

## The Future of Libraries

*How can libraries -- and librarians -- stay relevant in the digital age? By incorporating strategic foresight, a powerful approach used by futurists, says Andy Hines, director of consulting at the global research and consulting firm Social Technologies, and this year's keynote speaker at the Joint Spring Workshop of Washington, DC Libraries.*

Washington, DC ([PRWeb](#)) April 25, 2007 -- More than 150 librarians filled the L. Quincy Mumford Room at the Library of Congress on April 12 for the annual Joint Spring Workshop of Washington, DC Libraries. The topic for this year's event was "Envisioning the Future: What Will Your Library Look Like in 5, 10, or 20 Years?"

As the keynote speaker, futurist Andy Hines set the stage early for the day's events by announcing: "You are facing the greatest transformation in your industry, perhaps since the fourth century when Alexander the Great founded the Royal Library of Alexandria."

New threats also bring new opportunities, he explained. "Therefore, your task today will be to craft a strategy that will guide policy so your industry can explore new markets, products, and services---and ultimately meet emerging customer needs," said Hines. Throughout the workshop, he shared strategies and ideas from what he calls his "futures toolbox" to provide the librarians with ideas for how they might prepare for the future.

"The process begins by outlining what changes are happening now, and brainstorming future scenarios that could emerge," Hines offered. "This starts by identifying trends, values, socio-cultural and technological developments, and finally, understanding the work and educational background of your customers."

Hines taught the group about one of his favorite futurist tools: the futures wheel, which enables groups to visualize a problem and logically think through possible solutions. "Start with the challenge, then think how that impacts your industry, your organization, and finally, you," he advised. "Consider the things you absolutely must attend to. Then consider the events and changes that may not happen, but which would be important if they did, and come up with a Plan B, just in case."

Finally, Hines gave the librarians an opportunity to apply what they had learned. He divided the audience into small groups and gave each one an assignment: to answer questions ranging from, "What are the implications of complete digitalization?" to "How do we make sure libraries stay relevant?"

Mary Augusta Thomas, a librarian at the Smithsonian Institution, commented, "Our group's question was to assess whether concept of the librarian will go away." Thomas was one of about a dozen group leaders to take the podium. "Our group believes the answer is no. The librarian creates the library. We simply need to make sure we stay on top of changes and trends, and we believe that it will start with reeducating today's librarians---and educating future librarians---so that we have the skills that will be needed in years to come, including knowing how to negotiate and work more diplomatically with the public, as well as being more flexible when it comes to learning and incorporating new technology."

Thomas concluded, "We realize that we are one of the stakeholders in this industry and, as such, it is our

responsibility to be part of the team that brands what we do and to develop a campaign to get the word out."

Hines applauded the findings of Thomas' group. "Stakeholders, branding, campaigns---these are all techniques that Fortune 500 companies use to keep their products and services relevant," he said. "This is exactly what you need to be thinking about when planning for the future."

When the attendees adjourned for lunch, conference organizers said they couldn't have been more pleased with Hines' presentation.

"We usually get only about 100 librarians to attend our annual workshop; this year we topped 150---I think Andy was one of the reasons we had such a great turnout," said Kate Martin, chairman of the Joint Spring Workshop and the director of library services for the DC law firm of McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP. "His speech gave us practical tools so that we can go home and properly evaluate our own libraries."

Roberta Shaffer, executive director of the resource-sharing consortium of federal agency libraries FLICC and FEDLINK, knew the benefit that a well-spoken futurist would bring to the event. "Andy's presentation and delivery are so easy to understand and digest that I knew the audience would benefit," she said. "I have heard him speak several times before, and I never grow tired of what he has to say."

Plus, Shaffer believes, libraries---and librarians---need to be much more cognizant of macro-trends and intersecting planning techniques. "Andy's speech certainly helped us bring all of the issues facing our industry to the fore. His discussion regarding thinking about the future, and viewing the problem as a futurist would, enabled us to consider how we might position ourselves for continued success."

#### About)Social Technologies

Social Technologies is an international research and consulting firm specializing in the integration of foresight, strategy, and innovation. Headquartered in Washington, DC, Social Technologies has offices in London and Shanghai, and a client list that includes Global 1,000 corporations, government agencies, and major nonprofits, as well as a global network of analysts and consultants. The firm is recognized for its unique perspectives and approaches, which combine rigor with creativity, knowledge with action, and technology with culture. For more information, log onto [www.socialtechnologies.com](http://www.socialtechnologies.com) and the blog [changewaves.socialtechnologies.com](http://changewaves.socialtechnologies.com).

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