
VALA 2014 conference papers: A review

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There was great enthusiasm at the VALA conference (Melbourne, February 2014) for the many ways in which libraries are using technology to better provide traditional library services, and also to provide new and innovative 21st century services. This paper points out some of the key concepts from the conference, grouped under broad topics from each of the six keynote presentations.

INTRODUCTION

This article, covering papers presented at the VALA 2014 conference, complements previous articles which focussed on the VALA exhibitors ((2014) 28 OLC 79; (2014) 28 OLC 89).

DATA

Plenary session 1: “Big data”

Christine Borgman spoke about “big data” (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/vala2014-plenary-1-borgman>) in the context of scholarship, pointing out complexities and variation in the creation, use and sharing of data. There will be many challenges for librarians in the management of large volumes of research data.

GLAM data

Ingrid Mason spoke about GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) data and digital humanities research (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/812-vala2014-session-10-mason>), suggesting opportunities for innovation and better service for developing needs. These opportunities include the provision of collection APIs and use of social media, along with better packaging of data and interoperation with research cyber-infrastructure.

Visualisations of library metadata using GlamMap

Arianna Betti and colleagues spoke about visualisations of library metadata using GlamMap (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/821-vala2014-session-13-betti>). GlamMap is “a geo-spatial visualisation tool that allows users to visualise metadata of cultural heritage artefacts on an interactive, two-dimensional geographic map”.

Linked data

Peter Neish spoke about the cost-benefits of linked data at the Victorian Parliamentary Library (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/813-vala2014-session-10-neish>). He pointed out that “One of the main benefits of Linked Data is the Linked part; however, if there are few other datasets to link to, then this benefit is not realised. Even so, the projects that have implemented Linked Data give a glimpse into what might be possible when a critical mass of data is reached”.

Toby Burrows and Deb Verhoeven spoke about the building of the HuNI Virtual Laboratory, for the linking and sharing of data in the humanities and creative arts (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/814-vala2014-session-10-burrows>). Their paper shows, for example, a map of Europe with 7100 books about logic clustered by place of publication, and colour-coded by year of publication.

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SOCIAL MEDIA

Plenary session 2: Social media as an agent of change

Johan Bollen spoke on social media as an agent of change (the video, but no paper, is available at <http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/798-vala2014-plenary-2-bollen>). He described collective intelligence, and the analysis of large-scale social media data to gauge socioeconomic developments, including the stock market, elections, and scientific impact.

Social media content for cultural heritage

Kathryn Barwick and colleagues spoke about a trial of Vizie (<http://www.csiro.au/Outcomes/ICT-and-Services/Social-media-monitoring.aspx#vizie>), a social media tool for collecting ephemeral digital content for heritage collections in research libraries and other cultural institutions. Their collaboration aims to curate online content relating to significant events and everyday life in New South Wales and Australia (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/804-vala2014-session-7-barwick>). Vizie provides meta-search functionality so that a user's query is farmed out to social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram. Where possible, Vizie follows links to capture the conversational context of a post and takes snapshots of websites, given their transient nature.

Social, mobile and photo technologies

Wendy Abbott and colleagues spoke about the convergence of social, mobile and photo technologies in libraries, with a focus on libraries' experience with photo sharing on Instagram (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/805-vala2014-session-7-abbott>). They report: "The ease of use of the Instagram app and a willingness of librarians to experiment and be creative in its use has generated a wide range of images that represent the unique identities of public, university and special libraries."

Professional development and social media

Holley Adams and colleagues spoke about the use of a "self-supporting online workplace learning network" for the professional development of library staff (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/820-vala2014-session-12-adams>). The program includes provision of a blog feed straight to the front page of the staff wiki, and a weekly email summary. They concluded that the use of existing familiar tools works well.

Information professionals use of Twitter

Kathleen Smeaton and Kate Davis from Queensland University of Technology spoke on the way information professionals use Twitter and their practices with regard to privacy, personal disclosure and identifying their organisational affiliations (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/vala2014-session-7-smeaton>). They concluded: "In keeping with the subject matter, a curated set of social media content will be available in lieu of a formal paper."

