Library / information prospects: three views of the future

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A view over the next 20 years

- based on
  - reality - current trends

- with some
  - prediction - futurology
  - imagination - science fiction
Prediction is very difficult, especially about the future

(Niels Bohr)
Dangers of prediction

- failure of imagination
- failure of nerve

(Arthur C Clarke)
Current trends

- economic situation
- a digital world
- web 2
- new generations
- the ‘cloud’
Economic situation

• generally bad for information services

but

• some sectors do well (law, health ..)
• ‘library brand’ flourishes
• renewed enthusiasm for the ‘real’
A digital world

• digital is now the normal form of information
• most information is born digital, and lives and dies digital

But

• the real book and the physical ‘library place’ do not go away
Web 2.0

- ‘to Google’ is a verb in the English language
- Amazon.com is ‘the bookshop’
- Wikipedia is ‘the encyclopedia’
- Facebook, Twitter and blogs are the natural way of communicating information
- Will all books soon be e-books?
Libraries and Web 2

- Fight ?
- Collaborate ?
- Copy ?
- Ignore ?
New generations

• Gen X, Gen Y, Google generation

• young people’s information behaviour is totally different

• or is it?
The ‘cloud’

- Information resources and software held on networks, with wireless access from any place
- Where then is
  - The collection
  - The ‘information place’
  - ‘my’ information
Summary of trends

- a mixed picture
- some clear trends
- but also counter-movements

- the future is not as clear as some commentators tell us
Three scenarios

- Business as usual
- Changing landscapes
- Into the clouds
Business as usual

- rely on library ‘brand image’
- build on continuing desire for the collection and the ‘information place’
- establish consensus (truce ?) with newer forms of information communication
Changing landscapes

• changing image and name
  • Information Commons, Discovery Centre, Idea Store

• some services close, others expand

• greater integration with wider institution
  • Business, education, culture

• creative balance physical / digital
Into the clouds

- new concept of ‘collection’
- no physical ‘information place’
- information specialists become consultants / advisers / educators
  - researchers / ‘publishers’
Conclusions

- the future is not certain
- it will not be as we expect
- library / information services will survive and thrive (but not as they are now)
- we can influence our future