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Readers' Advisory: A Practice

Jennifer Hootman

Regardless of all the information freely available to patrons via the Internet, when it comes to reading recommendations, many prefer to consult a librarian's expertise on the matter. Readers' advisory (RA) is a long-standing, traditional library service that's as popular as ever. Many librarians providing this type of service, however, may feel overwhelmed if not

also intimidated by the breadth of knowledge needed. How does one develop such an expertise without having to read every title imaginable, all day, every day? How can the practice of preparing for readers' advisory be a manageable and enjoyable prospect?

Rebecca Vnuk in *Jack of All Trades Readers' Advisory: How to Learn a Little about a Lot* (Jan/Feb 2010 issue of [Public Libraries](#)) suggests some answers to these questions. Building an expertise in readers' advisory isn't about how many books you read cover to cover but more about reading strategically and using some specific tools to help manage what you learn from your reading. The end result of your efforts would hopefully include a solid understanding of books and authors for needed comparisons, broad knowledge of your library's collection, and a reserve of quick, go-to resources to consult when you are not familiar with an author, title, or genre.

For starters, Vnuk recommends doing a little background reading on readers' advisory (she provides a list of some core RA resources in her article). Next, and perhaps the key step in this practice, is intentionally seeking out those authors and genres of which you know very little or nothing. Vnuk clearly lays the challenge before us: discover one new author a week and become familiar with as many authors from your library's collection as possible, with books your colleagues are reading, and with books that your patrons are reading. Reading the entire book, of course, would serve this purpose, but that doesn't have to be the only measure by which to tackle this challenge. Vnuk states that this can be done by skimming, reading reviews on library websites, blogs, or journals, or by following her "Top Five of the Top Five" rule.

To help with reading strategically for readers' advisory service, Vnuk suggests the following reading regimen for each one of these categories - Mystery, Fantasy, Humor, Horror, and Women's Fiction:

- Five must-know classic authors
- Five up-and-coming authors
- Five must-know books
- Five trends/subgenres

For each set of Five, Vnuk offers her picks.

In addition to reading strategically, keeping track of what you've read in a format that's quickly accessible is a critical aspect of providing effective RA service. Vnuk offers some great suggestions that include both freely available online tools and the well-known subscription database, EBSCO's *Novelist*. Moreover, I recently attended a session, *Readers' Advisory 2.0*, at the local *2010 Library Technology Conference* held at Macalester College in which Michelle McGraw and Jody Wurl of Hennepin County Library delivered a terrific presentation on the role of social media in providing and in preparing for RA.

McGraw and Wurl detailed, compared, and gave examples of a number of online tools for RA service such as MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Ning, Library Thing, Goodreads, Twitter, and Shelfari. The two also gave advice on managing your online RA resources including starting small and being selective, trying new resources, scanning/skimming blogs and blog comments, using RSS feeds and aggregators, and using author alerts. I highly encourage you to check out their presentation materials and resources. You can find those available at <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/libtech_conf/2010/concurrent_a/3/>.

These resources are bound to get you excited and feel empowered to develop the knowledge and tools needed to provide readers' advisory service.

Though RA is readily thought of in the context of reference questions, booktalking is another type of RA that is equally as challenging. In her article, *Booktalk Boot Camp: How You Can Learn to Stop Worrying and Love Being "The Bomb"*, Chapple Langemack shares some specific advice on honing your booktalking skills. To read more on booktalking and other RA services, be sure to take some time to review the readers' advisory issue of *Public Libraries* (Jan/Feb 2010). It is chock full of great advice, how-to, and supportive resources.

Additionally, Minitex Reference is hosting a webinar panel in April highlighting booktalking with Jennifer Brannen, St. Paul Public Library; Karla Businaro, Carver County Library; Sarah Nagle, Carver County Library; Angie Noyes, Washington County Library; and Barbara Pierce, St. Paul Public Library. Sessions of *50 in 75: Reader's Advisory Round Table's Second Annual Blast of Booktalk* are now full. If you didn't get a chance to register, look for the archived version shortly after April 14th on our website <<http://minitex.umn.edu/events/training/archived.asp>>.

Langemack, Chapple. "Booktalk Boot Camp: How You Can Learn to Stop Worrying and Love Being 'The Bomb'." *Public Libraries* Jan/Feb 2010: 42-49. Print.

McGraw, Michelle, and Jody Wurl. *Readers' Advisory 2.0*. Library Technology Conference, 17-18 Mar. 2010. Web. 24 Mar. 2010.

