

# Indian Librarians Emerging Info- Architects and Library Portals Information Architecture

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**Abstract:** The paper highlights the concept of library portals and information architecture and the relationship that exists between the two concepts. Further, it imports the functions of librarians in the traditional setting into the webometric setting, elucidating the roles Indian librarians can play as Information Architects whereby they are seen as content creators, copyright experts, digital reference service personnel, metadata creators, portal specifiers and creators. Questions regarding the imported concepts of Information Architects and librarians' roles are raised. Problems facing librarians as Information Architects are raised and solutions proffered. The paper concludes by making a submission that librarians become Info-architects in the present digital information environment.

**Keywords:** Information Architecture, Librarians, Info-architects.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Clients stumble upon a myriad of information while on the library portal and some of the information are not useful to them due to the manner in which the resources are linked and made available on the portal. Sometimes, priorities are misplaced and information is uploaded on some library portals which are not meant to serve the immediate needs of the library clients. The current process of accessing several resources for the sake of seeking information is cumbersome and requires some knowledge of the various resources, their access mechanisms, the query interface they provide, and the type of results they return. ' Library portals have tremendous roles to play in the present age and here comes in the information architecture aspect and who plays the role. Information architecture is the arrangement of information in classes which they belong; classification of information in an orderly manner. Librarians are trained classifiers of information – they catalogue and classify, in which case they are termed 'cataloguer librarians'. The role of librarians as Information Architects cannot be overemphasized, more so relating it to library portals design. These and more are discussed in this paper.

### What are Library Portals?

Library portals are a sub-set of web portals which are organized gateways that help to structure access to information found on the Internet. Portal in itself is a Web site or Web service that provides information content to serve a specific community. In the Information Technology (IT) World, a portal is used to describe a browser experience that has an entry point that is intended to be the starting point for any journey or user experience. A portal is only one possible: component to a library's Web presence. A library website can be made up of three types of content:

1. Information about the library - staff directories, departmental descriptions, maps of the building, hours, etc.
2. Electronic versions of traditional library services - online tutorials, book renewals, interlibrary loan requests and status reports, requests for purchase, online chat/reference, virtual tours of the building(s), etc.
3. Access to library content - catalogs, indexes, full-text magazines and journals, digitized special collections, free and commercial e-books, government documents, freely accessible Internet resources, electronic encyclopedias and dictionaries, licensed content from vendors, etc.

All these boil down to information access and how fast it could be achieved. Library clients are information seekers and remarked that most library clients want information regardless of where they find it and that they don't want to limit themselves to their library's collection. Therefore, a portal offers them one-stop shopping that takes them from the initial need for information through its delivery-without having to use several different tools.

### **The Concept of Information Architecture:**

The library is the heart of any institution and every institution has a mission, vision and content to be communicated to the outside world. This content talks about information to be released to the institution's visitors and clients. The library aids in the realization of this aim. Librarians therefore, have a role to play in this scenario. Information architecture, according to Wikipedia is the art of expressing a model or concept of information used in activities that require explicit details of complex systems. Among these activities are library systems, Content Management Systems, web development, user interactions, database development, programming, technical writing, enterprise architecture, and critical system software design. It is believed that the term 'information architecture' was coined by a man trained as an architect.

There is a tsunami of data that is crashing onto the beaches of the civilized world. This is a tidal wave of unrelated, growing data formed in bits and bytes, coming in an unorganized, uncontrolled, incoherent cacophony of foam. It's filled with flotsam and jetsam. In the context of organizational methodology, the Information Architecture Institute defines information architecture as the art and science of organizing and labeling websites, intranets, online communities and software to support usability. The Information Architecture Institute is an international organization committed to advancing and promoting the practice of information architecture. It is the view of the institute that as information proliferates exponentially, usability is becoming the critical success factor for websites and software applications. Good Information Architecture lays the necessary groundwork for an information system that makes sense to clients. Information architecture is all about looking at the big picture, then breaking it down into manageable bits of information for your clients.

### **Library Portals and Information Architecture:**

Information architecture can be simply seen as organization of information just as in architecture where it could be seen as the organization of structures. Relating this to the library, information architecture becomes organization of information using the tool of catalogs. Relating this description with library portals, information architecture becomes the organization and structuring of information on the web. The process of information architecture begins by answering questions about your institution's purpose, your user's needs and desires, and the types of content you have to communicate.

### **Librarians' Roles Revealed:**

Librarians are organizers of knowledge and they are seen as Information Architects. Librarian's training in developing information classification schemes, the creation of hierarchies, thesauri and databases, and concentration on information navigation and access are directly applicable to Information Architecture..

Librarians are practically responsible for the organization of content in their libraries, thereby enhancing the easy location and retrieval of information by the clients. The Web enables librarians to provide deeper access-access to chapters in electronic or paragraphs within hypertext documents. Benson listed examples of how librarians have put their talents to work as information organizers making Internet resources easier to locate and access:

This goal is achieved only when librarians realize it is of paramount importance to transcend into information organization and architecture. This is necessary in this issue of library portals and creating access to contents. Cataloguing librarians are now transcending into OPAC experts, whereby they learn how to create portals and design websites for their libraries instead of involving external hands. The educators who organize and evaluate information resources, academic librarians bring unique perspectives and skills to the development of portals in their colleges and universities. To campus portal planning and implementation, they bring their expertise with content, their knowledge of copyright, their commitment to customer service, and their experience in creating customized Web-based information delivery systems'.

### **Copyright Experts:**

Librarians are very much knowledgeable in copyright matters. As a matter of fact, some library schools teach this at undergraduate level as one of the courses. According to Zemon (2001), librarians' knowledge of current copyright policy is being called upon now more than ever in setting up electronic reserves and online information for learning portals

created using Blackboard and other Web-based course management systems. Zemon went further to state that Librarians provide guidance in determining which Web-based materials are under copyright and seek permission for use of these works with the Copyright Clearance Center and other agencies.

#### **Digital Reference Service Personnel:**

We hear of online chats, Ask-the-librarian, chat with a librarian, etc. All these are services offered by librarians on the web to clients who are naïve about how to get about the library. These services could be useful to both indigenous and foreign students who may not be physically present at the library site.

#### **Portal Specifics:**

Librarians as Portal specifics talks about purchase of platforms for portal designs. This is in a situation where the librarian is not the portal designer. According to Boss (2002a), a library interested in purchasing a portal product from the vendor of its automated library system, or from another vendor, should develop requirements and submit them to the vendor.

#### **Solutions Proffered:**

Following the challenges raised, the following are the solutions proffered by the authors in a bid to promote Information Architecture Services in libraries:

**IT-related Training of library personnel:** Librarians should be trained on Information and Technology issues; new trends in library services. This will offer them opportunities to compete with their colleagues who are into utilization of IT in reaching their clients. It should be made a matter of necessity for improved library services.

**Training of Librarians as metadata creators:** This will widen the horizon of cataloger librarians.

**Teaching of Information Architecture in Library Schools:** Information Architecture should be an added course in Library and Information Science Curriculum whereby students are taught the rudiments of Information Architecture and Library Portal Designs.

## **2. CONCLUSION**

Librarians are changing roles, or rather increasing their roles and becoming information architects. This term Information Architect describes librarians as individuals that structure information on library portals where clients can easily locate such information. As Information Architects, librarians are trained to be user advocates; reading the mind of the users or clients and being able to provide answers to their queries. This therefore becomes the submission of this paper – that librarians should henceforth, think along the line of Information Architecture and envisage what immediate services they could offer clients using the portal platform.

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