

Thought leader interview: Jim Mouw

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The UKSG Editorial Board decided it might be interesting to invite some key thought leaders in the information industry to be interviewed for *The E-Resources Management Handbook*. A list of five questions was drawn up, ranging from the reasonably straightforward – “How long have you been in the industry and what is the most significant change you have seen?” – to questions for the professional seer – “Where do you see the industry going in the future?” A number of professionals from varying backgrounds – Stephen Abram, SirsiDynix; Martin Marlow, Ingram; Peter McCracken, Serials Solutions; Jim Mouw, University of Chicago; Alison Mudditt, SAGE – agreed to be interviewed. The resulting material makes fascinating reading, giving a range of very different perspectives on the information industry at this time of change and upheaval.

Why are you in this industry?

It's certainly a very interesting and challenging time to be in the information industry when we think about all of the changes that are happening in the information field and the delivery of library resources. There are challenges involved in cataloguing, inventorying, keeping links up and running, dealing with the transition from paper to online. The environment is endlessly challenging and it's just a great time to be involved in all of this.

How long have you been in the industry and what is the most significant change you have seen?

I went straight from college to graduate school in a library programme and I've been involved with libraries every since. I graduated from my professional degree in the late 1970s and spent about 15 years moving through various roles, which included teaching. Being involved in training the next generation is a wonderful place to be. It's very challenging, and also great fun. I came to the University of Chicago in 1990 as the Head of Serials. I then moved through various positions until I got to my present position which includes within it broad oversight for the management of our electronic resources.

It's difficult to pinpoint the most significant change I've seen in the industry, as several things come to mind, and I don't fully know which was the chicken and which was the egg! But the fact is that our researchers can have so much information delivered onto their laps, their desktop – wherever they happen to be – and this is an utterly seminal development that has meant that we in turn have had to rethink our delivery programmes and rethink how we provide reference services to people who don't physically come into the building as often as they once did. That's probably the most significant change.

What will replace Google?

Google, or whatever comes up to replace it in the next generation, whether it's Google 2 or a totally different product, has shown to us that freely delivered and widely accepted resource discovery platforms are heavily used by our students and researchers. The real challenge for us is not to figure out what comes after Google, because the industry will decide what comes out after Google. The challenge for us is more to figure out what our place is in all of this, particularly as we think about all of the very high-priced resource discovery tools that we're purchasing and delivering. It's a new world. How do we continue to provide relevant information to people who need it when they're perfectly happy going to Google?

What has been your biggest disappointment (in a work context)?

Related to this, I think a major disappointment is that as I look at all the things we have been able to recreate and redeliver for the new environment, there's still so much that is being left behind; publications that we can't provide electronic access to, places where the infrastructure just has not retooled itself to provide the best access. We need to work so much more on the access side of things.

Where do you see the industry going in the future?

Burning issues for the future, I think – not surprisingly – include things like how do we manage our legacy print collections? Despite all the measures we've put in place, how do we really have some assurance that we are actually providing secure long-term access? In an electronic world it's still a big issue. I think scalability at some point will become an issue as we do more and more, both in terms of not overwhelming our researchers with too many places to go for too many types of information, but also in terms of "how do we continue to fund all of this?"

Jim Mouw was interviewed for UKSG by Catherine Jamieson on 26 September 2008

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