



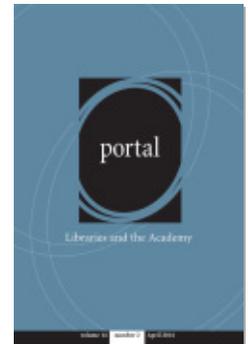
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Global Collaboration and the Future of the OCLC Cooperative

James G. Neal

Presentation at the OCLC Members Council Meeting in Quebec City on February 6, 2007*

I was originally asked to attend this Members Council program to provide an update on our progress in advancing RLG programs as part of OCLC. Then your president, Ernie Ingles, contacted me and indicated that this was not acceptable and that a talk exploring the future of the organization and its strategic and global role was required. A relatively comfortable and innocent assignment became this challenging and provocative treatise.

I was born professionally, like many in this audience, during the infancy of OCLC in the late 1960s and 1970s. You know what they say about those wonderful years—if you remember them, you weren't there. We have lived through OCLC's adolescence and now its full maturity as a global enterprise serving the library community's voracious appetite for cost-effective access to worldwide information. I have been involved, like you, in its regional networks. I have served on and chaired its Research Libraries Advisory Council. I addressed the Members Council in 1993 when the most controversial topic was boxed wine at the receptions. I fought OCLC as part of the "Save MARC" group during the battle over the copyrighting of the database. And now I chair the board committee on RLG Programs and serve on the RLG Program Council. Clearly, we all have OCLC in our professional genes and see our success as libraries serving our communities as intimately bundled up in OCLC's vitality and relevance. As Martin Buber once noted, we no longer just stand side by side, but with one another.

My plan this afternoon is to outline briefly a context for my ideas and then to describe a series of things that I want from OCLC: first, I will identify the things I want OCLC to

*A partial video clip and an entire audio of this speech are available at: <http://www.oclc.org/memberscouncil/meetings/default.htm>.



watch and observe with more intensity; second, I will list the things that I want OCLC to sense and feel with more passion; and then third, I will enumerate the things that I want OCLC to commit to and to do with more investment.

One of my favorite films is Mel Brooks' *History of the World, Part 1*. There is a classic scene when Brooks, playing Moses, is coming down the mountain carrying three large stone tablets. He yells, "Children of Israel, I have 15..."—and he trips, and one of the tablets crashes to the ground. He picks himself up and proceeds down the mountain. "Children of Israel, I have 10 commandments." Such is the history of social change. So, Members Council delegates, I have 24 suggestions for OCLC's observation, sensitivity, and action as this global cooperative grows in its impact and reach.

First, some context. The late newscaster Charles Kuralt once noted that, thanks to the interstate highway system in the United States, one can travel from New York to San Francisco and see absolutely nothing. The technology and information infrastructure upon which we rely is necessary but insufficient. Our users tell us, often very clearly, what they want: more and better content, more and better access, convenience, new capabilities, cost moderation if not reduction, personal control, and enhanced individual and organizational productivity.

Libraries of all types continue to advance core roles in information acquisition, synthesis, navigation, dissemination, interpretation, understanding, and archiving. But the focus on get, organize, find, deliver, answer, learn, and preserve is being extended as libraries assume new and often schizophrenic roles as consumers, aggregators, publishers, educators, research and development organizations, entrepreneurs, and policy advocates.

Libraries of all types are being challenged to manage shifting values and to respond to critical trends. It was the former CEO of OCLC, K. Wayne Smith, who provided me with the best definition of trends. In 1996, there were 4,963 Elvis impersonators working in the United States; and, by 2006, that number had increased to 27,206; and, if that trend continues, by 2016, one out of three people in this audience will be singing *Hound Dog* for a living.

We face heightened levels of accountability and new measures of success. We encounter new pressures for market penetration and diversification. We need to align more rigorously our resources with our priorities and focus less on strategic planning and

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more on strategic action. We need to focus more on risk capital, competition, business planning, and sustainability in moving from concept to customer. There is an expectation of rigorous resource attraction and not just effective resource allocation as our administrative mandate. There is an expanding requirement for customization

and for attention to individual needs and preferences. We need to respond to the mantra of self-service, the ATM expectations that our users bring to all service interactions. We note a wave of mutability, of constant change, of hybrid structures and approaches.

Libraries of all types will be LEGACY, responsible for centuries of societal records in all formats. We will be INFRASTRUCTURE, the essential combination of space,



technology, systems and expertise—what I have come to call our façade, our trompe l’oeil. We will be REPOSITORY, guaranteeing the long-term availability and usability of the intellectual and cultural output. We will be PORTAL, serving as sophisticated and intelligent gateways to expanding multimedia, interactive content, and tools. We will be ENTERPRISE, leveraging our assets, advancing innovation, and building new markets and capacities.

