloging records for that content. Due to the "publish or perish" paradigm, academic faculty held to the tenure and promotion standard need to produce and publish their research. Typically, the more prestigious the venue, the more likely it is to be cited, thus building reputation for the faculty members and their institutions. Academic libraries purchase databases that contain faculty publications to provide online access. Increasing journal subscription costs and decreasing acquisition budgets are problems that do not show signs of abating. Institutions pay twice for the material: once to pay the salary of the faculty who writes the piece, and again to obtain a copy after publication. OA journals seek to disrupt the traditional scholarly communication model and, while efforts thus far have been slow, some scholars have predicted its inevitability (Lewis, 2011). In line with this sharing of knowledge, the library community should promote the acquisition and propagation of OA metadata and cataloging records of content as well.

While OA metadata can help to aid further discovery of scholarly communication materials and open access journals, the concept needs to be broadened and address the local library's catalog as well (Mercer & Dyas-Correia, 2011). OA metadata is bibliographic information describing library content that is openly licensed and freely accessible. OA metadata, while still a new concept, already has made large inroads. Most notably, Harvard released 12 million cataloging records as OA metadata, following their institution's OA initiative (Harvard Releases Big Data for Books). With such a large amount of OA metadata now available, from other institutions as well, anyone can download and use that OA metadata thus creating a whole new realm of possibilities. Specifically, I believe that OA metadata could revolutionize traditional cataloging workflows and benefit catalogers and library users.

STAKEHOLDERS IN OA METADATA

Academic libraries, like all libraries, desire high-quality, complete cataloging records so that their library users are able to find information and items in their collections. At a time when budgets, staffing, and funding are tight, or decreasing, for many libraries, a collaborative approach to library metadata and cataloging records would help catalogers by allowing them to focus on their particular needs and specialty items at a local level. Catalogers could share the workload for commonly owned

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items by inserting OA metadata for those materials into their catalogs. This allows catalogers to create records for more complex, specialized or rare materials that are unique to their institutions. In turn, as more OA metadata is created and shared, catalogers and their libraries have more opportunities to find records for their catalog and help other libraries. As a result, high-quality OA metadata would benefit library users who would be able to find and use items more quickly since cataloging records would be in place sooner, especially for e-resources.

Vendors could play a significant role in helping to create OA metadata via the cataloging records for their content. While it is unlikely that they would release cataloging records directly as OA metadata due to current contracts and licensing practices, libraries that purchased the records could possibly release them as OA metadata, subject to negotiations over licensing agreements. Vendors may have contracts that restrict the use or sharing of the records by libraries, which would need to be addressed. The probability of vendors collaborating with libraries to provide OA metadata depends on a number of factors: the particular vendor, librarians' demand for high quality, full-level records, and the success and prestige of OA metadata itself. Libraries account for a majority of vendors' business, giving librarians leverage for demanding high-quality, full-level cataloging records. This could be achieved if vendors hired professional catalogers on staff, instead. Since cataloging records accompany vendor e-resources, for example, those products would become more valuable to libraries if the records were of higher quality, thus driving business for vendors while reducing the cataloger's workload. In addition, the publicity and good press would be priceless for vendors that cooperate and provide full-level records that become OA metadata from a library.

Working at ProQuest as a Catalog Librarian gives me insight into vendors, their process, and the importance of libraries to their business. For ProQuest, librarians and library users are a top priority and key to the services and products the company provides. ProQuest, for example, hires MLS-degreed, professional catalogers who create full-level cataloging records that accompany certain ProQuest products such as e-books and streaming videos. Since ProQuest aggregates items for libraries into packages or services, it makes sense for vendors as a whole to take on the role of creating high-quality cataloging records in order to provide more consistency and standardization among the records. Vendors that machine-derive records tend to be sparse and can have more errors in coding and within the fields, since professional catalogers know the rules and can examine the materials. Besides vendors, publishers are also in a position to contribute to OA metadata.

The extent of the role of publishers in the OA metadata movement would depend on how involved they want to be in creating metadata. Publishers could hire catalogers on staff to create high-quality cataloging records for their items. This seems less likely since content is a publisher's main concern, whereas vendors on the other hand, could add value such as aggregation, platforms, and metadata. Publishers could instead clean up the information that they provide to vendors about their items, which would help vendors create higher quality records. This is needed since sometimes the information vendors receive is incomplete or incorrect, such as ISBN numbers, titles and publication year.

As the main stakeholder, librarians need to take the initiative with OA metadata. There are two ways librarians can spearhead OA metadata without help from vendors and publishers.

