

New and Noteworthy

The Value-Added Organization: Beyond Business as Usual

Jennifer A. Bartlett

The term “value-added” is thrown around fairly frequently in library literature, but what does it really mean? In libraries and other information organizations, we are constantly under pressure to demonstrate value to our constituencies. How much does the public benefit from tax monies spent on local public libraries? How much does the academic library contribute to student success? Can the special library demonstrate its value to its parent company or organization?¹ Related to the concept of “value,” but not identical, is the “value-added” product or service. Originating in business and economics, the term “value added” refers to additional features that provide something extra to a product or service, thereby increasing their worth to users.

The rapid technological change of the last few decades has driven and is continuing to drive massive organizational disruption in nearly every industry, including our own. We exist in a vastly different environment than our predecessors, and risk becoming irrelevant if we continue thinking in terms of “business as usual.” Serious thought about added value in terms of the new reality is the focus of many recent additions to the literature, of which the following represent only a few.

An excellent introduction to value-added organizations in the field is Joseph R. Matthews’ new book, *Adding Value to Libraries, Archives, and Museums: Harnessing the Force That Drives Your Organization’s Future*.² Matthews, a consultant and prolific author, has been studying the concept of value for some time,³ and his new book is one of the few to synthesize the current state of value-added services with a strong historical and theoretical perspective. Matthews presents his ideas around five core concepts by which libraries and other cultural institutions can enhance their value, the “5 C’s:” content, context, connection, collaboration, and community. Value is centered on active user (customer) experience, in Matthews’ view: “The library does not create value, but rather the customer creates value through the use of collections and services...ultimately, the goal of each library is to recognize that it is in the value creation business. Libraries exist to facilitate value creation in the lives of their customers” (38).

Matthews begins with an overview of various models of visualizing organizational value and how libraries have traditionally added value.⁴ He then moves into targeted discussions of how to think about the 5 C’s in the current information environment. The “Content” chapter, for example, begins with how libraries have traditionally thought about collection access, then moves into possible new strategies for value creation, including

digitization, online collection portals, user-contributed content (“presumption”), knowledge management platforms, self-publishing, and library-provided social content. Topics in remaining chapters include embedded librarianship, tagging, makerspaces, crowdsourcing, and many more.

Packed with checklists, examples, case studies, screenshots, illustrations, charts, tables, and lists of further reading at the end of each chapter, *Adding Value to Libraries, Archives, and Museums* is one of those rare books that combines a strong foundation of research, actionable DIY ideas, and engaging writing. This logically organized, thoroughly researched, and engaging book is definitely a must read for anyone interested in the future of all types of libraries.

One of the dangers of providing enhanced access to our users may be that they increasingly see us as irrelevant to the process. Carl Grant, writing in *Public Library Quarterly*, talks about strategies for ensuring that librarian involvement in the age of cloud computing remains visible, and discusses how we should differentiate ourselves from other information suppliers.⁵ He offers seven areas of concentration, including device-neutral access, contextual support, and proactive services through analytics. An important thing to consider, in Grant’s view, is what we can no longer do: “The big ground-level library professional task, therefore, is to boil down the internal activities of the library to just those activities that support our professional and organizational goals. This selection process will help us deal with reduced funding by allowing us to take the resources, money, staff, and time that were being devoted to unnecessary activities where we don’t add value and reallocate them to where we do provide value.” (24).

Judith Broady-Preston and Wendy Swain examine the concept of value-added services from a national library perspective in a 2012 qualitative study.⁶ Their research project focuses on interviews with senior managers, librarians and library assistants in the National Libraries of Scotland and Wales to determine their definitions of core business and value-added services. Interestingly, while value-added services are defined as “those which add value or worth to the business but are ancillary to the core functions of the organization,” researchers note that “customers increasingly come to expect these to be available as a norm or baseline of service provision” (112). Individual perceptions of what constitutes value are fluid and variously interpreted among customers and library staff.

