

# Editorial

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E-content management, search engines for literature, abstracting and indexing, collection management, designing and evaluating, and conservation and preservation – the topics in this issue of World Digital Libraries reflects the range of tasks and challenges that libraries face in implementing the modern digital library, and in that sense the journal serves to be an excellent primer for libraries with an earnest interest in digital library development.

This journal operates on the assumption that digital libraries are now an integral feature of the library landscape and should not be conceived and built merely as boutique projects for a very limited and specialized range of materials. The scale of digital projects has been growing, not just because of local digitization projects, but because commercial publishers are providing many more digital journals and monographs. There is good evidence that British scholars rely primarily on electronic sources for their scholarly research (Tenopir, 2011)\*. Britain is not alone or unique in this venture. It puts pressure on libraries to expand their digital full-text content and encourages publishers to favour digital formats. Journals have gone further in this direction than monographs, partly because centralized journal ownership

of copyrights has made it easier to avoid legal complications when digitizing, while author ownership of the copyrights in monographs has made the permission process administratively harder. Nonetheless, new eReading devices and screen-friendly formats have given an impetus to digital publication of monographs as well. Digital libraries that a decade or so ago had only a few hundred items can now have contents in the same or greater scale than the number of physical items in traditional library buildings.

The technical and administrative complications for management grow with the scale of digital contents. Today, the boundary between traditional publisher content in digital formats and the digitized content that libraries themselves provide is an artificial divide based on licensing and legal issues. Overcoming that divide is not always easy, especially when the publisher content remains on the publisher server. Efforts to do this matter because readers care chiefly about finding and being able to use content that answers their information seeking needs. Discovery tools such as indexing are of key importance here, but the solutions are not purely technical. E-content management involves integrating digital content into the library as a whole and the way in which libraries present

digital content can make a significant difference to its usability.

The digital preservation issues are particularly important and complicated. The issue today is not simply that storage media will fail or that formats will change. Digital content presents questions in areas like integrity and authenticity that are significantly different than the comparable issues in the preservation of traditional physical materials. Digitization itself is also a widely recognized way to preserve fragile physical content, when the digitization of fragile materials becomes an integral part of a collection development plan. Digitization need not mean

disposing of physical content. Digitization actually helps to preserve fragile content by providing access while the original object can be protected in closed and environmentally-friendly locations.

Digital libraries are growing in importance. The speed of this growth varies from country to country and depends to some extent on the communications infrastructure, without which digital access is not possible. Digital libraries also require staff with appropriate technical training. The number of possible discussion and research topics is legion and World Digital Libraries will continue to cover them.