What does all this mean for the OCLC cooperative? As the late Ken Kesey, author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, once commented in an interview, “You can count the seeds in the apple, but you can’t count the apples in the seed.” Let’s see if I can plant some ideas that might bear some provocative fruits.

What do I want OCLC to watch and to observe with more intensity? Allow me to cite eight examples:

1. I want OCLC to watch the transformation of the cooperation to competition continuum in the library community. We have advanced an aura of profes-

sional “kumbaya” when, in fact, there is an expanding struggle for collections, staff, donors, grants, and visibility, for example. We also recognize that among the reasons for the RLG/OCLC combination was

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the enhanced power achieved through new aggregation and scale and the ability to compete with more capital and agility with the new players in the information marketplace. We also need to be sensitive to perceptions of monopoly, often misdirected in my view, as we face a persistent market condition in which there are fewer providers of products and services key to the library community.

2. I want OCLC to watch the very schizophrenic organizational frameworks and structures in which libraries are evolving. Organizational charts present, at best, the “current lie” and belie the rampant shifts and informal structures that explain how priorities are established, decisions are made, resources are allocated, and power is wielded. We are increasingly integrating centralized planning and resource distribution systems with loosely coupled consultative structures with extra-institutional ventures with entrepreneurial enterprises and maverick units. How will this fluidity and vitality contribute to productivity and success, and how will it affect the working relationship between OCLC and libraries?
3. I want OCLC to watch the expanding anxiety over workforce development in libraries, the alignment of supply and need. This includes new thinking about the role and substance of professional education, our recruitment and employment strategies, our shallow commitment to staff development and lifelong learning, and our new approaches to staff retention. I have recently teased out the concept of the “raised by wolves” feral professional in our libraries. We are bringing in new librarians with diverse and non-



MLS academic credentials. We are implementing a wide range of new and non-librarian professional assignments, now approaching 50 percent of our professional staffs in some libraries. And we continue to see formerly professional roles assumed by support staff and students. What will be the socialization implications? What will be the impact on values, outlooks, styles, and expectations? When OCLC talks to libraries, who will be on the other end of those conversations?

4. I want OCLC to watch the new visibility and renewed vigor around standards development. NISO is revitalizing the standards conceptualization, consultative, and deployment lifecycle. The goal must be standards that are transparent, open, impartial, relevant, consensus-based, performance-based, coherent, built on due process, timely, and committed to certification and ongoing registry and maintenance. Standards need to solve the right problems. But standards work must also embrace education and training, promotion and publicity, test beds, conformance monitoring, and, what I call, standards “lite” activities—such as white papers, technical reports, and best practices. Will OCLC play an expanded role in our community’s work on standards?
5. I want OCLC to watch the expanding calls for more rigorous accountability and assessment. This is a product of institutional expectations and

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government and funding agency mandates. We need effective and widely embraced measures of user satisfaction, market penetration, success, impact, cost effectiveness, and usability. How do we know if

libraries meet and exceed these various evaluative tests? Too often it is as if there were three kinds of people in our profession—those who can count and those who can’t. Will OCLC play a role in library appraisal?

6. I want OCLC to watch developments around cyber infrastructure, and around text and data mining tools and capabilities. When researchers map the universe, monitor the environment, or investigate the gene, for example, they build massive data sets, much of it unstructured and often multimedia. They want tools for location, extraction, distribution, collaboration, visualization, and simulation. More and more, researchers from all fields and disciplines want to be able to search for words or phrases, to establish meanings and patterns, to link objects. They need an open-text mining interface and protocol. Will libraries play a role in building the technologies and capacities to support these arenas and add value to the processes? Or is this a market that will be dominated by the publisher and software industries?
7. I want OCLC to watch the convergence, the intersection among libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural organizations. This is part of the RLG Programs agenda—managing the collective collection, renovating



descriptive and organizing practices, and getting more effectively from discovery to delivery to use. There is much to be learned and shared across these communities, and OCLC can create the commons for interaction and collaboration.

8. I want OCLC to watch the extraordinary innovations and experimentation around emerging technologies and to map relevant capacities in the hands of library users. We can all generate our lists, but think of the obvious—the hand-held devices and the social networking tools. Think of the less obvious—real-time speech recognition, vision systems, and intelligent robots. Where do libraries fit into the venture enterprises being launched in our universities and our communities? How do libraries break away from the mindset that quality equals content, when we so clearly understand that quality equals content plus functionality, the imbedded and integrated tools and services?

