What Exactly Is It That Technical Services Does?: Promoting and Advocating for Technical Services' Work to the Academic Community

Abstract

The article suggests ways of advocating Technical Services to library users and the wider academic community. It starts with the reasons behind advocacy and then focuses on modern tools, such as social media, Canva, and word clouds. Finally, it provides a list of further reading for those interested in advocating without using visual aids.

Keywords

metadata, technical services, social media, advocacy, discoverability

Introduction

Working in Technical Services at an academic library -- how many non-librarians understand what that means? How many librarians are aware of the daily tasks such a job description entails? This article is written from a Greek librarian's point of view, but colleagues from other parts of the world can also relate. When the author introduced herself to other colleagues working at the same University, they seemed not to comprehend what a librarian does, especially in the realm of Technical Services. Besides the work of the Circulation Desk, they were unfamiliar with those "small offices in the back". If colleagues were not aware after all these years, it was unlikely the administration would know. Given that these administrative positions, such as the Rector, decide who keeps their jobs and who loses them, allowing ignorance of the work of Technical Services librarians is dangerous. During the next economic crisis, like the one Greece faced more than a decade ago where the country almost defaulted on its debts, it's likely such knowledge would play an important role in continuing employment. In an effort to advocate the work being carried out by Technical Services in Greek academic libraries and to create something positive out of a negative force, such as fear, this article presents modern methods of promoting Technical Services work.

Technical Services (TS) in a library can be described as "library operations concerned with the acquisition, organization (bibliographic control), physical processing, and maintenance of library collections, as opposed to the delivery of public services"[1]. The American Library Association (ALA) defines the technical services librarian as someone who "specializes in

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[1] Reitz, Joan M. 'ODLIS: Online Dictionary of Library and Information Science'. https://products.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_t. Accessed 4 April 2022.

acquiring, organizing and preserving all kinds of library materials"[2]. ALA goes on to specify the areas that can be associated with TS, such as acquisitions, collection development and management, cataloging and classification, preservation, and archives[3]. The next sections of this column present ways of using modern technological tools to promote these careers.

Social Media Presence

In the current era, it is common to be present in social media either as an individual or as an organization. Popular social media outlets for libraries include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and others. A library may wish to promote its services and events or policies through these channels of communication, but it can also offer an opportunity to promote library staff members and their daily work via social media. For example, Princeton University Library's Twitter account often includes a photograph or a video of a person at work with their daily tasks, accompanied by their name and duties:

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[2]American Library Association. 'Technical Services Librarian'. 20 July 2016. https://www.ala.org/educationcareers/libcareers/jobs/technical. Accessed 4 April 2022.

[3]Ibid.

Princeton University Library
@PULibrary

I'm Gillian Marcus! I've been working in conservation for seven years and have worked with materials ranging from Warhol screenprints to puppets to 12th century Islamic manuscripts. #AskAConservator

account https://twitter.com/PULibrary/status/1456247973831131147

Librarians in administrative positions or librarians who interact with users are those most usually presented in social media. This trend reflects the need to attract users or to make users feel more familiar with those who have been assigned to directly assist them. However, this does not have to be the only case. All members of staff contribute to a library's web of services and its success. Bringing the back TS office to the front line of social media accounts familiarizes the library's audience as well as the university community with the "hidden" staff who serve the library. Putting a face to a name or a book on loan or a scanned page can make a simple transaction more personal. It can also have positive connotations for the staff member when their work is being recognized.

Promoting search and discovery tools can also highlight the work being carried out by Technical Services. A library with a plethora of online catalogues, institutional repositories with student dissertations and faculty scholarship, databases with e-journals and e-books, either in-house or commercial, may use a single tool, such as a discovery service, to assist

users in searching for items. The user does not have to access each product from a different web address; the discovery tool aggregates and searches simultaneously across all linked products. Yet in order for such a tool to function properly, technical standards must be met in describing the resources and securing interoperability. The work of a metadata librarian can be recognized publicly by counting the total number of searches during an academic year. The Bodleian Libraries, the main research libraries at University of Oxford in the U.K., have promoted SOLO (Search Oxford Libraries Online) in such a manner. A post[4] on their Instagram account states that SOLO was searched 16.2 million times during academic year 2020-21 and describes the types of resources searched across:

Pic. 2 Solo is the discovery tool of the Bodleian libraries

Through these two examples from Twitter and Instagram, it is clear that a library's social media presence can promote services that interact virtually with the users, but require significant time and effort on the part of Technical Services staff to be effective. Such statistics highlight the work carried out behind the scenes.

Word Clouds

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4   https://www.instagram.com/p/CXF_q2js8b3/

For thousands of years, words have been paramount in the library world. Words make up books, as well as descriptive metadata. In today's world of social media, microblogging and infographics, words acquire added value with the help of algorithms. A word cloud is a visualization of a textual data set. For instance, one may feed into a word cloud generator a set of tweets in order to discover what is being tweeted the most. Words that are met the most times in the data set are written or depicted in larger fonts; words that are encountered less frequently are depicted in smaller fonts. Technical services can make use of this technology in a number of ways. For example, this author constructed a word cloud out of last year's newly added subject headings and name authority headings from the library's catalogue:

Pic. 3 Word cloud of 2021 new subject headings and name authority headings added to the University of Macedonia's Library catalogue with the use of WordArt.com