CITIZENS/USERS/MEMBERS

Plenary session 3: Creating a citizens' library

Gene Tan spoke about the Singapore Memory Project, which aims to collect, preserve and make available the memories of the citizens of Singapore (the video, but no paper, is available at <http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/800-vala2014-plenary-3-tan>). This citizens' library is made possible partly because of the small size of Singapore, which makes it possible to collect the stories of every citizen, and also because of the commitment of funders, volunteers and librarians to the project.

Usability of public library websites in Australia

Dianne Velasquez and colleagues spoke about the usability of public library websites in Australia. Their paper was based on the evaluation of 221 websites to determine what information they provided to patrons (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/789-vala2014-session-4-velasquez>).

Library websites for users

Craig Murdoch and Shari Hearne spoke about the redevelopment of the Auckland University of Technology Library website with a focus on user needs. The aim was to create a website that presented information resources effectively and appealed to users (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/791-vala2014-session-4-murdoch>).

Accessibility for the print-disabled

Tony Iezzi spoke about the first accessible catalogue for the print-disabled community in Australia, which provides access to library resources from Vision Australia. It can be used by any person with a print disability, using appropriate software and technology (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/790-vala2014-session-4-iezzi>). He writes: "For the first time, mainstream technology such as smart phones and tablets using specifically designed apps are able to deliver information to growing numbers within the print disability community."

EPUB standard and ebook indexes

Glenda Browne spoke about the EPUB standard and ebook indexes, and their role in improving the accessibility of information for all readers. Her presentation also emphasised the role of librarians in advocating for quality navigation mechanisms in ebooks (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/808-vala2014-session-8-browne>).

SERVING COMMUNITIES

Plenary session 4: Empowering frontline staff

Matt Finch spoke about the tension between outreach and control in the empowerment of frontline staff in the GLAM sector so they can better serve their communities (the video and a chat session, but no paper, are available at <http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/801-vala2014-plenary-4-finch>).

Grass roots digitisation

Smita Biswas spoke about the engagement of two New Zealand public libraries with their communities through grass roots digitisation projects using Kete open source software (the video, but no paper, is available at <http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/823-vala2014-session-13-biswas>).

Digitising archives

Michael Organ and Rebecca Daly spoke about the digitisation of archival collections, including the WIN4 television news collection from 1964-1968 (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/815-vala2014-session-11-organ>). The process involved the development of new technological solutions, realignment of staff, and realisation of a leadership role.

Integrated service delivery

Anna Gifford and Julie Rae spoke about the development of an integrated information service in a small, specialist library (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/828-vala2014-session-15-gifford>). Changes included the implementation of an automated SMS drug information service, information in new forms (eg infographics), publication of new works in EPUB format to improve readability on mobile devices, expanded membership, and implementation of a single search discovery system.

Ubiquitous broadband and the NBN

Warren Cheetham spoke on the implications of the NBN for library services and the need to support community members as profound digital changes occur (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/795-vala2014-session-6-cheetham>).

Digital exclusion

Brendan Fitzgerald spoke on digital exclusion as a major social justice challenge, and the community effort that is needed to ensure that all Australians can benefit from digital citizenship (the video, but no paper, is available at <http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/822-vala2014-session-13-fitzgerald>).

MAKER CULTURE

Plenary session 5: Maker culture

Mia Ridge spoke about maker culture in cultural organisations (the video, but no paper, is available at <http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/802-vala2014-plenary-5-ridge>). Maker culture represents “a technology-based extension of DIY culture” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maker_culture). Maker culture is a way of connecting people to deeper levels of engagement with cultural heritage and includes making, fixing, tweaking and tailoring information for your own needs and interests.

Maker/hackerspaces

Michelle McLean and Tania Barry spoke about Maker/Hackerspaces in libraries (the video of this workshop, but no paper, is available at <http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/811-vala2014-session-9-mclean>).

“A hackerspace (also referred to as a hacklab, makerspace or hackerspace) is a community-operated workspace where people with common interests, often in computers, machining, technology, science, digital art or electronic art; can meet, socialize and collaborate” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hackerspace>).

