

An Existential Crisis in Cataloging?

Brian Falato

Senior Cataloger

University of South Florida

Tampa, Florida

- There have been mentions of a crisis in cataloging before, but those were about not being able to catalog all the resources available.
- Now the concern is about the nature of cataloging itself.
- Batch loading of records (often provided by vendors) means the careful cataloging of individual titles is becoming less relevant.
- But the focus of our professional activity is still on the content of the individual records.

- Since records in large batches can't be examined individually, the quality of records received varies greatly.
- Some records use machine-generated data.
- Even when humans are involved, records sometimes lack subject headings or do not have authorized forms for names and subjects.
- In the case of e-book records, the item described sometimes does not match the book that is retrieved from clicking on the URL.

- When dealing with batch loading of records, the cataloging function is transformed into file management.
- If errors are located and can be corrected through a batch process, then records can be fixed.
- If not, then the inaccurate metadata is perpetuated in records, further minimizing the value of cataloging.

- As library budgets continue to constrict, there will be increased pressure to buy in collections rather than individually.
- Batch loading of records could become the norm, and substandard catalog records accepted as good enough.
- The skills catalogers have learned will continue to be depreciated.

- Some have predicted that reading books electronically will become the standard method, and printed titles will occupy only a niche market of collectors.
- Similarly, will full cataloging of individual items become defined as a niche activity that's only done for small, specialized collections?

- Can linked data and a replacement for MARC be the thing that convinces administrators of the value of professional catalogers?
- Or will it just confuse matters even more and put cataloging on an even more tenuous footing?

- I welcome your thoughts on the issue.
- Brian Falato
- University of South Florida, Tampa
- bfalato@usf.edu