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Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor

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Keeping Up with New Information Technologies

Introduction

One of the most difficult jobs for any information professional is trying to keep up with changes in technology. Just as soon as you think you know how to apply something new in your organization, it's been replaced by something else. Change is constant and the amount of available information is astounding. The good news is that there are some simple strategies you can use to stay up-to-date on the latest innovations without being completely overwhelmed.

Many thanks to Steven Bell for his very helpful article "To Keep Up, Go Beyond", which is cited in the bibliography. The tips for avoiding information overload come directly from there as does the inspiration for the title of this guide. Thanks also to Marylaine Block for her tips on staying current, as well as to the people who sent her their methods for staying conversant with technological changes. The sources listed below are the ones used by the WMRC librarians. If you have additional strategies or sources you use to keep up with changes in information technology, please e-mail library@wmrc.uiuc.edu.

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Strategies for Staying Current

Network, Network, Network

Talk to other information professionals from all types of libraries to find out what they're doing. Consultants in library systems are also a rich resource. Attend events sponsored by your state library association. The Illinois Library Association's Resource and Technical Services Forum has a technology interest group that meets several times a year to discuss new technologies and their use in libraries. Topics of past meetings included blogging, accidental systems librarianship, and a hands-on tech fair.

Talk to Your Tech People

This is a corollary to the first strategy. The tech people in your organization are probably also up-to-date on the latest innovations and have some resources of their own for keeping up.

Just Do It

Take a class or attend a workshop or training session so you aren't just aware of the latest technologies, but also know how to use them.

Attend Conferences

Conferences are excellent ways to stay informed about new technologies. In addition to attending workshops

and conference sessions, make time to visit the vendor displays to see new demonstrations of new technologies and talk to the vendors about how to apply those technologies to your specific situation.

Keep Up With Your Reading

Choose the sources that are most helpful to you and read them as often as you can. It's important to spend time on this on a regular basis. It's very easy to put off reading the latest journal that comes across your desk when you have other time pressures. To quote the slogan for Steven Bell's Keeping Up web site, "If you're not keeping up, you're falling behind".

Avoiding Information Overload

Know Your Users and Environment

When you see a new technology, ask yourself if this is something that will help your users do their jobs better. For example, many hospital staff are using personal digital assistants (PDAs) as part of their daily routines. Medical librarians realize that this new technology is a very important tool and they are working to bring library resources to their users via handheld devices. However, if you work in a place where your users don't even know what PDAs are, it's probably not a topic worth investigating in depth, although it's something to keep on the radar.

Use a News Aggregator

News aggregators are programs that use RSS (rich site summary) feeds to bring general content into one interface. These programs bring web site updates to your desktop so that you don't have to go to many different web sites to keep up with technology news. There are several news aggregators available. For a good discussion of these, see "Personal RSS Aggregators", an article by John Udall from the May 2002 edition of *Byte Magazine.* For a list of library-related weblogs (some of which have RSS feeds), see http://www.libdex.com/weblogs.html.

Subscribe to E-Mail Newsletters

Although news aggregators make it much easier to monitor web sites, many of them also have e-mail newsletters that they send on a regular basis. These are very helpful because they come directly to your e-mail account. As do news aggregators, e-mail newsletter eliminate the need to visit to dozens of different web sites in order to keep up with the latest in information technology.

Organize Your E-mail

Many e-mail programs allow you to set up filters that automatically sort incoming mail into specific folders. Use whatever organizational scheme works for you. Some people have a "Keeping Up" folder that they look at every day or so. Others set up folders for each newsletter and read them periodically. For information on setting up filters, see the E-Mail Filters page at http://www.uic.edu/depts/accc/ecomm/mailfilters_help.html.

Browse

Skim e-mail newsletters and tables of contents to find the information that is relevant to you.

Print or Capture and Review Later

Sometimes the best time to review new web sites isn't when you first find them. Print our the first page of the site and keep it in a tickler file that you review once a week. You can also set up a bookmark folder as a virtual ticker file if you prefer to avoid printouts.

Share the Burden

Develop a list of the e-mail lists you receive and websites you track. Enlist your co-workers or colleagues and

form a "Keeping Up" club. Participants agree to share anything they think would be helpful to others in the group. Librarians can also do this for their users to help them with information overload.

Sources to Help You Keep Up

Center for the Study of Technology & Society
http://www.tecsoc.org/

C/Net Tech News
http://news.com/

Current Cites
http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/CurrentCites/

ExLibris
http://marylaine.com/exlibris/index.html

Gigalaw.com Daily News
http://www.gigalaw.com/news/index.html

Internet Scout Report
http://scout.cs.wisc.edu/

LibLog
http://www.redwoodcity.org/library/news/liblog/

LLRXBuzz
http://www.llrx.com/ then click on the link to the latest issue

Metafilter
http://www.metafilter.com

Neat New Web Stuff
http://marylaine.com/neatnew.html

New York Times Technology Section
http://www.nytimes.com/pages/technology/index.html

Radio
http://radio.userland.com/

ResearchBuzz
http://www.researchbuzz.com

RRE-L
http://dlis.gseis.ucla.edu/people/pagre/rre.html

SearchDay
http://searchenginewatch.com/searchday/

Search Engine Watch
http://searchenginewatch.com

The Shifted Librarian
http://www.theshiftedlibrarian.com/

Slashdot
http://www.slashdot.com

Steven Bellâ€™s Keeping Up Web Page
http://staff.philau.edu/bells/keepup/

Tourbus
http://www.tourbus.com/

Washington Post Technews.com
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/technology/

WebReference.com
http://webreference.com

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Bell, Steven J. (2001?). â€œTo Keep Up, Go Beyond.â€¢ *College & Research Libraries News*. Online at
http://www.ala.org/acrl/keepup.html

Block, Marylaine (2002). â€œPart II: Stop the World, I Want to Catch Upâ€¢. *ExLibris* #148. Online at http://
marylaine.com/exlibris/xlib148.html (Part I is at http://marylaine.com/exlibris/xlib137.html).

Cohen, Steven M. (2002). â€œRSS for Non-Techie Librariansâ€¢. *LLRx.com*. Online at http://www.llrx.com/
features/rssforlibrarians.htm

Fox, Megan (2002). *PDAs and Handhelds in Libraries and Academia* (Website). Online at http://web.simmons.
edu/~fox/PDA.html