In addition to broad studies, articles on specific value-added services are readily available in the literature. One such is J.W. Felts’ 2014 article on integrating new services into mobile platforms.⁷ Coastal Carolina University’s Kimbel Library (Conway, SC) experienced low usage of its mobile application. Introduction of new features such as chat, SMS, and computer availability maps into the mobile app resulted in increased usage. Interesting future plans include location-based services, tutorials, tours, and an augmented reality component.

Another example comes from Laurel Tarulli and Louise Spiteri, writing in *Library Trends*, describing “library catalogues of the future,” which will serve as social and

collaborative platforms rather than a static listing of online and print materials.⁸ By integrating value-added content to the existing catalog, it can become “an extension of a physical environment where relationships and a level of trust with the community already exist. It is also created, maintained, and continues to exist to serve an identified population and user group” (112). Readers’ advisory resources, book club content, tagging, and other user-generated content turns the catalog into a community-based collaborative information resource. Rather than becoming an antiquated tool, the catalog can thus maintain its centrality as a first destination for library patrons.

Catalog record tagging, makerspaces, augmented reality applications, digital materials portals, georeferencing, crowdsourcing: libraries and information organizations are exploring a wide variety of value-added services to promote patron involvement and knowledge creation.⁹ Whether our patrons are visiting a physical building or an online platform, our question as librarians and library managers needs to be, “how can we create value for the people we serve?”

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¹ Three excellent resources dealing with demonstration of library value are the “Library Value Calculator” at http://www.ala.org/advocacy/advleg/advocacyuniversity/toolkit/makingthecase/calculator_new the ARL LibValue website at <http://www.libvalue.org/home>, and the ACRL Value of Academic Libraries Toolkit, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/issues/value/valueofacademiclibraries toolkit>, last updated in 2010 but still a useful source of information.

² Matthews, J. R. (2016). *Adding Value to Libraries, Archives, and Museums: Harnessing the Force That Drives Your Organization’s Future*. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

³ For an earlier treatment of the topic, see Matthews’ 2013 article, “Adding Value: Getting to the Heart of the Matter” (*Performance Measurement & Metrics*, 14(3), 162-174).

⁴ Matthews cites in particular Robert S. Taylor (former Dean of the library school at Syracuse University) and his classic 1986 work, *Value-Added Processes in Information Systems* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp.), which has served as a foundation for many subsequent models. Also recommended is R. David Lankes’ frequently-cited *The Atlas of New Librarianship* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

⁵ Grant, Carl. (2013). Value-Added Librarianship: Creating It in Our Services and in the Infrastructure upon Which We Rely, *Public Library Quarterly*, 32(1), 21-32.

⁶ Broady-Preston, J., & Swain, W. (2012). What Business Are We In? Value Added Services, Core Business and National Library Performance. *Performance Measurement & Metrics*, 13(2), 107-120.

⁷ Felts, J. W. (2014). Enhancing Mobility: Integrating New Services into Your Library's Mobile Platform to Increase Traffic. *Journal of Library & Information Services in Distance Learning*, 8(3/4), 263-274.

⁸ Tarulli, L. & Spiteri, L. F. (2012). Library Catalogues of the Future: A Social Space and Collaborative Tool? *Library Trends* 61(1), 107-131.

⁹ Online resources for value-added library services are rapidly increasing. See, for example, Ellyssa Kroski's 2013 "A Librarian's Guide to Makerspaces" (<http://oedb.org/ilibrarian/a-librarians-guide-to-makerspaces/>); Paula Wilson's 2015 *Public Libraries* article, "Five Reasons to Crowdfund the Library" (<http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2015/09/five-reasons-to-crowdfund-the-library/>); and Troy Lambert's 2016 piece, "Virtual Reality in the Library" (<http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2016/02/virtual-reality-in-the-library-creating-a-new-experience/>), also from *Public Libraries*.