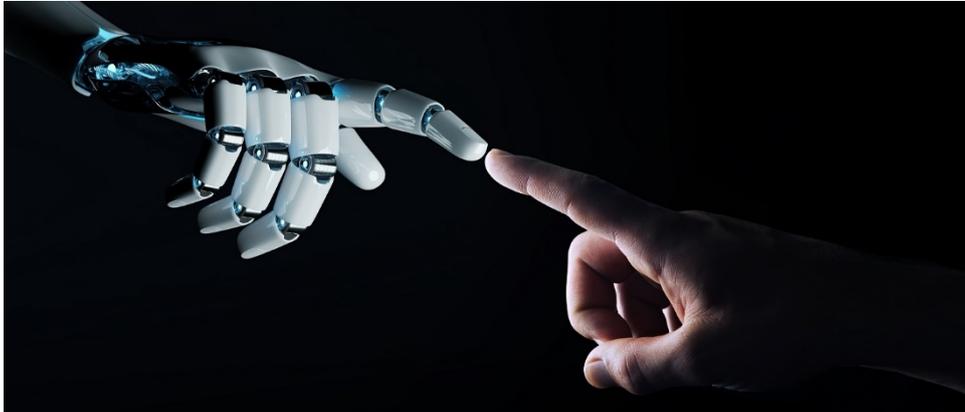


Interview: The Future of the Library and the Information Professional



There is much buzz around how emerging technologies have and will continue to change the world. Some of these techs are being experimented by libraries now, while others awaiting its potential to be unleashed. How are libraries doing in terms of adapting and integrating emerging technologies, and how would the role of the librarian change over time?

We recently had the opportunity to interview Jason Griffey, Director of Strategic Initiatives at National Information Standards Organization (NISO). Here are his thoughts on the future of the library and the information professional.

Question: What are your thoughts on how the Internet has changed over the last decade, and how that that has affected the way people interact with information?

Jason: The biggest change in the way that information flows on the Internet has come about because of the rise of social networks as the primary information source for most people, and the algorithmic delivery method that they use to drive their economic model of advertising, or what Shoshana Zuboff calls surveillance capitalism. This move from a more organic browsing and discovery among friend groups that was idealized in the early-web blog and RSS culture to a highly-directed, and automated information delivery bubble has created an incredibly negative reinforcement cycle.

Question: Where does the library sit amidst all these changes? How has the role of libraries shifted alongside these changes?

Jason: In general, the library has sat outside of most of these changes. There are surface ways that library efforts have shifted over the last couple of decades; away from ready-reference resources and skills, towards more in-depth and focused reference. Library collections have largely resisted this sort of negative filter-bubble effect, although the various arguments in the profession over the last several years about “neutrality” shows how far we still have to go collectively in our understanding.

Question: What are some of the emerging technologies that librarians should really look out for in the new decade?

Jason: Artificial intelligence and the potential for automated agents to operate on behalf of individuals for information seeking and summary work. Ar/Vr as alternative methodologies for interacting with entertainment and information that locks libraries out of participation because of the nature of the resources (licensed, streaming, locked to hardware).

Question: What are some practical applications of the above-mentioned technologies at the library?

Jason: Practical applications involving AI and Machine Learning are almost infinite, because any potential question that might be asked of data could eventually use AI in analyzing that data. From a user standpoint, this could show up in terms of discovery systems and research assistants. For librarians, this could manifest as automated metadata creation, advanced summary tools for readers advisory, or image description tools.

Question: How are libraries doing in terms of adapting and integrating new tech?

Jason: At best, libraries over the last 2 decades have been playing at integration, and not actually focusing on and making the technology a central aspect of their work. They have also failed to appropriately see and lobby for needed legal changes that allow them to play on level fields vis a vis copyright and IP law. The rise of streaming as the primary mechanism for consumption of music and video has cut libraries off at the knee when it comes to collecting and maintaining collections, much less acting as the archive of public memory.

Question: How can libraries truly embrace emerging technologies into its day to day operations? What are some of the common challenges that slow libraries down from embracing emerging technologies fully?

Jason: These two have the same basic answer: budget for active experimentation, creation, and integration of technology in the library. Libraries are universally underfunded for their basic operations, and when presented with emerging technology, libraries often dip into one-time funds in order to implement ideas but fail at long-term routine investment. Every major public library system should have a staff of developers that is funded to the same level as the other vital aspects of the library. As the saying goes: "If you show me your budget, I'll tell you your priorities".

Question: What skill sets do you think would stand a librarian in good stead for the future library?

Jason: A well-grounded understanding of information theory, especially as it relates to public consumption and sociological impacts of information. Comfort with new technologies, and at least conversational knowledge of development and the online world. Digitization and description of digital objects, especially newly emerging complex objects like research bundles, data libraries, and the like. Teaching skills, and the ability to do information instruction at a high level.

Hear more from Jason about AI, Machine Learning, and the Role of the Information Professional at the **Wiley Virtual Librarian Summit**. [Register for free](#) to watch the recording of his presentation now.

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About Jason

Jason Griffey is the Director of Strategic Initiatives at NISO, where he works to identify new areas of the information ecosystem where standards expertise is useful and needed, and leads ongoing projects such as NISO's participation in the Coalition for Seamless Access. Prior to

joining NISO in 2019, Jason ran his own technology consulting company for libraries, has been both an Affiliate at metaLAB and a Fellow and Affiliate at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University, and was an academic librarian in roles ranging from reference and instruction to Head of IT at the University of TN at Chattanooga.