

A Meeting of Minds: Interviews with Mr Michael Keller

Mr Michael Keller

BiblioAsia: Mr Keller, how would you define a knowledge-based web?

Michael Keller: The knowledge-based web is a multi-dimensional matrix and this matrix consists of knowledge, information, facts, and data that are recorded in published or written works that may appear in only digital form, available in the public Internet or in the private Internet. The matrix also includes knowledge, information, facts, and data that are transmitted orally from one person to others. The knowledge-based web is a multi-faceted knowledge machine that helps to facilitate precise retrieval of knowledge. It realigns itself to work in the information context.

BiblioAsia: You say that the knowledge-web will consist of, partly, published and written works. What then are the implications for the knowledge-based web when strict intellectual property (IP) laws are in place? Take for instance the Google Library project.

Michael Keller: The issue of intellectual property is a huge concern. We understand IP rules are in place to protect creators and their creativity. For example, a book is an author's original work. The book is copyrighted and these copyrights cannot be violated. What we can do is to convince the right holders that there is a benefit in making their works available to the world.

In the case of the Google Library project, Google and the five libraries involved [Harvard, Stanford, the University of Michigan, the University of Oxford, and The New York Public Library] are not violating the laws. We do not seek to make available the entire content of a book but just a small portion of it. The publishers were unhappy because they will not be rewarded monetarily through this project. They see the project as a way of making profits and yet they are not able to benefit from it.

However, we have to understand that society has nurtured these authors and this is a form of payback to society. Besides, the publishers do not stand to lose as the project can bring about awareness of the books and interest the search user to purchase them.

BiblioAsia: Therefore, with a project such as the Google Library, what role does the knowledge-web play in the future of libraries and what are the roles of librarians?

Michael Keller: The knowledge-web will enable libraries to be self-sufficient and it will help libraries to build their collections and understand the needs of their users. Libraries and librarians will not become redundant. In fact they will become even more relevant as they have the skills to provide a personal service and to coach library users in selecting information and transforming the information to knowledge.

BiblioAsia: Do you see the need to broaden the scope of library competencies given this development?

Michael Keller: Yes, constantly. Libraries and librarians are facilitators in providing and creating knowledge. Therefore, they have to be leaders and models so as to bring their users to a higher level in the new knowledge-based economy.

In conjunction with the official opening of the National Library, *Celebrating Knowledge: The Power and Potential* conference which was held at the InterContinental Hotel from 13 to 15 November, attracted over 440 delegates and more than 25 international speakers.

Engaged in discussions ranging from the future of libraries and knowledge workers to the design of learning spaces, researchers, knowledge experts, international librarians and information professionals from countries such as the US, the Netherlands, China and Malaysia brought home with them a wealth of information and experience.



and Professor Howard Besser

Among the speakers were Mr Michael Keller, University Librarian and Director of Academic Information Resources at Stanford University (USA), and Professor Howard Besser, Director of Moving Image Archive and Preservation Program, New York University's Tisch School of Arts (USA). Mr Keller spoke on the knowledge-based web, particularly on the retrieval of knowledge and information heuristics while Professor Besser spoke on the digital architectures for interoperability. He also discussed the issue of the digital library.

The two distinguished speakers took time out of their busy schedules for interviews with BiblioAsia.

Professor Howard Besser

BiblioAsia: What is a digital library? You mention that it is not merely digital collections of works but more. Please define.

Howard Besser: The digital library is more than just a series of links. It should carry out the roles of brick-and-mortar libraries and more. However, right now, it is doing less than the brick-and-mortar libraries when it has the potential to do so much more. The digital library has to build on previous innovations and to do things that have never been done before. It has to be more efficient and most importantly, it has to be transformative. The digital library must "transform" the user's experience of the library.

BiblioAsia: Will the digital library eventually replace the brick-and-mortar library then?

Howard Besser: No. It takes a substantial amount of time for print to be digitised therefore the brick-and-mortar library has to be physically present. More importantly, the brick-and-mortar library is part of the physical space and community and it provides for the people-to-people interaction, which the digital library will not be able to replace. The digital library is a partner to the brick-and-mortar library.

BiblioAsia: As partners, how then can the digital libraries work with brick-and-mortar libraries to serve the knowledge-based economy?

Howard Besser: They can enhance each other and direct the user from one to the other. Take, for example, online museums. When they were initially made available online, many critics claimed that people will stop going to museums. However, it was the exact reverse. People started going physically to the museums as what they saw online gave them the push to go visit the exhibits in person. The same will happen for libraries. That first-hand experience is not replaceable.

BiblioAsia: What then are the roles of librarians in the digital library?

Howard Besser: In addition to the "traditional" roles, librarians will now play a bigger part in research enquiry, content selection and content creation. They have to provide research support to the user and help them to "sieve" through a large amount of information found in the digital library. Librarians will also get involved in the earlier part of the process by creating and selecting content for the digital library, in addition to the brick-and-mortar library.