There are a number of freely available word cloud generators on the Web: WordArt.com[5], WordClouds.com[6], TagCrowd[7] and many more. There are limitations as to what each generator offers through its free version. For example, the size of the text one can paste can be up to 500KB in TagCrowd, while the size of a file to be uploaded can be up to 5Mb in the same generator. When looking to construct word clouds, one thing to consider, as in the case described earlier (subject headings), is that the generator can handle phrases, not just single words. WordArt.com and WordClouds.com can handle phrases, while TagCrowd cannot. Another feature to look for is whether the generator can handle languages other than English. If your library catalogue or institutional repository is multilingual (or in a language with a different character set, such as Greek), then WordArt.com and WordClouds.com can handle your input. However, not all fonts can handle Greek text. One has to select among the suite of available fonts to find the one that suits their content. Fonts such as *Chrysanthi* and *Roboto* are effective for Greek text. TagCrowd can handle a small number of languages, such as Spanish, French, Italian and a few others, but not Greek. Another aspect for consideration is the matter of available downloading options. Word clouds can be downloaded as HTML code or as a PDF from TagCrowd, while WordArt.com lists a number of options like .png, .jpeg, .svg, .pdf, .csv, HTML animated, and others. The available options for downloading from WordClouds.com are .jpg, .png, WebP, .pdf and HTML. As for shapes, which is a popular feature in word clouds, WordArt.com and WordClouds.com provide a variety of shapes from which to choose. TagCrowd's visualization is much simpler, as it does not provide such a feature. The visualization is linear; however, the words are listed alphabetically and there is the option of showing the number of times a word appears in the text.

The Wonderful World of Canva[8]

Designing a poster or a flyer, preparing a presentation or a Facebook post, is made easier with the help of tools such as Canva. An online tool which is free for nonprofits and classrooms, Canva offers a variety of beautiful and fashionable templates, some for a fee and some for free. Libraries have taken advantage of this online service and have used it to promote events. Lisa Krok describes such a case at Morley public library[9]. There is also a website called *Librarian Design Share* where one can browse through a collection of

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5   https://wordart.com/
6   https://www.wordclouds.com/
7   https://tagcrowd.com/
8 https://www.canva.com/
9 https://teenlibrariantoolbox.com/2021/03/10/using-canva-to-promote-library-services-a-guest-post-by-lisa-krok/.

designs intended for libraries and available under a Creative Commons ShareAlike License[10]. Events and social media are one thing, but in what other venues can Technical Services librarians use Canva to promote their work?

One idea is that Canva can be used to help users find their way around the shelves, or the philosophy behind the classification system can be explained in detail. For instance, at the University of Macedonia Library and Information Centre, we use Library of Congress Classification numbers. A design this author created concerned the location of a translated book next to its original version (caption in Greek reads "Do you have this book in Greek?"):

Pic. 4 Canva design for the location of translated books on the shelves

Learning how to use Canva is simple. A user has to log into the system in order to save their designs, and from then on the possibilities are numerous. Themes can vary from archives to book binding and acquisitions. In addition to the obvious choices, one can also promote the bigger picture. Nielsen Book published a study concerning the importance of metadata for UK book sales and library borrowings. It is clear from the charts and the data in the report that the more metadata a record carries, the likelier it is that someone will buy or take the book out on loan. For instance, the average sales per ISBN are higher when a

10L https://librariandesignshare.org/faq/

record carries four descriptive metadata elements compared to zero, one, two and three metadata elements[11]. This information is excellent for letting the world know about the value of the work carried out by Technical Services. "Metadata brings added value to your work!" is one caption that comes to mind when promoting faculty's book content within a repository.

Additional Methods for Technical Services Advocacy

In addition to current technology and trends, there are other ways to advocate for Technical Services. The latest issue of *Catalogue & Index*[12] focused on this subject and published three related articles, with the findings examined below.

The first article by Jenny Wright is a set of answers to common questions regarding cataloguing that are asked by non-librarians. Wright explains what it is that cataloguers do, why authority control is important, and how poor metadata results in a substantial percentage of help desk enquiries. She explains the importance of standards and how library catalogues are linked to weeding, acquisitions, and collection management. The second article, by Emma Booth, comments on the importance of collaboration between libraries and other stakeholders, such as academic publishers, to bring forth shelf-ready metadata. She stresses that producing sets of guidelines and publishing reports is a way of starting a dialogue between stakeholders that could produce better results for libraries and their metadata. The third article, written by Anne Welsh, discusses what publication-in-hand cataloguing is and the important role played by shared metadata. Cataloguing is important to libraries whether they produce their own metadata, buy it from suppliers, or download it from common databases. Local studies collections especially need to be able to produce metadata in order to make resources discoverable, since the option of buying metadata for these types of collections is quite expensive.

Conclusions

Technical Services remains a well-kept secret in many libraries, as even university colleagues are unaware of the work produced by such departments or the roles they play in the usability of tools essential to effective end-user experience. It is up to the library TS staff to advocate and promote the work they do, to make themselves recognizable and

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11 Walter, David. 'Nielsen Book UK Study: The Importance of Metadata for Discoverability and Sales', 2016, p.16.

12 *Catalogue & Index*. Issue 205, December 2021. Available from: https://www.cilip.org.uk/resource/collection/C5632899-ECE6-473A-A616-20AF8C7D33C6/C&I205full.pdf .

discoverable, just like their metadata does for library resources. To that end, social media can help, as well as trending technologies such as word clouds and Canva designs. Use of these technologies can be effective, but it is up to the staff members themselves to pursue a certain level of extroversion and claim more visibility in how they affect the library and its resources.

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