

## Google Virtual-Library Agreement Is Important First Step

Marti Harris

A true global virtual library is still years away, but academic librarians and administrators should prepare for the increasing digitization and online availability of library collections.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

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### Event

On 14 December 2004, Google announced an agreement with five major libraries — those at Stanford, Harvard, the University of Michigan and Oxford, as well as the New York Public Library — to create digital copies of books that can be searched using Google.

### Analysis

For years, academics have envisioned a free global virtual library. However, digitizing collections, protecting copyright and finding funding for such a large-scale project have been daunting obstacles. This agreement moves the vision of a virtual library a small step closer to reality. Google's willingness to underwrite the digitizing of texts for online access removes one of the main stumbling blocks — cost. Google has also opened the door for its competitors, such as Yahoo and MSN, to become involved in major digital-library projects.

Gartner's prediction, made during the dot-com boom, that virtual libraries adequate to support an undergraduate liberal arts degree would not be available before 2005 has proved to be true (see "No Vendor Has a Complete E-Library for Liberal Education"). Google's library agreements move the virtual library forward, but individual library projects remain highly labor-intensive, and their implementation will take many years.

### Recommendations:

#### Library software vendors:

- Enhance integrated library management systems to better track and report statistics on patrons' use of digital documents outside the library's own collection. This will give libraries the information they need to analyze use patterns.
- Further develop search portal and link server products to make them more attractive to a generation of students for whom "googling" is second nature.

#### Academic librarians:

- Work to make the library portal the location of choice for students accessing Google Print and Google's virtual-library collections. It will be important for the university keep usage statistics for budgeting and collection development.
- Improve interlibrary loan services. Although the full text of copyrighted books may be searched as part of the Google agreements, only a limited number of pages can be viewed, followed by the option to purchase the title from online book sellers. Students are unlikely to purchase expensive, esoteric books online, and this will increase the need for efficient interlibrary loan services until publishers reach agreement on full-text transfer.

#### Academic administrators:

- Start thinking about how access to virtual collections will be included in your institution's learning content management plans as e-learning expectations rapidly increase.

**Analytical Source:** Marti Harris, Gartner Research

### Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Predicts 2005: Higher Education Evolves" — Higher education's gradually improving fiscal situation should be seen as an opportunity to shape new agendas. **By Ron Yanosky, Marti Harris and Michael Zastrocky**
- "Integration Indicates Higher-Education E-Learning Commitment" — E-learning has become an essential instructional support system for higher-education institutions. **By Marti Harris, Ron Yanosky and Michael Zastrocky**

(You may need to sign in or be a Gartner client to access the documents referenced in this FirstTake.)

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