

# Eight Steps for Keeping Current

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I'm addicted to currency. I want to know about new technologies, tools, search features in engines, and articles in certain areas before everyone else finds out about them. Why? Besides the rush of being able to post about it to my weblog, <[www.librarystuff.net](http://www.librarystuff.net)>, I want the people I work for to know that I am on top of any topics that they are interested in. I've reinvented my job in order to provide the best online and book research that I possible can and to monitor issues important to my clientele. I'm basically using the same tools for keeping current in library science.

That said, keeping current can be difficult, but here is an eight-step program to help librarians stay current to the best of their ability and not feel overwhelmed while doing it.

## 1. Don't Browse

Forget about those bookmarks that you have collected over the years. If you do have a collection, how often do you revisit these sites to see if any new information has become available? Even if your intention was to use these bookmarks for collection development purposes for later retrieval, have you ever done so? I haven't. Don't go after information to keep current—have the information come to you. I haven't browsed the Web in years, which, in my opinion went out of style in the mid- to late nineties. Your users want information fast, and browsing is not the way to gather it.

## 2. Choose Your Weapon

Whether it be e-mail alert services, professional journals, Web site monitoring software pack-

ages, weblogs, electronic mailing lists, or Really Simple Syndication (RSS), choose the methods that best suit your needs. Currency techniques depend not only on the user's knowledge and use of the tools, but the situations in which keeping current is being practiced.

Whatever method you use to keep current, take it slow at first. If you choose to monitor weblogs, read ten to fifteen on a daily basis. Have the new posts from library weblogs come to you via e-mail or an RSS aggregator. If you find that reading new content from these sources isn't enough and you can handle more, than go right ahead. I time myself; if I only have (on average) forty minutes per day to keep current, I measure how long it takes me to read the content that I have picked out, then I add and delete as needed.

If you only have thirty minutes per day to keep up with library news, then you have to be able to try to perform these tasks within that time frame. If your boss understands the importance of keeping current and gives you the precious time off the floor to do professional reading (online or off), then take the opportunity. I find that every librarian can always steal some time away during the daily workday to stay current. Working at home is a different story. Your home life may be more or less hectic than mine. You may not want to keep current at home. It's a personal choice, but one that needs to be addressed before deciding on a currency strategy.

## 3. Find the Right Content

Don't waste your time reading content that you are not interested in, especially in the library

field. The key is to find the sites (weblogs or other sites) that you will benefit professionally from reading and that will keep you abreast of the most important information for your particular (work) community. There are many resources that will assist the librarian in locating resources to read. They include:

- Peter Scott's lengthy list of library weblogs, <[www.libdex.com/weblogs.html](http://www.libdex.com/weblogs.html)>
- The Open Directory Project library weblog directories, <[http://dmoz.org/Reference/Libraries/Library\\_and\\_Information\\_Science/Weblogs](http://dmoz.org/Reference/Libraries/Library_and_Information_Science/Weblogs)>
- LISBlogsource, a weblog about library weblogs, <[www.lisblogsource.net](http://www.lisblogsource.net)>
- Blog without a Library, a weblog about what libraries are doing with blogs, <[www.blogwithoutalibrary.net](http://www.blogwithoutalibrary.net)>

#### 4. Community Aggregation

This step coincides with the first in that it covers ways to get all of the content that you will be reading on a daily basis into one place rather than having to go out to many sites to receive content. A tool that I have used for the past three years is the fee-based Web Site Watcher <<http://aignes.com>>, which downloads to your desktop. You add the Web sites that you would normally visit, and, whenever it detects new material on any of these sites, the software highlights the new content. Watch That Page <[www.watchthatpage.com](http://www.watchthatpage.com)>, another useful tool, e-mails me every time a Web site that I want to monitor has changed.

I always advocate using RSS feeds to keep current. This article is not the proper venue to discuss the intricacies of RSS, but you can read an article I wrote about RSS for Law Library Resource Exchange at <[www.llrx.com/features/rssforlibrarians.htm](http://www.llrx.com/features/rssforlibrarians.htm)>. In general terms, the user places RSS feeds for the sites that they want to monitor into an online form, and a newspaper-type interface displays all of the content from each one of those sites. Examples of free community aggregators include Blogdigger Groups, <[www.blogdigger.com/Groups](http://www.blogdigger.com/Groups)>, Feedpapers, <<http://now.feedster.com>>, and Rollup <[www.rollup.org](http://www.rollup.org)>.

#### 5. Always Be on the Lookout for New Resources

After you have your repertoire of Web sites to monitor, the task is not complete. You need to keep locating new resources that may spark your interest or that arise out of your duties at work. Generally, weblogs provide the first alerts to new resources.

#### 6. Purge

Inevitably you will want to add more resources (see step 5). At this point, it is important to purge those sites that aren't producing the same type of content that they have done in the past. If you are on electronic mailing lists, and you find yourself deleting the entries without reading them, unsubscribe to the list. The theory here is that for every resource you add, take one away, otherwise the amount of time you use for currency will increase. Step 6 is hard because

librarians like to collect more than they like to weed, but it must be done, or your currency plan will become unwieldy.

#### 7. Customize

I believe that the future of keeping current will be in customization. For example, you can receive customized e-mail alerts from Google News, <[www.google.com/newsalerts?hl=en](http://www.google.com/newsalerts?hl=en)>, Yahoo News, <[http://alerts.yahoo.com/config/set\\_notification?t=n](http://alerts.yahoo.com/config/set_notification?t=n)>, and Cnet, <<http://news.com.com/2030-52-5149595.html?tag=ne.ft.si.alert>> for any chosen keyword. Feedster, <[www.feedster.com](http://www.feedster.com)>, recently released an e-mail alert tool for any searches in its database. If you prefer to work with RSS you can receive customized feeds. For example, PubSub, <[www.pubsub.com](http://www.pubsub.com)>, can provide feeds for any keywords or phrases from its enormous database. Feedster also provides customized feeds for searches run on its database.

#### 8. Be a Hero @ your library®

I believe that librarians need to justify their existence every day, whether it be in a school, public, academic, or corporate library environment. By keeping current we are not only keeping ahead of our patrons and clients, but are providing them with the content that they need before they learn about it themselves. Whether you are keeping current for your own personal or professional purposes, or for your teachers or students, you can be at the forefront of technology and news on any topic with the right tools and strategies. ●