

This year's Talis Insight conference can hold its head up with the best, discovers **Tim Buckley Owen**.

Plenty of insight on offer at inspiring industry conference

ACCEPT A FREE invitation as the guest of an information & library technology company and you'll probably be prepared to tolerate a pretty high level of promotion of your host's products – or at best a glorified user group meeting. But Talis's two-day Insight 07 conference, held at the Birmingham Hilton Metropole earlier this month, was in a completely different league.

You could certainly find out all about new developments at Talis itself, with sessions on the company's plans for an extended independent procurement gateway, updates on the Lyra resource discovery programme, the newly unveiled Community Knowledgebase pilot and more. In fact, so rich is Talis's product research and development programme that two days devoted entirely to this creative company's offerings would have been a fully satisfying experience in itself.

But when you also find speakers of the calibre of information futurologist Euan Semple, asking what 'businesslike' will mean when business isn't business any more, or MLA's head of library policy John Dolan on the need for new services, delivery models, governance and performance criteria, then you begin to realise that this is no ordinary supplier freebie. Talis wasn't afraid to embrace controversy either, giving the platform to the provocative library campaigner Tim Coates and inviting the outspoken Frances Hendrix to chair a panel discussion in which a group of young librarians expressed their impatience for change.

Catching up with the conference on its



High calibre speakers featured at Insight – 'no ordinary supplier freebie'

second day, the line-up of speakers was no less impressive and the issues just as challenging. Nine and a half weeks into the job, MLA's new Chief Executive Roy Clare opened by asking why great achievements like Birmingham's new central library don't break the national surface.

Public libraries shouldn't be focusing their efforts just on the disadvantaged, he challenged; we needed to give that group something to aspire to. Simply saying that people didn't have time for libraries wasn't good enough; we had to find out why they didn't make time for them.

Society of Chief Librarians president Tony Durcan was concerned that existing legislation kept public libraries in a 1960s model; we needed to understand the requirements of the born digital generation, and remove the barriers thrown up by 149 library authorities doing things 149 different ways. Specifically, continued MLA's David Potts, we had to streamline our antiquated inter-library loan system, lessening its reliance on back office staff and equipping it to compete with services like Amazon Marketplace (a feasibility study on how this could be achieved should be published by December).

'Take risks' was the message from Zoinal Abidin, the Manager of one of Tower Hamlets' Ideas Stores. You want to host a sleepover in the library, or install a

bouncy castle? Sure there are health and safety issues, but the council has insurance and lawyers, so deal with them.

Perhaps betraying its academic research ancestry, Talis positively embraces disruptive debate, including uncomfortable views about its own industry. So it invited the American specialist Marshall Breeding to tell a packed audience that existing library systems were reaching the end of their useful life (see separate feature).

Talis's relations with its customers also seem remarkably close; so the demonstration of its Engage community information product featured not just a Talis spokesperson but pioneer customers Andrew Cothliff and Heather Spencer of Lancashire County Council, showing how flexible and user-empowering the system is. And when closing speaker Liz McGettigan of Renfrewshire Libraries (feistily demonstrating that the private sector doesn't have a monopoly on innovation) disclosed that she had just quit her job to work for Talis itself, you appreciate that this is indeed a company of all the talents.

'This isn't directly about our products; this is about a set of issues that are facing the sector,' Talis's Paul Miller told *Gazette*. 'It's a success if people go away thinking about the issues; they don't have to go away and sign a cheque.'

■ CILIP was a sponsor of Talis Insight 07. www.talis.com



Dave Errington, Talis CEO, welcomes delegates

New stock system goes into action

Bridgeall Libraries has announced the first implementations of its smartsm evidence based stock management (EBSM) tool – at Bournemouth Libraries and the City of Stirling Libraries. Smartsm aims to deliver better value for money from stock, improved quality and higher customer relevance by employing EBSM techniques. Smartsm is delivered on web-based software. Robert Ruthven, Library and Archive Service Manager, Stirling District Council, said: 'I must say I'm impressed with the stock

analysis we are getting from the system so far, and looking forward to implementing and seeing those issues surging upwards.'

www.bridgeallsmarts.com

Fresh features for selection service

Nielsen's online search and selection service, BookData Online, has several new features. Now available is a Marc service for libraries that allows librarians to search, select and instantly download UKMarc & Marc21 records to their

desktop. BookScan's unique sales data has also now been incorporated into the BookData Online service to allow users to search and sort results by chart position giving a clear indication of weekly bestsellers.

BookScan's TCM (Total Consumer Market) sales ranking from the UK and Australia is now available through the service which is updated weekly. Future plans from Nielsen include a joint venture with Muze Europe to supply title records for recorded music and videos in Marc format, offering search, selection, and cataloguing for multimedia items.

www.nielsenbookdata.co.uk

NEWS BRIEFS

New staff and office for OCLC

Andrew Pace has joined OCLC as Executive Director, Networked Library Services, Andrew was most recently Head of Information Technology at North Carolina State University Libraries. Andrew has also worked for Innovative Interfaces, where he was a Systems Librarian and Product Integration Specialist from 1996-1999.



■ OCLC is opening an office at the University of St Andrews in Scotland, and has appointed John MacColl to head it. The aim is to strengthen relationships with research institutions and other partners the UK, Ireland and the rest of Europe. John MacColl joins OCLC from his previous post as Head of the Digital Library at Edinburgh University Library.

www.oclc.org

Coates gets back to bookselling

Tim Coates, the former Waterstones boss and an outspoken commentator on public libraries, is returning to bookselling. He is



joining YBP Library Services, the academic library supply arm of US book distribution giant Baker & Taylor, as its UK General Manager. Tim Coates campaigns for what he sees as achievable efficiencies in the library supply chain, and for more spending on bookstock in libraries.

Blag a free place at US event

LIS students can write a 500-word essay to earn them a free place at the Special Libraries Association Conference in Seattle, US, 15-18 June 2008. There are four awards offered by different divisions. Details at: www.slaf.org/; <http://units.sla.org/division/dieb/index.htm>; and <http://units.sla.org/division/dst/>

Award for good practice in IL

The Information Literacy Practitioner of the Year Award is now open, for all making an impact in the IL arena and from any sector. The closing date is 31 January and the award will be presented at the LILAC 2008 conference dinner in Liverpool on 18 March.

Details: Helen Harrington h.harrington@imperial.ac.uk

Focus on furniture and design Pages 7-11