< http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/libtech_conf/2010/concurrent_a/3/>

Vnuk, Rebecca. "Jack of All Trades Readers' Advisory: How to Learn a Little About a Lot." *Public Libraries* Jan/Feb 2010: 34-37. Print. ■

AskMN

AskMN Updates

Carla Pfahl

We've added new information to the AskMN.org website. You can now find information about promoting AskMN on your website <<http://askmn.org/promote/>>, including downloadable logo graphics. There is also information on promoting AskMN in the classroom <<http://askmn.org/schools/>> and best approaches to use with K12 students. Interested in learning more about AskMN.org or how to participate? We now have an FAQ about AskMN <<http://askmn.org/about/faq.aspx>> that answers many questions asked by libraries around Minnesota. We also share information with libraries about what is involved with participation <<http://askmn.org/libraries/participate.aspx>> and the many benefits to libraries, staff, and their patrons.

The new pages are a way to help libraries and staff have a better understanding of what AskMN is and how the service can be used by both libraries and their patrons. Since AskMN.org statewide digital reference service went live two years ago we have worked with libraries across the state with their questions and are hoping that the new information may better address initial questions people may have. The new FAQ webpage is a compilation of many libraries' questions. We have found that many libraries and other organizations have placed a link to AskMN on their websites. Many more inquire if it is ok to link to the service. We wanted to address this and also provide the tools for doing so in an easy format with downloadable images of the AskMN logo.

In the Fall and Winter of 2009 we began promoting AskMN to teachers and school libraries across the state through webinars and presentations, and the response has been very positive. We have seen a definite increase in K12 student use. To help teachers and school librarians with introducing students to AskMN, we have put together a section on promoting AskMN in the classroom. This includes an online "Class Visit" form. When introducing the service to a group of students or classroom, the form will help us understand the assignments, can prepare staff for the amplified demand, and will make available resources on your students' subject matter so that all students collect similar information.

If you have any questions or comments about AskMN, please contact Carla Pfahl, <cpfahl001@umn.edu>, for more information. ■

AskMN – A Librarian’s Answer in Real Time

Diane Wallace-Reid, Media Specialist on Special Assignment, IT Services, Minneapolis Public Schools

AskMN is almost as satisfying as a face-to-face encounter with a local librarian. For some, this online librarian may be even easier to approach, as “waiting in line” online is somewhat easier for multi-taskers than standing in line at a reference desk. One can always check out something else while waiting for the online response.

Many of the media specialists in Minneapolis Public Schools have directed both students and teachers to this new resource provided by Minitex and participating libraries. I don’t have an actual count of how many Minneapolis students have posted a query. I do know that at one middle school the AVID teacher has introduced her students to AskMN. AVID is a program for students to hone their organizational and study skills to prepare them for college. So it is especially important for them to avail themselves of AskMN and other online resources. It helps them understand that Google does not have all the answers, that there is an “invisible web” of useful information waiting to be mined.

My primary responsibility is supporting Minneapolis media specialists, providing professional development and keeping them informed of resources and strategies to use with students and teachers. This year, I had the privilege of presenting ELM resources to an audience of volunteers, tutors and youth professionals who work with our Minneapolis students in a variety of settings. They were amazed at the wealth of resources they had at their fingertips. They were especially impressed with AskMN, an easy and efficient way to get information that they could not find on their own.

In addition to the satisfaction of having one’s questions answered so expeditiously, there is the sheer fun of connecting with someone in another part of the country who is ready and willing to be your online librarian. A big “thank you,” Minitex, from me and all the students and teachers in Minneapolis who have been introduced to AskMN where the librarian is always in! ■

Library Technology Conference 2010

Matt Lee

The third annual Library Technology Conference was a great success, at least in this participant’s experience. Please find summaries below of just some of the excellent sessions.

*“Libraries, Technology Evolution, Change and Success”
Michael Porter, WebJunction*

The library brand must be synonymous with electronic content. We must make the delivery of that content as seamless as do companies like Amazon or Apple. The

framework for this change must happen at the library support level with vendors and technical innovations, but in order to integrate this change, library staff at all levels must be fully involved and “on board.”

