

Kurt De Belder



Leiden University, NL

K.F.K.De.Belder@library.leidenuniv.nl

Kurt De Belder has been working at the University Librarian of Leiden University in the Netherlands since February 2005. Before that, he was a member of the management team of the University Library at the University of Amsterdam for almost eight years in charge of the digital library, digital information services, e-publishing, IT, innovation and projects. Among others, he set up the Digital Production Centre which supports e-publishing, supporting the creation and publication of journals, text corpora, image databases, dictionaries, critical editions, research environments, multi-media publications and repositories. Quite often, this was in collaboration with Amsterdam University Press. Prior to that, he worked for almost 12 years in the US in a variety of library positions at New York University, University of California Berkeley and Stanford University.

GRL2020 Position Paper

Faculty and students need high quality and massive amounts of digital materials, including historical materials, preferably the complete human record, for research and teaching purposes. These digital materials should be trustworthy, searchable and brought together in meaningful ways, which could also entail selection. Also, faculty and students would like to annotate, bring together, break apart, refer to and interlink these materials as part of their scholarly or learning practice. The really advanced ones would like to use more sophisticated techniques, such as data and text mining, and tools to check hypotheses or to enhance their research. Here, they stumble against the different silos (libraries and publishers) in which these materials are being held, incompatibilities with regard to formats, formats that resist integration technologies, specific indexing issues, etc. But increasingly, another problem is that they have no intellectual access to materials written in languages they do not read. They are confronted with the fact that libraries and publishers are still very text-oriented and they want more images, data, etc. Furthermore, faculty and students also want to be able to create digital publications that can interact with this larger environment without having to have a technologist at their side or knowingly have to use complex XML schemes etc. Furthermore, they would like to interact with like-minded scholars, through e.g. collaboratories, on the condition that it adds value to their work and does not just consume time.

Having a hard time trying to describe what will be achieved in 2020, but even more importantly, what the context will be in which these changes will occur, in the past 15 years a number of disruptive technologies have changed the context quite drastically and that have come sometimes quite unannounced or whose success/uptake was not expected (http/webbrowser; text messaging, mobile technology, Google). At the same time, some technologies have already been frequently announced (e-paper) and have not yet had the impact that was expected. Other trends that are in the midst of (web 2.0, social networking, and semantic web) are in regard not yet settled and their impact on scholarly communication, on how scholars and students will interact with and create

information is not yet clear. So, in other words, unexpected/disruptive technological developments could create a completely different context and playing field that could create disruption and opportunities for existing and new players, methodologies, concepts, etc. Consider the disruption the printing press caused, how long it took to settle down; think of such straightforward concepts such as the title page, an index, copyright, stability of information, clear definition of author/publisher/etc.; and its consequences with regard to religion, enlightenment, rational discourse, democracy and democratization of learning. This provides not only a very nice indication of the scale of present developments and their impact but could also indicate that the present turmoil/uncertainty is not only a necessary part of the process but will (possibly/necessarily) settle down in a stable but very different context.

Of course, this is expecting that the view presented in the first paragraph will be realized by 2020. However, how this will happen and the effects these developments will have on 1) institutions such as publishers, libraries and universities, on 2) concepts such as copyright, peer review, information integrity but also on 3) diverse things such as business models for the acquisition of information, the organization of work, financing these changes, etc. is hard to predict. The innate conservatism of universities does not help but in the end might not be very relevant.