Suppose you lived halfway between two libraries, both of which had friendly, helpful reference desks -- but one gave incorrect or incomplete answers twice as often. Which one would you ask for help? Now what if one of your patrons wanted some bibliographic information, say, the title of the latest James Paterson novel. They could go to Amazon, or Goodreads, or LibraryThing -- or your online catalog. Don't you think they're going to end up using the most complete, most accurate source of information?

You've probably come across examples of errors on Amazon.com: a listing for a jar of peanuts illustrated by a picture of a pair of scissors. Hilarious, but not very common. But do you know how many of *your* catalog records have incorrect or incomplete information?

Suppose patrons visit your online catalog a million times a year, and your catalog is 99.9% complete and accurate. That means 1,000 errors or omissions a year, or about three a day. Would that be acceptable for the reference desk? We're not talking about books the library doesn't have -- or questions the reference desk can't answer -- we're talking about the catalog -- or the reference desk -- providing information which is incorrect or incomplete *without any indication of the error or omission*.

So perhaps you think 99.99% accuracy would be a better goal. If you have a million records in the catalog, that means that your goal is to have fewer than a hundred catalog records that are less than perfect.

If you're a public library, I guarantee you that you have more than a hundred less than perfect records. Look for duplicate Name Authority Records, ebooks missing ISBNs, and books missing series information. Take a look at a typo list and see how many books have a subject heading containing "ficton" (for "fiction") or "supsense" or "survivial".

Once you have a goal, you just need two more things. You need a way to measure the accuracy of your records -- so you know how far you are from your goal -- and you need a plan to get from there to your goal.