What do I want OCLC to feel, to sense with more passion? Allow me to cite six examples:

1. I want OCLC to feel the new spirit of globalization, a topic you are actively discussing at this Members Council. To steal from Socrates, I am a citizen, not of Ohio, not of the United States, but of the whole world. How does OCLC build a global commonwealth that reaches beyond shared bibliographic records, beyond international collections, beyond international customers and users, beyond differences in language, in standards, in laws, and in cultural traditions across east and west, and across north and south? Let us remember what Ghandi said when he was asked, “What do you think of Western civilization?” and his response, “My, what a wonderful idea.” Poverty does not equal naïveté or a lack of understanding and sophistication.
2. I want OCLC to feel a renewed sense of partnership and collaboration with the global library community. We understand the business relationship that is at the core, but as Harvard researcher Rosabeth Kanter tells us, partnerships “must yield benefits for the partners...[a sense of] creating new value together...[and of] exchange, getting something back for what you put in.”¹ We in the United States tend to take a narrow and more opportunistic view of relationships, evaluating them strictly in financial terms, frequently neglecting the political, cultural, and social aspects of partnerships. In collaborative ventures, we need to know ourselves and our industry, embrace the importance of personal chemistry and of the need for compatibility on strategy and values. We need strategic integration, tactical integration, operational integration, interpersonal integration, and cultural integration, as stressed by Kanter. These must be part of OCLC’s relationships with its communities.
3. I want OCLC to feel an expanded sense of social responsibility. IFLA’s core values perhaps state it best: “The belief that people, communities, and



organizations need universal and equitable access to information, ideas, and works of imagination for their social, educational, cultural, democratic, and economic well being."² Does this mean that OCLC needs to think about and act on matters of poverty, health, oppression, literacy, and censorship? I would say YES, and let's work together on the hows. Remember that every snowflake in an avalanche pleads not guilty.

4. I want OCLC to feel our institutional and community goals and not just library goals. How can OCLC embrace in its mission such things as the success of graduates, faculty and teacher productivity, administrative performance, community vitality, business advancement, and quality lives. Cost-effective access to worldwide information is necessary but insufficient.

I want OCLC to feel the importance of the value proposition—what customers and members see as the utility and merit of investing in, working with, and associating with the organization.

5. I want OCLC to feel the tension in the library community between dissonance and harmony, between anxiety and complacency, between disruption and unity, and between chaos and order. I want OCLC to tap into and to embrace these emotions and this psychology, to recognize but also build on these conditions. Don't fight them or avoid them. Put them on the OCLC couch and probe them, and make them work for the collective enterprise.

6. I want OCLC to feel the importance of the value proposition—what customers and members see as the utility and merit of investing in, working with, and associating with the organization. Can OCLC continue to differentiate its products and services from the offerings of competitors? Can benefits to our communities be clearly tracked and delineated? What difference does OCLC make?

What do I want OCLC to do, to work on with more attention and investment? Allow me to cite 10 examples:

1. I want OCLC to get more involved in the creative application of new media and digital technologies to all levels of teaching and learning. How can we enhance the student and teacher experience? How can we more effectively integrate the library into the online learning environment and the course management system? Our teaching and learning systems need content creation, storage and management of complex learning materials, sophisticated search and query capabilities, distribution and access tools, and new approaches to rights management. Can OCLC make a difference and introduce a sound business venture into this arena?
2. I want OCLC to expand its capacity for assisting libraries with their digital preservation and archiving needs. Yes, OCLC has invested substantially in this area, but the task is extraordinary, and we do not have clarity in our



community around the technical issues, the economic challenges, and the policy framework. We need to continue to protect analog information as we also preserve converted and born digital content. Libraries are committed to the persistence, stewardship, integrity, and protection of our information assets. However, we are well short of dealing effectively with the dynamic, multimedia, ephemeral, and vulnerable conditions for digital and network resources.

