

LibraryCrunch

Service for the Next Generation Library: A Library 2.0 Perspective by Michael Casey

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Tom Peters on The Long Tail

I don't agree with everything Tom Peters says, but [this is a very good essay on the Long Tail](#) at ALA TechSource. I commented on his post but I'd like to talk a bit about it here.

My primary concern is the confusion over what titles people think fall into today's long tail. Many in libraries like to think that large public libraries and public library cooperatives can stock the long tail of titles. In my opinion this is incorrect. I'm not convinced that either large public libraries or large shared catalog systems are the answer. If that were the case, Amazon would not have the huge long tail advantage that it currently has over such very large chain bookstores as Borders or Barnes and Noble.

While it's easy to say that a large system of cooperating libraries can stock the long tail of titles, that thinking ignores the reality of local politics -- public libraries and the communities they serve want that top 20% of materials and they don't care to wait 24 hours, not to mention waiting a week. Sharing among branches is a small help, but the realities of cash and space overwhelm any effort to stock that long tail. And ILL is far too cumbersome and expensive a beast.

I think we confuse old, formerly popular titles with titles in today's long tail, and I think we need to be careful about that. To use books as an example, today's long tail is comprised of new books that have small publication numbers. The long tail isn't old, formerly popular, titles. No matter the size of the cooperative library system, it cannot hope to stock that long tail of titles. I'm convinced that in order to properly serve customers in that long tail we will need to radically change some of our acquisition models. The idea of pushing purchasing to the library customer may be one approach worth trying. Printing on demand, used book purchasing in place of ILL, and digital books are also good places to begin.

Posted by Michael on July 8, 2006 07:50 PM | [Permalink](#)

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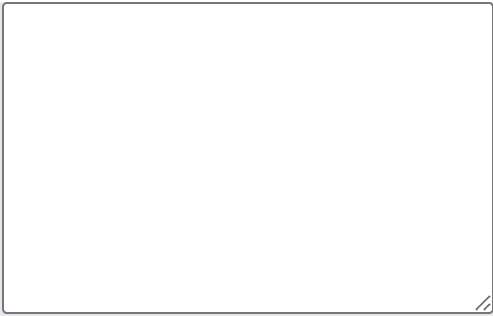
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