Leveraging emerging technology to visually promote library resources

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Leveraging Emerging Technology to Visually Promote Library Resources

What is LibraryThing?
LibraryThing is an online library catalog system. LibraryThing gathers information from Amazon and other libraries that utilize the Z39.50 protocol. Each record contains traditional MARC data, as well as book cover images, user-provided tags, and user-generated book reviews. Over 72 million books and more than 1.5 million members are on LibraryThing. Widgets allow the integration of LibraryThing & its data into other websites.

Objective
From 2008-2010, the East Campus Library at James Madison University discovered that thematic book displays helped promote book circulation. Using LibraryThing the Nursing librarian aimed to create and deploy a virtual bookshelf of new books to increase circulation. Figure 1 is an example of previous efforts to market new resources buried within the Nursing Subject Guide as a standalone subpage.

Methods
The librarian incorporated LibraryThing widget’s embed code into the HTML of the Nursing subject guide homepage. Spring semester instruction and reference service were the main ways for marketing the subject guide. A sample of 30 books were entered into LibraryThing. Web statistics and circulation records measured use of the tools and the books.

Results
Google Urchin collected and tracked website usage statistics. As presented in Figure 4, the Nursing Subject Guide (/nursing/default.aspx) received a lot more traffic than the New Books page within the Nursing Subject Guide (/nursing/newbooks.aspx). Therefore, repositioning the new books on the Nursing Subject Guide main page reached a larger audience. As for circulation status, about 33% of the materials from the LibraryThing test sample circulated (Figure 4).

Discussion
While the LibraryThing widget did reach a larger audience, the small sample size does not account for other variables such as content variation between books. An unintentional outcome was systemwide evaluation of the role of book covers in resource promotion. This model served as a contributing factor in the library’s decision to adopt LibGuides.