

Bowker is developing many of its products to help libraries respond to the changing ways in which their users' want to access information. **Jo Grange** updates us on 'Library Anywhere' and other initiatives from the database services company.

# Getting the right fit

## COMPANY UPDATE: BOWKER

**CAN YOU REMEMBER** the days when to book a holiday you went to your local travel agent? And Amazon was nothing more than a large rainforest, unrelated to your first stop for internet shopping? There's no doubt that the internet has revolutionised many areas of our lives. Mobile technology has also put people and the internet at our immediate disposal. It's not surprising therefore that people are expecting service providers to embrace this and deliver everything they need via the mobile phone or computer.

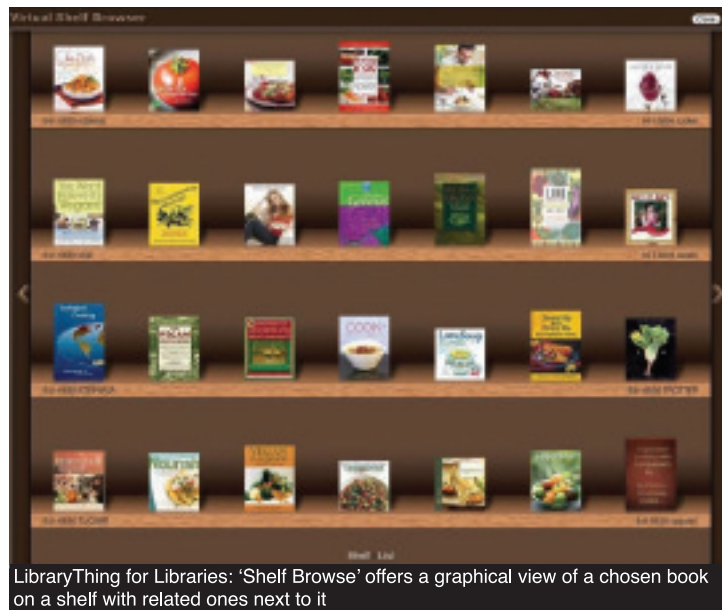
Libraries are not immune to the user-driven technological pressure to deliver better and faster than ever before. Libraries have to provide resources at a time and a place that suits their users, all in the face of declining library visitors and budgets.

While many libraries are embracing Web 2.0 technologies through resources such as blogs, Twitter and Facebook, some are turning to their suppliers to deliver services that fit with their existing resources and enhance their Opacs. Maura Stephens, Systems Librarian at the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, says: 'Our library management system is well up there with these trends and they are offered to customers. Unfortunately there are major financial implications with some software updates, e.g. SMS messaging, but we do go with what we can afford, to maintain a certain level and stay up to date with current technological trends.'

### Easier to find books

Many libraries have chosen to enhance their Opacs with cover images, tables of contents, summaries and reviews, etc. from services such as Bowker's Syndetic Solutions. This gives a more rounded view of a title. Most libraries have commented that just providing a library user with a cover image makes finding the book on the shelf an easier task – which boosts circulation figures. Maura Stephens says: 'Syndetic Solutions has empowered our users who may not have been very confident with their searching skills. The jacket images allow users to see what a particular book looks like before going to find it on the shelf.' Syndetic Solutions has thousands of public and academic library customers around the world. Subscriber numbers in the UK and Ireland have reached more than 120 libraries. The service is continually evolving by offering more language options and more enhancements. Syndetics Plus was launched at the beginning of this year, employing widget technology so that all of the valuable content libraries subscribe to is visible seamlessly in the full record display.

Many libraries have started to provide tagging, reviews and recommendations



LibraryThing for Libraries: 'Shelf Browse' offers a graphical view of a chosen book on a shelf with related ones next to it

from users, to give a more relevant assessment of a title. Ian Haydock, Library Systems Manager at Keele University Library, says: 'Although the subject tags they apply to books don't meet Library of Congress standards, they are probably of equal value because they are using the language of the user rather than that of the subject expert. A recommendation for another book from someone who has done the same module is invaluable.'

Tags can be direct, associated words that have a special meaning for individual users; consumers find them easy to use and understand. Concern about subject tagging can be valid, however. It is growing in popularity but, at the same time, there is a worry that it may be undermining good subject cataloguing. Perhaps this is something that needs to be monitored over time as there is no denying that tags are becoming a major feature for libraries and online booksellers.

LibraryThing was one of the first social networking sites to be launched for individual book lovers, allowing users to store and share personal library catalogues and booklists. Utilising some of this data, LibraryThing for Libraries (LTfL) was launched in 2008, offering all types of libraries access to this content, effectively enhancing their catalogues overnight.

Keele University decided to subscribe to LibraryThing for Libraries for several reasons. They hadn't been able to catalogue as fully as they'd like, so the subject tags gave a way of linking between records and exposing previously underused resources. Also, the book recommendation and 'other editions' feature meant that resources were easier to discover.

Bowker is the exclusive distributor of

LibraryThing for Libraries, and offers two packages: Catalogue Enhancements (book recommendations, tag-based discovery and other editions and translations); and Reviews Enhancements. The catalogue enhancement option has proved to be the most popular with libraries from both the academic and public sectors. Libraries now using LTfL include Leeds Metropolitan University and the Open University in the UK plus many more in the US, Europe and Australia.

The Reviews Enhancements package is likely to catch up this year, with more library systems becoming compatible. There are more than 400,000 reviews available. Users can add their own reviews and ratings, and the application comes with blog widgets and a Facebook application which allows library users to show off their reviews.

### 'Shelf Browse' and 'Library Anywhere'

As part of LibraryThing for Libraries developments, two new releases were launched at the beginning of this year, called 'Shelf Browse' and 'Library Anywhere'. Shelf Browse has brought the virtual library to life by offering a graphical view of a chosen book on a shelf with related ones next to it, just as can be seen in the physical library. There is a mini Shelf Browse and a full Shelf Browse; these simple, colourful widgets enliven the record page.

Library Anywhere, which is currently being tested with selected libraries before becoming widely available later this year, brings the catalogue direct to your mobile. Marshall Breeding, library systems consultant, says of Library Anywhere: 'With the high level of functionality and the low pricing, this competition will lower the threshold

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Ian Haydock,  
Keele University Library

for mobile technology into the reach of almost any library.'

Library Anywhere has apps for iPhone, Blackberry and Android, and will allow library users to access information about opening hours, branches and events. It is designed to work with the majority of library management systems, and is an inexpensive service, designed to be up and running in minutes. It offers online catalogue searching and a range of additional services such as requesting or renewing materials. Ian Haydock from Keele University is about to become involved in the beta testing for Library Anywhere. He says: 'I believe this is an area where we will be pressured to increase our services. It's delivery at the point of need. I suspect users will be making increasing use of mobile internet devices. We can't just continue to provide services optimised for 19-inch monitors.'

There's no doubt that continual developments will be made in this field to support the demand from library users for immediate access to information. How much of it will still be around in 20 years? This remains to be seen but, for the time being, libraries can only assess what their users are asking for against what they can afford to do, and invest accordingly.

■ For further information on Syndetic Solutions or LibraryThing for Libraries, please contact Bowker UK at [sales@bowker.co.uk](mailto:sales@bowker.co.uk) or [www.bowker.com](http://www.bowker.com)