“Readers Advisory 2.0” Jody L. Wurl and Michele McGraw, Hennepin County Library

As noted earlier in this issue of [Reference Notes](#), in the article “Readers’ Advisory: A Practice,” this session introduced numerous online tools to help connect people with similar reading interests to each other and to relevant materials. While some of the tools covered were overtly book-focused, others had a broader scope that could be modified to the task at hand. The session covered Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Ning, LibraryThing, GoodReads, and Shelfari. The presenters illustrated well the notion that a successful readers advisory service is focused on the reader and delivers service as is best suited for each individual reader. Additional resources and online tool comparisons available at http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/libtech_conf/2010/concurrent_a/3/.

“Creating Online Tutorials Using Wink” Lorna Engels and Paige Weston, Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI)

Wink is a free video tutorial creator used by CARLI to support the libraries it serves and by member libraries in the region to provide student/faculty training. The session recounted several hands-on workshops provided by CARLI, which included coverage of tutorial best practices, analysis of existing tutorials, and hands-on tutorial creation. Examples and more information available at http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/libtech_conf/2010/concurrent_a/52/.

“Building Safety Nets into the Online Library” Jerilyn Veldof, Shane Nackerud, and Ryan Bean, University of Minnesota – Twin Cities

On a typical venture into a library’s web presence (including its website, databases, catalog, and points in between), a library user may encounter one or more “fail points,” where use is interrupted by confusion. Those fail points range from nuisance to crisis, and this session detailed how U of MN Libraries staff are seeking to identify and provide “safety nets” to support users throughout the entirety of their experience with the Library’s website. Presentation slides available at http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/libtech_conf/2010/concurrent_a/37/.

“Creating Interactive Websites with Flash” Amy Hribar, Kristen Mastel, and Claudia Sueyras, University of Minnesota – Twin Cities

Flash is an engaging, interactive platform for multimedia content within websites. After debunking some common myths about Flash, the presenters introduced two tools that are built on Flash Actionscript, Prezi and Pachyderm, and demonstrated Flash coding language. More background and additional resources at http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/libtech_conf/2010/concurrent_a/38/. ■

ELM Spotlight

Health Source®: Consumer Edition and Health Source®: Nursing/Academic Edition

Beth Staats

Via ELM, we have access to two great health-related databases, *Health Source®: Consumer Edition* and *Health Source®: Nursing/Academic Edition*. By their names, one is aimed at the consumer and the other at the health student / professional. So what sets them apart from one another, and, what do they have in common?

Health Source®: Consumer Edition, as the name implies, is aimed at the consumer and contains roughly 80 full-text consumer health-related magazines, full text for 83 health-related pamphlets, and 130 full-text health reference books. Topics covered in this resource include AIDS, cancer, diabetes, drugs & alcohol, aging, fitness, nutrition & dietetics, children's health and women's health. Some of the magazines in this resource include [American Fitness](#), [Better Nutrition](#), [Fit Pregnancy](#), [Harvard Health Letter](#), [HealthFacts](#), [Men's Health](#), [Muscle & Fitness](#), [Prevention](#), and [Vegetarian Times](#).

After performing a search for pamphlets it appears that most pamphlets in this database relate to drugs and/or alcohol and include titles like "Heroin Fast Facts," "Hangovers: An Ounce of Prevention," and "Denial: How It Starts & How to Stop It." The collection of reference books in *Health Source®: Consumer Edition* includes everything from cookbooks for diabetics, to books on Cystic Fibrosis and how to live healthier.

Health Source®: Nursing/Academic Edition has strong coverage in the nursing and allied health fields and contains more content than *Health Source®: Consumer Edition*. Included in this database are almost 550 scholarly full-text journals that focus on many medical disciplines like mental health, nursing ethics, pediatric nursing, and nursing management. Titles included in this resource are [Nursing Forum](#), [Journal of Advanced Nursing](#), [Age & Ageing](#), and [RN](#). The database is made up primarily of scholarly and peer-reviewed titles but does include the occasional popular title like [Running and FitNews](#). After browsing the publication title list, I saw that there are a few books / monographs in this database but when I tried to search specifically for them, I noticed that the "publication type" limiter is not available in this resource.

Both *Health Source®: Consumer Edition* and *Health Source®: Nursing/Academic Edition* contain over 5,100 Clinical Reference Systems reports (in English and Spanish), the *Lexi-PAL Drug Guide*, and *Merriam-Webster's Medical Desk Dictionary*. Clinical Reference System reports come from McKesson Corporation and they are high-quality patient education materials made available for professional and institutional use. The *Lexi-PAL Drug Guide* covers 1,300 generic drug patient education sheets and provides up-to-date, concise, and clinically relevant drug monographs for all U.S. prescription drugs, hard-to-find herbal and nutritional supplements, over-the-counter products, and new and investigational drugs.

