The Mother of all LibGuides: Reduce Maintenance and Enhance Uniformity Through Strategic Planning

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"THE MOTHER OF ALL LIBGUIDES": REDUCE MAINTENANCE AND ENHANCE UNIFORMITY THROUGH STRATEGIC PLANNING

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Pathfinder, c. 1970-1995

- developed as part of the Model Library Project of Project Intrex, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

- step-by-step orientation, reference, and instructional tool to information sources

- intended to support the first 3-5 hours of research

- uniform in arrangement and content

- limited to a single 8.5 x 11 inch sheet

- “The result is an efficient and productive library experience.” (Canfield, 1972)
Pros (for users and librarians):

Pathfinders addressed two related problems of reference work:

- User support: “the orientation problems of library users”
- Librarian workload: “the repetitive instructional demands placed on library staff” (Cipolla, 1980)
Pathfinders, c. 1970-1995

Cons:

Pathfinders originated a problem inherent in subject guides:

workload: the need to create Pathfinders and keep them up to date (Canfield, 1972)
Online Subject Guides, c. 1994-

- developed from Pathfinders enhanced with HTML links (Cox, 1997)
Online Subject Guides, c. 1994-

Librarians have examined subject guides in the light of…

- topic selection
- inclusion criteria
- design guidelines
- target audience
- usage
- user evaluations

- usability
- accessibility
- marketing
- information literacy
- **workload**

(Vileno, 2007)
Online Subject Guides, c. 1994-

Librarians have approached the workload issues associated with subject guide creation in various ways:

- static HTML
- database-driven subject guides
- course management systems
- Web 2.0 technologies
  - blogs
  - social bookmarking Web sites
  - wikis

(Corrado 2010)
LibGuides aren’t perfect

Pros
• Easy to create
• Customization and branding
• Consistency of format and contents
• Repackaging of content for different audiences
• Allow embedding in a CMS
• Automatic link checking
• Statistics
• Web 2.0 applications

Cons
• Too easy to create?
• Not easy to maintain
• Encourage reliance on (unstable) web links
• Workload issues
A word about **workload**

- The average subject guide/pathfinder takes an experienced librarian **between 8 and 20 hours** to produce (Kapoun, 1995; Wilbert, 1981).

- The more **electronic resources** a subject guide contains, the more **unstable** its contents (the **average life span of a URL = 44 days** [Kahle, 1997]).
Another **workload** issue

New issue associated with LibGuides

- Ease of creation encourages production of LibGuides, but adds to **workload** because of necessary maintenance.
What are the current models?
Each LibGuide exists independently. Content is specific or unique. Other LibGuides are not relevant.
Individual Creator Model

Pros

• Complete customization
• Individual creativity
• Liaison roles

Cons

• Labor intensive
• Maintaining each LibGuide
Social Network Model

Content borrowed from other LibGuides.
Little organization or collaboration.
Borrowing is uni-directional.
Social Network Model

Pros
- Leverage thinking & creativity of others
- Less effort needed

Cons
- Maintaining each LibGuide
- Retrofitting of borrowed content
Communication as design

Golly gee, Wally, those LibGuides are a mess.

Just let Mom take care of it, Beave.
Hub model
Hub Model

Pros
• Centralized maintenance
• Greater uniformity of style

Cons
• Control issues
• Less ability to customize guide
Multiple Node Model
Multiple Node Model

Pros

• Control
• Greater flexibility
• Division of effort

Cons

• Who creates and maintains the nodes?
Type of Common Content

The best type of content for a Mother LibGuide regardless of which model is used is content that is commonly used by multiple people across multiple LibGuides where the content doesn’t change or need customizing.

Examples of such content include but are not limited to:
• Databases organized by subject or disciplines
• Citation style content and resources that is uniform across multiple users.
• Links to library resources such as catalogs (local catalog, World Cat, etc.)
• Information Literacy materials, tutorials, etc.