DISRUPTING CATALOGING RECORDS THROUGH OA METADATA

The first way to disrupt OA metadata to academic libraries is to follow Harvard's OA metadata model, which was release in early 2012. Part of the contention about the release concerned cataloging records derived from OCLC records. While OCLC discouraged Harvard's OA metadata initiative, in the end they issued a statement saying that they could not stop Harvard from doing so but asked that attribution be properly given to them for those records (OCLC Recommends Open Data Commons Attribution License). Despite attribution, OCLC may worry that the records in their system being harvested and shared openly could mean that libraries would no longer continue using them. But the products and services that they provide remain necessary and relevant to libraries and catalogers, regardless if they participate in OA metadata. OCLC could possibly be included in the OA metadata process to the benefit of both them and libraries. These record releases are a local approach, since each institution usually needs an OA initiative for the library to release their cataloging records. Also, any library wanting to download and insert the OA metadata into their catalog must visit each library's website, such as Harvard's, to get the cataloging records and then proceed to go through and add the ones they want to their own catalog. While accessed through the Internet, this way would be onerous, especially if a library only needed a few records from multiple libraries with OA metadata. Yet, it is practical and occurring right now.

A second way to distribute OA metadata would be to allow libraries to combine their cataloging efforts and achieve maximum benefit with OA metadata housed in the cloud, and then pulled into local OPACs. While idealistic, the Open Collaborative Catalog (OCC) would house the cataloging records released as OA metadata, thus sharing the information globally over the Internet in a cloud catalog. It would be ideal for OCC to be editable as a wiki in order to maintain the best records and share them with ease, so libraries could download exactly the ones they need (Post-RDA: The Next Generation of Cataloging). Although similar to OpenLibrary.org, which is an online catalog with wiki-like editing capabilities and funded by the Internet Archive, OCC would provide catalogers the ability to collaborate on subject headings, authority files, and quality control, thus democratizing the cataloging process. With an online wiki catalog, the control is in the hands of the catalogers themselves, not only to create and maintain records but also for controlled vocabularies and authority files. This way, change can occur as needed and the collaboration aspect encourages catalogers to make edits because they have a direct say and stake in the work done in the shared cloud catalog.

While the OCC is merely a thought-experiment at the moment, to get it up and running would take a great deal of planning. Catalogers would run the website but deciding who could edit, implementing a reputation system, hosting the website and its data, choosing the software platform, and selecting those to lead the project are yet to be worked out and would need to be in place before the OCC could be accessed by library users and the Internet public. It is a ways off but a possible direction for cataloging in this technology age.

CATALOGERS' FUTURE IN THE PRESENT

Having monitored cataloging positions over the last two years, it appears that the cataloging profession lacks entry-level jobs, and lately only heads of cataloging departments or upper management positions are posted. The cataloging profession is shrinking and not being replenished with entry-level degreed catalogers, as deprofessionalization continues (Litwin, 2009) Paraprofessionals are beneficial, but new MLS catalogers should be encouraged more to join and strengthen the profession. Yet as the new cataloging rules and standards take effect, they promise an innovative organization of our metadata so that cataloging records better serve library users. If libraries and their catalogers embrace RDA, FRBR, and linked data, the results could truly reinvigorate the catalog and the profession. With so much information on the Internet, libraries along with these new standards could help clean up the tangled web by offering high-quality metadata with relevant outside links to drive more Internet users, besides library users, to the catalog for reliable information.

At a time when budgets and staffing are tight, OA metadata shared in an open cloud catalog seems to be a necessary, needed remedy. With recent library school and information school graduates trained with more technology skills and coursework, encouraging these graduates to join the cataloging profession by providing entry level positions would bolster the field and help prepare new catalogers for the future. Since the Internet pervades much of what librarians do in libraries,

even for catalogers and more so with the new standards coming into play, the profession should take advantage of these recent graduates. Plus, if the OCC did start up, it could be an entry point for a new cataloger entering the field, dealing with metadata and reading cataloging records to determine what to download while collaborating with the profession through OA metadata on a global scale.

CONCLUSION

In our highly connected world, a grassroots movement of librarians and particularly catalogers should lead OA metadata in order to benefit ourselves and library users. The Internet enables collaboration and sharing with anyone who has a connection, so whether OA metadata exists at each library's webpage as a downloadable file or in a cloud-based collaborative wiki catalog, now is the time to make use of the technology. At the end of the day, catalogers create the cataloging records' metadata to help library users. Working together as a profession to provide better information in the age of the Internet is the next logical step.

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