3. I want OCLC to advance the open revolution. Listen to our rhetoric: open source, open standards, open design, open architecture, open courseware, open knowledge, open archives, open access, and so on. Can OCLC share the value of openness and help the library community confront the barriers of market, technologies, laws, and traditional behaviors and norms?
4. I want OCLC to support more systematically the repository movement, the increasing tendency to deposit works and content in multiple places while it may also move through traditional publishing channels. We have discipline, institutional, consortium, academic unit, personal, community, and national repositories. How will the growth in the scope, rigor, complexity, and diversity of content repositories reshape the nature of collections, the integrity of sources, and the work of libraries? What will be the impact on discovery and aggregation?
5. I want OCLC to partner with libraries in defining and participating in a more rigorous entrepreneurial capacity. Libraries and the organizations that work with them must become more interested in leveraging their assets, their space, content, services, technologies, and expertise. Libraries are seeking new customers and markets for their products. This urge comes under the mandates of finances, competition, and prestige. Business development, however, requires risk capital, rigorous planning, market analysis, and cultural and legal firewalls between the commercial library and the operating library. We must also ask if e-commerce is a valuable source of revenue and reputation enhancement or a slippery and naïve slope to expensive and diverting competition. OCLC and library entrepreneurial partnerships can help us to answer these questions. Remember—it may be the early bird that gets the worm, but it is the second mouse that gets the cheese.

Librarianship is largely an information-poor information profession.

6. I want OCLC to help the library community to establish a research and development agenda and capacity. Librarianship is largely an information-poor information profession. We have never effectively committed to solving real problems in real situations with well-designed studies and carefully analyzed data. We generally make decisions through intuition and by the proverbial seats of our pants. An R&D capacity would enable the creation of new knowledge to be shared and used, position the library as a laboratory for experimentation, serve as a magnet for new staff and skills, offer opportunities for capitalization and technology transfer, provide support



for decision-making, foster a culture of risk-taking, and attract federal, foundation, and corporate investment. Does OCLC have a fundamental stake in this capacity of enabling faster movement from concept to prototype to testing to market in partnership with libraries?

7. I want OCLC to participate in and not just observe the transformation of scholarly communication. As we have advanced over three decades from the library serials crisis to the scholarly publishing revolution to the open access wars, the library community has advanced a consistent agenda: a competitive market, easy distribution and use of information, innovative applications of technology, quality assurance, and permanent archiving. We need to break away from the dysfunctional publishing marketplace, introduce new capitalistic and socialist publishing models, and advance system transforming tactics. OCLC can and should engage and make a difference by participating in the evolving scholarly communication arena.
8. I want OCLC to invest in leadership development for libraries. The key success criteria for senior leadership assignments have been transformed by an extraordinary convergence of new pressures and issues facing libraries. Concurrent with the growing demand for talented individuals to tackle these challenges, the desire to take on leadership roles seems to wane as potential leaders encounter the turbulence, stress, and demands bundled up in these jobs. Demographics demonstrate the aging of the library population, particularly directors, and document retirements will cause an increased number of openings over the next decade but without a generation of leaders eager and ready to assume these positions. We need OCLC to see its success linked to the health of libraries and the ability to recruit knowledgeable, accomplished, and savvy individuals to leadership roles.
9. I want OCLC to engage in national and global information policy matters. I understand the lobbying limitations, and I appreciate the urge to stand neutral on such matters. But we need OCLC's expertise and clout at the policy tables. Only a small number of libraries and librarians have stepped up to deal with the legislative and legal challenges. The policy issues are wide and complex: intellectual freedom, privacy, civil liberties, network development, telecommunications, government information, appropriations, copyright; and I could go on. The ability of libraries to serve their users is dramatically affected by developments in these areas. OCLC should care and find a legal way to get substantively involved. We are losing, but librarians are still active in the policy and political trenches.
10. I want OCLC to help us to conceive and define what we now refer to as "services to the network" or the post-integrated library management system. How can we best sustain the backroom operations while building a new approach to access and services, to a sophisticated array of searching, analysis, and communication tools that extend the ability of our users to work creatively and productively in and through our libraries?



Collectively, these are the things that I want OCLC to watch, to feel, and to do. I sense the wonder and the discomfort that you as Members Council might be experiencing—the mergers, the product acquisitions, and the new service suite. I sense a modest feeling of alienation, what Marx called the separation of things that naturally belong together. What is the balance of payments between the OCLC networks and the mother ship? Are networks tools of exportation, distributed service agencies, or agents of collaboration? In any relationship, as Churchill once pointed out—to improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often. In a novel by Salman Rushdie, the Water Genie speaks about the Ocean of the Stream of Stories: “And because the stories were held in fluid form, they retained the ability to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up with other stories, and so become yet other stories.”³ Such is the history and future of the successful saga of OCLC.

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Notes

1. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, “Collaborative Advantage: The Art of Alliance,” *Harvard Business Review* (July / August 1994): 97.
2. International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, IFLANET, “More About IFLA: Core Values Statement,” International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, [http://www/ifla.org/III/intro00.htm](http://www.ifla.org/III/intro00.htm) (accessed April 23, 2007).
3. Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea Stories* (London: Granta Books, 1990), 73.