Group work included deciding on your library type, outlining your users, and equipping your makerspace. This was followed by discussions on management/promotion, funding/staffing/space and change management/sustainability.

THE FUTURE

Plenary session 6: Library as Future

Joe Murphy spoke on the library as future (the video and two chat sessions, but no paper, are available at <http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/803-vala2014-plenary-6-murphy>). Murphy spoke about libraries as inspiration points and adapters of technology. He envisages librarians “excelling in streams of possibilities”, among the first to face challenges from technology and culture shifts, and having an emerging role as an “enabler of community futures”.

NFC-equipped smartphones

Alan Butters spoke about smartphones equipped with Near Field Communication (NFC) (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/817-vala2014-session-11-butters>). NFC and the technologies it utilises interact both positively and negatively with library RFID tags.

Copyright

Tom Joyce spoke on a probable future of copyright uncertainty as legislative change fails to keep up with evolving copyright norms (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/818-vala2014-session-12-joyce>).

Transformational change

Justine Hyde presented a boot camp session on “Transforming yourself for the future library”, looking at the ways in which libraries must be creative in dealing with change (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/861-vala2014-boot-camp-session-c-hyde>). Recognising that libraries have been living under austerity measures for a long time, one of her suggestions is to stop doing the least valuable of your services, to free up time and money for the most important, including the new ones.



Cloud computing SaaS applications

Zan Li spoke about the implementation of the cloud computing SaaS (Software as a Service) application Zendesk at the Melbourne Library Service, including the benefits and disadvantages of SaaS software (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/780-vala2014-session-3-li>). SaaS refers to “a software licensing and delivery model in which software is licensed on a subscription basis and is centrally hosted. It is sometimes referred to as ‘on-demand software’”. SaaS is typically accessed by users using a thin client via a web browser (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Software_as_a_service).

Cheerfully cloudy future

Derek Whitehead spoke about the concept of the cloud, and libraries’ enthusiastic embrace of the concept (the video, but no paper, is available at <http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/787-vala2014-session-3-whitehead>).

Cloud gazing

Michelle McLean spoke on the variety of cloud computing options, and on the best way to plan a move to the cloud (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/786-vala2014-session-3-mclean>).

NBN in future libraries

Michelle Hudson spoke about the opportunities for the Kiama community in NSW from their connection to the National Broadband Network (NBN). These have included training sessions, connection to collection conservation programs, and health services (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-proceedings/796-vala2014-session-6-hudson>).

OTHER PRESENTATIONS

There were many other presentations, listed below, that I have not had the space to cover here. The papers and videocasts from the conference (showing video, PowerPoints and tweets) are now available on the VALA website (<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2014-conference-programme>).

- Managing MOOCs: adding value in a “massive, open, online” environment
- Hacking the library catalogue: a voyage of discovery
- The South Australian Red Cross Information Bureau
- Marking up NSW: Wikipedia, newspapers and the State Library
- CPA Australia’s archive story
- Complex harvesting for content from public sources and email
- Influences of technology on collaboration between academics and librarians
- Just accept it! Increasing researcher input into the business of research outputs
- Terra Nova: a new land for librarians?
- Rolling out Digital Hubs in public libraries: the Mill Park story
- Extreme makeover: transitioning *International Surgery* online
- Learn to play and play to learn: using public libraries for creativity and collaboration
- Creating a Global Biodiversity Heritage Library
- Is it Tweet-worthy? Privacy in a time of sharing
- Video: streaming with possibilities, but undiscoverable
- Possible, inevitable or fait accompli? An analysis of streaming video acquisition, acceptance and use in higher education
- We built it and they are coming: the development of eResearch@Flinders
- “I need more hands-on training!”: reflections on creating self-directed learning opportunities for library staff
- Redefining “the librarian” in the context of emerging eResearch services
- New skill sets: providing service for graduate students and researchers
- Go with the flow: discovering new workflows and skill sets in Alma
- ALICE: are we ready for a startup?

