

IT BELONGS IN THE LIBRARY
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Too often, special libraries don't get the respect they deserve. This unfortunate fact has a long history. Nowadays, the Web, the Internet and Intranets, and computer-based tools make it easy for any unit of an organization, such as a team within a company or research institute, or a department within a university, to offer the reports and other documents they produce online in a form of electronic "library." This practice has become quite widespread, and constitutes yet another threat to the general perception of the library's, and the librarians', relevance and necessity.

Usually the impetus to do this comes from within the unit, and reflects a desire to make their work known and accessible to the organization or to the world. It is really a natural and seemingly constructive thing to do. It leaves the control of the document within the unit, where, it might seem to those who have not thought deeply on the matter, it should belong. Who needs the library? Why take the extra step to involve the library in the keeping and dissemination of these documents when it is clearly not necessary, now that information technology is so advanced and easy to use?

Where does this attitude leave the library? Not in the loop, certainly. And why should it be? Why do we librarians think that we have a better way?

What follows in this article are information and arguments with which you are probably already familiar, and my effort may be deemed preaching to the choir. What I have tried to do is sum up the librarian's point of view from my personal perspective, and provide a catchy mnemonic device that can be called upon in times of need, such as when you are making your case to management.

WHAT WE OFFER THAT OTHERS DON'T

First off, I don't claim that we have all the answers. We don't. But I do claim that we have a professional approach and vision that makes it beneficial for organizations to involve the library if they care about the future of their publications. I sum this up in a word that could very well be the credo of librarians, or even a rallying cry: FIFI.

FIFI = Forevermore:

Identified

Findable

Intantiable.

Let me explain what I mean by these words.

FOREVERMORE

"Forevermore" applies to all the other elements in the mnemonic, and means that we have an eye on the long-term future of

documents in our care. Web sites put up by organizations, divisions, and individuals tend to have a here-today-gone-tomorrow quality. Even if they are around a long time, often they cease to be maintained after awhile. The person or persons charged with maintaining the web site and the documents attached thereto may leave the organization or be given other assignments. The priorities within the unit might change. After the initial flurry of activity involved in creating the site, its existence may quickly fade into the shadows of the organizational consciousness. By contrast, the library is an established part of the organization, whose outlook is toward the long-term preservation and accessibility of the documents of which it is in charge, in whatever electronic or physical form those documents exist.

IDENTIFIED

"Identified" means that each item in the library's charge has an established unique identity. Too often in settings outside the library, different versions of a document appear, perhaps in the same electronic location as the original, and create mix-ups. Someone might download a document from an online site, and moments later, it is replaced with a different version that may have the same name; there may or may not be an indication that it is a new version. In other cases, a new version might have a

completely new title, with no indication of its relation to the previous version.

Putting the document in the care of the library means that there will henceforth be a one-to-one correspondence between the contents of the document and its identifying information (e.g., title, document number, version number, date, etc.). When someone retrieves this document from the library, physically or electronically as the case may be, it will be exactly the same document that it was at the time that it was entrusted to the library—and it will be exactly the same document if it is retrieved a year later or ten years later. If an updated version is submitted to the library, the update information will be included in the catalog record, thus ensuring that the new version is distinguishable from the old. (Probably the act of submitting it to the library would prompt the producers of the document to be diligent in specifying versions, and adding version identification to the document.) The old version may be withdrawn if that is deemed to be appropriate.

No library or other work unit can guarantee against the deliberate clandestine alteration of a document, should that be someone's intention. However, if a document is in the care of the library, altering it becomes a trickier and riskier business,

and less likely to be undertaken, than if it were stored within the boundaries of the department that created it.

FINDABLE

This is probably the issue that comes up the most when departments keep their own documents on their own web pages. How does one know where to find these documents? Does everyone know where the web site in question is? Does everyone know that it exists? Among those who do, do they know that that is where the publications are kept?

People outside the unit, or outside the organization may come across a reference to the document and want to see it. Where is the first place they usually turn when they don't know where to find it? You know the answer—the library. The fact that a library is a library makes it a natural place for people to start their search when they don't know where else to look. Librarians do their best to keep track of where various types of information are kept, but if units just put their works up on their web pages without involving the library, it's not at all a sure thing that the librarians know about it and will be able to help people who inquire.

Making things findable is one of the main objectives of librarians, and in fact has been one of our paramount

professional concerns since at least 1876, when Charles Cutter's *Rules for a Dictionary Catalog* was published. As much as possible we try to unify the means of finding items by providing access to them via the catalog. In the case of some items or resources that, given their nature or the infrastructure in which the library operates, may not be practical to enter into the catalog, we still do our best to be sure that they can be easily located, perhaps via a presentation of information resources on the library's web site.

INSTANTIABLE

Maybe you can find a document, but can you actually see it? This question is not to be taken lightly in the case of digital documents. There has been a growing awareness in this decade of the problems associated with the impermanence of many digital media, and the impermanence of the software needed to present the digital object in a readable format. In recent times, the latter problem has generally been the more pressing one, as software becomes obsolete much faster than the physical format deteriorates.

Librarians have been among the first to recognize the seriousness and pervasiveness of this problem, which threatens the whole gamut of digital information sources, from companies' internal records to documents of great historical value in the National

Archives. Librarians have a long history of being attuned to the issue of preserving items in their collections, since paper manufactured since the latter part of the nineteenth century has contained acid, which causes it to deteriorate over time. Preservation of digital items follows naturally from this longstanding professional concern.

Obviously, librarians do not have a perfect solution, but the profession, via its professional organizations, has responded vigorously. The Council on Library and Information Resources' Commission on Preservation and Access has been actively studying the problem, as has the Association of Research Libraries, which recently published a report entitled *Issues and Innovations in Preserving Digital Information*. The issue is a frequent topic of discussion at professional meetings. We may not be able to provide a quick fix to our organization's digital longevity problems, but the professional awareness and attitude with which we approach our work can go a long way toward seeing to it that items in the digital collection remain instantiable, using whatever techniques we have at our disposal. These techniques may include those of record-keeping, human management, and simply being the ones who make it their business to keep an eye on the situation and alert the appropriate parties and marshal the necessary resources when action (e.g., converting documents to a different format) is needed.

CONCLUSION

The ease with which units within an organization can make their own publications available on a web site can make doing so irresistible. This is not only bad for the library, it is bad for the organization. It is imperative that librarians or other information workers within the organization make cogent, well-reasoned arguments, based on their best professional knowledge, on the best ways to handle the organization's publications. Above all, we want people in our organizations to know that we want to work *with* them in providing the best means of handling their documents. For example, we could offer to help work units set up their own web sites, with links to their publications which are given a home on a library site. The best we can do is to keep presenting our case with professionalism and clear arguments. FIFI can be your guide to explaining the better way that we offer.

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Page 9

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