To summarize, these are two health databases with very different content, aside from the materials I mentioned in the previous paragraph. They are like night and day. *Health Source®: Consumer Edition* is aimed at the layperson, consumer, and patient, and *Health Source®: Nursing/Academic Edition* is aimed at the nurse, medical student, and clinical healthcare professional and contains primarily scholarly and peer-reviewed content. ■

EBSCO Purchases NetLibrary

Matt Lee

As you may have heard, EBSCO recently purchased NetLibrary from OCLC, along with the rights to license several vendor databases currently provided by OCLC through the FirstSearch interface. The FAQs at the following site provide background and guidance for current OCLC customers: <http://support.epnet.com/uploads/kb/faq_documentnetlibraryfirstsearch_march_2010.pdf>.

This will not directly affect users of the ELM resources. The statewide collections of NetLibrary ebooks will continue to be available and accessible via the current NetLibrary platform, and the FirstSearch databases involved in the purchase do not include those in the Base Package, which is a part of ELM. ■

ELM Vendors Offer Webinars

If you're interested in getting some online training via webinar from one of the ELM vendors, look no further than the following links:

Britannica <http://info.eb.com.proxy.elm4you.org/html/er_free_training_sessions.html>

EBSCO <<http://www2.ebsco.com/en-us/app/training/Pages/TrainingForm.aspx>>

Gale/Cengage <<https://www.yourconferencecenter.com/CMS/eventcalendar.aspx?beid=100416>>

Proquest <<http://www.proquest.com/en-US/support/training/webinars.shtm!>> ■

This 'n That from the Web

Multilingual Minnesota: An online resource center in support of multilingualism in Minnesota

Beth Staats

Multilingual Minnesota <<http://www.multilingualminnesota.org/>> supports the many languages spoken in Minnesota by providing language-related resources for parents and caregivers, teachers, and learners. The website includes an introduction to bilingualism, information about immersion education, and a directory of language learning opportunities for students of all ages. Another emphasis is the heritage language support page, which provides resources and support for families who are maintaining an additional language at home.

The creators of *Multilingual Minnesota*, Patsy and Max Vinogradov, are involved with language education. You can help to build their Directory of Services by Language if you offer or know of language learning activities going on out there. Contact Patsy or Max at <patsy@multilingualminnesota.org> or <max@multilingualminnesota.org> if you have a program or school to add to this directory. ■

Note Taking in Today's World

Carla Pfahl

Are you a "sticky" fanatic? If you are anything like me, you have many sticky notes around your computer area or on your monitor with little kind notes of reminders for this or that. Everyone has their own way of organization and things that work best for them. For me, it is the visual to-do list and reminders that help me keep things from falling off my plate. I decided to try and clear up some of the clutter on my desk and test out some online versions.

The use of note taking online opens up many new choices. Kate Brooks, University Libraries, University of Minnesota - Twin Cities, has compiled a great assessment of note-taking applications. As you consider which note-taking tools to use, you might consider if you would like features like text formatting, the ability to organize notes into folders/collections, syncing and backup, and more.

Here are some examples to consider:

- list.it from MIT is an open source tool for taking quick notes. It works as a side-bar in your Firefox browser. It's simple and quick to use and offers backup for notes, but doesn't have text formatting features or folders.
- Another option for taking more extended notes is to use the notes option in Zotero, an open source citation manager program that works in Firefox. Zotero offers text formatting features and folders ("collections") to help you organize your notes by projects or other ways. Screen clippings can be added to your notes. You can also sync, backup, and share your notes with groups via the Zotero site.
- If you prefer note taking on your local computer but want the flexibility of storing your notes in the cloud,

consider Evernote <<http://www.evernote.com>>. With Evernote you can set up notebooks and nested tags to keep your notes organized. Clients are available for Windows, Mac, iPhone, Android, and other devices. Evernote's basic plan is free; if you need more storage or features, you can invest in a Premium plan.

- For another option on your local computer, consider Microsoft OneNote. In OneNote, you can set up notebooks with sections and subsections. This product includes a full featured text editor and many other features.

- Many other note taking packages are available. Some are listed at: <<http://www.distancelearningnet.com/blog/2009/50-tools-and-tricks-to-revolutionize-your-notetaking/>>.

