

## Leveraging Crisis for (Re)Creation:

### *Letting the Good Times Roll!* in a Post-COVID Landscape

As a first-time attendee of the Charleston Library Conference, the theme of *Let the Good Times Roll!* is the promise of something new and exciting, especially for early career professionals like me who have only ever known the shifting landscape of pandemic and post-pandemic operations. To date, my time as an academic librarian has been characterized by navigating the rapid move to remote and then hybrid services, a hard transition to fully digital acquisitions, and reduced funding as budgets were transferred to address critical health needs. And all of this was manageable, because being a librarian (no matter which field you work in!) means being adaptable. But, for those of us that have joined the profession in the last few years, there has always been something missing – the ability to connect with other professionals in-person. Letting the good times roll means doing just that.

I have never been more optimistic about the future of libraries. As we set the stage for the ‘new normal,’ the industry is in the unique position to keep all of the programs and services of that have centered libraries as critical drivers of social capital and community engagement (Vårheim 272-273), while still being able to leverage the changes borne of COVID that have allowed us to reach new and unexpected audiences as a result of remote accessibility (Wakeling et al. 139).

For libraries, this means striking a balance between the expectations of the past and the promise of the future. It means embracing a return to on-site programming while continuing to explore virtual and hybrid offerings that allow remote and home-bound patrons to be active participants in their communities (Kumar 6). This can be seen most noticeably in the

proliferation of virtual lectures and author talks that were previously limited by travel budgets and geography. It means continuing to drive forward with newer, more accessible platforms, because when resources are configured to be accessible to our most vulnerable populations, they are more accessible and more enjoyable to all (Walsh & Rana 239). This can be seen in the activation of accessibility tools embedded within learning and library management systems that enable automatic closed captioning of recorded lectures, transcripts of live events, and the automatic generation of OCR documents from uploaded PDFs compatible with talk-to-text. It means finding a balance between print and digital acquisitions, because the data has shown both are necessary (McMenemy et al. 103; Wakeling et al. 143). And, it means continuing to leverage the streamlined and collaborative operational models that arose out of need to do more with less (Kumar 6).

For vendors, letting the good times roll means meeting libraries with new products and services developed in response to the cataclysmic shift in operations as many have had to withdraw from 'Big Deal' subscriptions (Green 2), and over 60% do not expect to return to pre-pandemic levels of physical acquisitions (Green 6; Wakeling 146). It means getting ahead of the rapid migration to digital acquisitions for books, journals, and streaming media expected within the next three years (Frederick & Wolff-Eisenberg 20-22) and ensuring that every platform and product is available to all patrons served by purchasing institutions through the integration of accessibility features. And it could mean extending the online training currently available to library workers on the use of licensed products and resources to the patrons these libraries serve to ensure fewer people are left behind with the digital turn (McMenemy et al. 96). For publishers of both fiction and non-fiction, this could mean integrating libraries as partners in their

marketing and PR campaigns given the demand for virtual events such as book launches, author talks, and writing workshops (Kumar 4-5; McMenemy 96; Wakeling et al. 143).

For everyone, letting the good times roll means staying flexible, adaptable, and willing to create and recreate services in response to the greater needs revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It means developing networks and partnerships amongst librarians, paraprofessionals, and vendors that will allow us to address the gaps in services and collections in new and dynamic ways. It means a heightened era of connection and collaboration, both in-person and online, as the collective knowledge of this industry makes us stronger together. And, more than anything, it means the best is yet to come.

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