Libraries 2029 – Bibliotecas 2029

Posted on **October 29, 2012** by **Carol Hixson**
https://poynterdean.wordpress.com/2012/10/29/libraries-2029-bibliotecas-2029/

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I just hooked up today with a great blog http://bibliotecas2029.wordpress.com/ discussing the future of libraries. Once again, colleagues from Spain are inspiring me. A comment from María-Jesús del Olmo, director of the Centro de Recursos Informativos of the American Embassy in Madrid, has got me thinking. Reacting to a post discussing a keynote presentation by Steve Coffman (author of The Decline and Fall of the Library Empire) at this year's Internet Librarian conference, María-Jesús said, "Google y Amazon son las hermanas Blancanieves y la madrastra biblioteca no sabe cómo competir con ellas." (rough translation: Google and Amazon are the Snow White sisters and the stepmother library doesn't know how to compete with them.) I agree that we are often at a loss. So many of the functions that we used to be able to claim exclusive rights to have been taken over by others. And not only taken over by others but perhaps even done better (as with Google developing comprehensive digital collections with sophisticated search capabilities).

It is true that we in libraries seem to be suffering an identity crisis. As our Spanish colleagues note, we are not comfortable looking in the mirror these days. We don't recognize ourselves and we don't always like what we see. We struggle to "engage" and to be relevant.

And, yet, people keep coming. Our library is busier than ever. Why do people keep coming to us if we are so irrelevant? Why do they keep coming to us if others are doing what we have always done and are doing it better? It's a question we ask ourselves all the time here at USFSP's Poynter Library. For example, why are the computers in the library always more heavily occupied (usually at 80% capacity or better) than the newer computers in the lab right next door in Bayboro Hall where it is cheaper to print than in the library? Why is the computer lab in Bayboro Hall reminiscent of a Western ghost town? We have less money than most of our competitors, on and off campus. What are people finding here that they are not finding elsewhere? They can connect to hundreds of thousands of electronic resources without needing to come to the library. And yet, they keep coming. Why are we busier than ever in spite of the opening of a brand-new student center with a dining hall, wireless connectivity, a games room, and residence for 200 students right next door?

What do you think? What do we have that the others don't?