I have been using MIT's list.it for a few weeks now, and I have gotten to like the simplicity of the app very much. You can choose to view the list or hide it to open up extra browser space. However, Evernote is very popular because it allows you to sync your notes with mobile clients. Currently, for my iPod Touch, I have been exploring the numerous free to-do list and notetaking apps available from the iTunes Store. Many developers create a free version of their apps which allow people to test out the application before purchasing. There is a new application that I am curious about, Stick It - Sticky Notes for iPhones (and iPod Touch), but there is no free version currently. I am satisfied for the time being with the free versions. ■

Mobile Funnies

Enjoy some laughs from Gerr McKiernan's blog posts on *Mobile Libraries*
<<http://mobile-libraries.blogspot.com/>>

- "If You Choose To Read On A Kindle ..."
<<http://tinyurl.com/ykteqm9>>
- Grimmy, Want To See My New I-Phone Apps?
<<http://tinyurl.com/y8ohdc6>>
- No Tweets Beyond This Point
<<http://tinyurl.com/ye2ts8g>>
- Twitter: The Movie
<<http://tinyurl.com/ylerxp4>>
- "Didn't You Get My Tweet?"
<<http://bit.ly/XRbaQ>>
- Not The Kindle
<<http://tinyurl.com/ydeq87b>> ■

New Policy to Get Broadband up to Speed?

Matt Lee

In theory, moving content online improves accessibility in a fair and scalable way. In a library setting, for example, ebooks can be viewed even when visiting the library in person isn't an option. Multiple people can read the same article in a database at once. Content is distributed across a region, rather than being housed at one centralized location. In practical terms, however, especially in rural or poor areas, putting content online might actually make it less accessible for some library users. Where fast, reliable Internet connections are prohibitively expensive, if available at all, online content might as well not exist for some library users.

Will the Federal Communication Commission's recently released [National Broadband Plan](#) enact practices to change this situation? The policies included within the report's 376 pages seem to encourage sweeping change in terms of infrastructure and cost, but some critics say those changes are too unwieldy to manage and too lightly-defined to enforce. The plan has some distance to go before we see outcomes from it, but librarians will certainly be watching.

Connecting America: The National Broadband Plan
<<http://download.broadband.gov/plan/national-broadband-plan.pdf>>

F.C.C. Questioned on Its Far-Reaching Plan to Expand Broadband Access
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/17/technology/17broadband.html>>

FCC National Broadband Plan: What it Means for You
<<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2361421,00.asp>>

Key Takeaways for Libraries from FCC National Broadband Plan
<<http://bannedlibrarian.wordpress.com/2010/03/18/key-takeaways-for-libraries-from-fcc-national-broadband-plan/>> ■

Web Junction: New Group and New Courses

Jennifer Hootman

A new group has been established on WebJunction Minnesota called MN TechSpeak.

Established by the Minitex IT unit, this group is intended for library IT staff across Minnesota to share information concerning the support of technology in libraries. The charge reads, “We all solve similar problems in supporting library specific software, operating systems, and enterprise architecture systems. Use this group for discussion and sharing of information regarding your own technology issues and installations.”

You’ll find it on WebJunction Minnesota in the right hand frame under Minnesota Groups on the home page <<http://mn.webjunction.org/>>. This group hopes to provide a space for IT and system staff in Minnesota libraries to ask questions of each other as well as answer questions and suggest areas of interest. Join the discussion at <<http://mn.webjunction.org/techspeak>>.

Three new self-paced LE@D courses from the University of North Texas have been added to the Course Catalog. You can find these courses available at <<http://mn.webjunction.org/catalog>>.

- **Strategic Planning: The Five Minute Introduction:** This class is designed to introduce you to the skills and techniques necessary for developing a strategic plan and emphasizes two important concepts: Strategic planning works; It does not have to be a long, expensive, tedious, and basically useless process.
- **Strategic Planning: Quick, Cheap, and Decent:** This is a class for when you need a quick, simple, short-term working strategic plan for your library or project; when your plan needs to be good, not great; when your existing plan needs a fast makeover; when your existing planning process is stalled and you need a jump-start; when you have a difficult planning deadline; when your library’s leadership and management have never created a strategic plan before, and they want to start small, simple, and doable; or when there is only one of you to do it all.
- **Mentors and Protégés: Creating Successful Workplace Programs:** Throughout this course, we will be exploring how to create the best interchanges between mentors and protégés, with an eye toward positive results for all involved. ■

Reference Notes

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Office HoursMonday—Friday, 8:00 am—4:30 pm
Reference Intake Form	https://www.minitex.umn.edu/reference/request/

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