DttP: Documents to the People

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From the Chair

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The March 2007 issue of *Preservation* had an article about the technological marvel of the Horn and Hardart Automat in New York.¹ The article reminded me of my own experience with the Automat and technology as a child.

While on a family trip to New York, we stopped at the Automat for lunch. After making my dessert choice, a slice of lemon meringue pie, I inserted my money, only to have the door stick and, as I tugged at my plate, the pie fell off. Snuffling back to my parents, my Dad came up with the needed change, and I again went off for my pie, only to have the same result! By this time I was near tears, and my Dad wasn't a happy guy either. I distinctly remember that at this point in my earliest "content exchange" experience, a woman who worked at the Automat opened the back of the unit and handed me a slice of pie.

Technology is often like that. Sometimes it doesn't work exactly the way we expect, and it often needs human intervention to be effective. As government information specialists, we face this challenge every day in our libraries. The users of our collections no longer prefer digital, as we were once told, but now *expect* that our services and our content will be both in electronic form and structured to work with whatever format or delivery device *they* use. Meanwhile, our vendor partners regularly create new products that significantly change how we and our patrons access government information. At the same time, government entities at all levels rapidly produce new electronic content, but often without the necessary funding support to do the job thoroughly. As government information librarians, it is difficult to keep up with everything and to remain effective in this ever-changing environment.

I believe that GODORT has a very important role to play in responding to these changes. Like the employee at the Automat, it is our responsibility to make sure that new technologies and new concepts of service are not just available, but delivered in the most effective and reliable manner possible. How can we, as an organization, ensure that all our members have the skills to do this? One approach is by offering increased training opportunities to our members. Whether it is a subject-orientated preconference or a technology boot camp that focuses on Web 2.0 issues, we must continue to provide the type of educational experiences that can help all our colleagues to develop new skills and abilities that will enhance their careers.

Another way we can work toward this goal is to ensure that ALL the public information—producing communities we work with receive our full support in fulfilling their missions while keeping the goal of free, permanent public access at the forefront of any technology-based initiative. Finally, I believe very strongly that we have much to learn from our vendor partners about managing content, delivering services, and training staff to be conversant with new technologies. I am fully committed to building a strong relationship with this community, one where knowledge and experience can flow easily between GODORT and our colleagues in the commercial sector.

This is why I urged that a vendor representative be included in our strategic planning initiative. This effort, approved during the New Orleans membership meeting, will get underway this year. The strategic planning process will be led by Linda Johnson and Marianne Ryan and include a mix of old hands and newer GODORT members that will focus on the needs of the organization and help us to improve our services and outreach efforts. As part of this process, the Membership Committee will shortly be sending out a survey to evaluate our services and mission. I know that many of us are bombarded with survey requests but I really want to encourage each of you to respond to this survey. It will help us to better prepare a plan for the future if we know with some degree of assuredness what our members like and don't like about GODORT. We will also be working with ALA to get the survey out to former members as well.

As we move into the next year, we must work together to create an environment of change that will help to position GODORT for the future. We have to meet the needs of current members, yet work to make our round table more attractive to newer librarians who work with government information but don't necessarily see themselves as "documents librarians." Certainly past chairs Aimee Quinn and Arlene Weible have worked hard to move us in that direction, and I hope that I will be able to build on their successes.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your GODORT chair. I look forward to learning from and working with all of you.

Reference

1. Suzanne Gannon, "An Automatic Choice?" Preservation 59, no. 2 (2007):14–15.