

# Openers

by *Lyn C. A. Gardner*

**T**hose of you who are regular readers might remember the editorial for Volume 53, Number 2, April–June 2007 ([http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/VALib/v53\\_n2/openers.html](http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/VALib/v53_n2/openers.html)), in which I speculated,

What if the library mailed books to your door? Recorded Books has been doing this for years. Netflix is doing it now. Libraries are exchanging books amongst themselves through interlibrary loan. The bookmobile makes the rounds of the city for special patrons. [...] [T]ime and money [...] would be covered if you'd take subscriptions to this service, like Netflix, or alternatively charge an appropriate fee per item to cover roundtrip shipping and handling. My guess is that patrons would jump at the chance. [...] It would follow a model many have grown enthusiastic about. [...] The library could invest in sturdy, reusable shipping containers in a variety of sizes, enclosing the return postage card with the item, as we do with audio materials mailed to the blind.

I don't know whether any libraries out there have actually taken up the gauntlet, but at least one commercial entity has. BookSwim: Read Easy (<http://www.bookswim.com>) offers "unlimited book rentals shipped free, easy returns & no late fees! [...] BookSwim is the first online book rental library service lending you paperbacks, hardcovers and now college textbooks

Netflix®-style directly to your house, without the need to purchase! [...] Even choose to purchase and keep the books you love!"

By the time BookSwim arrived on the scene, there had already been plenty of successful free online book swaps. A service such as this clearly falls within our mission. By failing to explore and take advantage of such opportunities

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and allowing commercial entities to exploit them instead, libraries may be their own worst enemies. Far more than any shift in cultural emphasis away from books or libraries, it seems to me that the worst threat to libraries is the reluctance of some to think creatively and act beyond their established paradigm, even to serve our patrons better, meeting them halfway in an age of changing expectations.

Seeing that BookSwim offers customers the chance to purchase books they love, I thought about a way that we could satisfy this desire without increasing our workload overmuch. Recently, I noticed

that my library had weeded some of my favorite books on tape, but I was unable to find them at the somewhat frenzied book sale. How many of you have seen a favorite, out-of-print book that no longer circulates much and thought, "I'll have to keep an eye out for that if it ever shows up at the book sale"? And, feeling this way, how many of you have been successful at finding the item later, once it disappears from the catalog? Many of our online catalogs already provide patrons with the ability to keep lists of books they want to read and place and manage their own holds. What if we added a feature whereby patrons could add their names to a "want list" to purchase a particular title, instead of simply pointing them toward Amazon (and effectively giving their business away)? If a copy of that book gets removed from the catalog, it could go to the first patron on the book sale waiting list, perhaps reserved with a slip that notes the price. The item could be held at circulation like a request, thus allowing the notified patron to look at its condition and pay for it there. If the patron chooses to pass on the item, the material could go to the next patron on the sale waiting list. This could be especially useful as libraries are repeatedly faced with the task of purging older formats and conserving shelf space. It would also provide an easy way to sell extra copies and rentals when they are no longer needed, as well as reference and nonfiction that's outdated or not circulating

much. It would be a boon to both the patrons and the library, allowing patrons a better chance to purchase exactly what they want, while giving the library an easy chance to sell some materials without worrying about the storage or labor needed to add that particular item to the book sale. It might also help discourage patron complaints as the library phases out particular formats, if the patrons who wish to use that format have a better chance to acquire favorite titles for themselves.

Regarding library collections, I'm a firm believer in the value of our libraries as preservers of our cultural heritage. Libraries and museums serve as our guidebook to accumulated human knowledge and the arts, as well as proving a fount of inspiration and research for the creation of new projects. Special collections and special libraries and archives abound in Virginia, granting the satisfaction of serving a few patrons well and deeply. Even with useful electronic tools and digitization projects, these collections are indispensable, offering not only the unique items themselves but often unique means of accessing them, such as the in-depth in-analytics created at the Mariners' Museum Library to document their extensive and intensively subject-oriented periodicals collection. It's important that we both protect and celebrate this cultural heritage, which makes us strong even in trying times. Thus, our themed issue for 2010

will focus on a subject dear to both your editors' hearts—special collections. With a deadline of August 1, 2010, we'd like to extend an invitation to all of you to contribute articles and interviews centered around these unique resources and the people who work with them or contribute to their efficacy. The

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issue will be published as Volume 56, Number 4, October/November/December 2010.

As readers of recent issues know, "Virginia Reviews" is now open to the discussion of works by writers, musicians, filmmakers, and other creators of potential library content who are Virginia residents or who create works illuminating Virginia subjects. If you would like to write reviews but are at a loss for subject matter, take a look at local events. Whether at a library, coffee house, concert hall, or theatre, there are plenty of local writers, poets, musicians, and contributors to dramatic works who display their talents in our communities. If you've enjoyed such an event,

consider whether the artist's work would suit collections in Virginia's libraries, and think about writing a review of suitable material to draw our attention to artists of merit. If you or your local library don't own or can't ILL the work, consider submitting a patron request. We do welcome review copies from publishers (which should be sent to Cy Dillon), and we're grateful to those publishers who have submitted material. In addition to adding richness to the collections of Virginia libraries, we hope that your reviews will also assist us in encouraging the contributions of further publishers and content providers. **VI**

**Correction**

On page 17 of Volume 55, Number 3, of this publication we misidentified both the session and the presenters depicted in the photograph at the top of the page. The caption that originally read "Sasha Matthews and Melinda Brown provide ideas for teen programs" should actually read "Randi Wines and Shiloh Campbell presented a session on urban fiction." The editors regret the error, and have corrected it in the online archive at [http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/VALib/v55\\_n3/williams.html](http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/VALib/v55_n3/williams.html).