

Birds of a Feather: Phish Fans as an Information Community

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Abstract

Fans of the band Phish are a large and unique community requiring information and social connectedness to thrive. By examining and evaluating scholarly literature on information communities, music fans, Phish and Phish fans, as well as popular, fan-generated sources and informal conversations with fans, this research paper serves to create a comprehensive overview of this community. It focuses on their information needs, practices and preferences and their

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information seeking behavior. The author finds that Phish fans seek information on a variety of topics related to their fandom and do so mostly via internet-based and user-generated websites and social networking. The research reveals that this information community values social interaction as well as technology and often exploits both to reinforce and satisfy their information goals and social bonds. The author also critically analyzes the findings and resources available to the Phish fan community and provides suggestions for information professionals on how to better assist this community with their information needs.

Introduction

“Birds of a feather are flocking outside.” –Phish Birds of a Feather (Phish, 1998)

The phrase “birds of a feather flock together” is a fitting metaphor for music fans and information communities. Fisher and Durrance (2003) define an information community as a group that forms around a specific need for information. Music fans are not a new type of information community. As long as there has been popular music, there has been a devoted, loyal group of people wanting the latest information about the band they love. Currently, one band in

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particular has fans who are so keenly interested in their music and culture, they often tour with the band, following them from town to town, attending multiple shows over several weeks.

The band is Phish – a group who has been making music and touring for about 30 years. They are classified in the genre of music known as jam bands. This means that much of their music is improvised and no two performances are exactly alike. This aspect of their artistry has made fans want to follow and tour with them over the years. Phish fans are reminiscent of Grateful Dead fans of the 1970's-90's in that much of the fan culture comes from touring with the band and creating a market and carnival-like scene in the parking lot at show venues.

Phish fans fit well into Fisher & Durrance's (2003) definition and characteristics of an information community. They require resources to not only research and find news about the band, but more importantly, share tour information, find setlists, buy and sell band merchandise, create blogs, share music and more. Phish fans are united by this shared, common interest in not just the band and their music, but also the culture and lifestyle that often accompanies it.

They also have no geographical boundaries, can reside anywhere in the world, but are yet linked via technology. This leads the community to exploit technology often in their search for information. This is evident by the multitude of websites available to and created by the fans.

The Phish fan community organically formed around members' needs to access and use information about the band. Those who are new fans of the band, their music and the culture that surrounds Phish often seek information that can better acquaint them with the subject of their newfound fandom. Aligned with Fisher & Durrance's (2003) definition, in this community, there is a collaboration among diverse groups that provide information to new and current fans;

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members of the community include people of all ages with varied backgrounds, ethnicities and occupations. This group also removes barriers to information by allowing all members access to pertinent information. This creates social connectedness among the Phish fan community. Some even call this group a 'Phamily' as the members are mostly friendly, helpful and encouraging. Phish fans are everywhere and require a strong information network to stay informed about the band and in touch with one another. This paper will provide a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature relating to information communities, music fans, Phish and their fans. This and other literature will inform a discussion of Phish, their fans and this fan community's information needs and information seeking behaviors. It will also explore and analyze resources available to the Phish fan community and conclude with how libraries and information professionals can assist this group with attaining, accessing and validating information.

Literature Review

Since the topic of music fandom is extensive, scholarly research has been done from different perspectives. The research tends to fall into at least one of three groups: information communities in a general sense, music fans and their information seeking needs and behaviors, and research directly about Phish, their fan community, and the culture associated with them.

Information Communities:

On the topic of information communities, Fisher and Durrance (2003) write about the characteristics and formation of information communities and how they are essentially created around a group's need for information. Watson (1997) expounds upon the idea of community.

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He discusses why assigning the word “community” to an online group of music fans can be approached with skepticism, but is also appropriate and necessary (Watson, 1997). Watson (1997) would agree with Fisher and Durrance (2003) as he also notes that communities are built on common interests and not necessarily relegated to geographic location. The research of Liao, To and Hsu (2013) on virtual communities describes the focus on interaction, support, information and acceptance between members and participants who are essentially strangers.

Music Fandom:

In writing on music fandom, O’Regan (2014) notes that it is a rather new area of academic study and that not much research has been done on the topic, unlike other areas of fandom such as film; Baker (2009) would agree. This could be because it does not fall into “processes of generalization” (O’Regan, 2014, p. 76). In other words, music fandom is a term that incorporates a wide range of tastes, roles, identities and practices. Baker (2009) has studied how people “combine their offline presentation of self with their online interests” (p. 8). As an information community, the research shows that music fans utilize multiple online resources to locate information about and listen to music from their favorite bands, in fact, fans’ use of online sources is a major theme in much of the literature.

One example that has been studied in relation to music fandom is Web 2.0 applications, specifically online forums. Watson’s (1997) research focuses on the online forum Phish.net. He notes that forums such as Phish.net allow for the community to form a “group mind” and participate interactively with other fans (Watson, 1997). A study by Zheng (2011) which examines the roles online fan forums play in “niche cultures,” such as fans of rock music, found

that Web 2.0 technologies have made a huge impact on the way fans communicate (Zheng, 2011). Zheng (2011) goes on to discuss innovation diffusion theory (IDT) to give a theoretical basis for the examination of relationships between fan forum use and appreciation of rock bands.

Matson and Shelley (2013) and Laplante and Downie (2011) have added to the literature regarding music fans' information seeking behaviors. Matson and Shelley (2013) focused on students' search for music. In examining students as "consumers of music" and studying their search behaviors, the article clarifies the nature of their information seeking behaviors and found that 83% began searching for music online and 95% listened to the music for free online (Matson and Shelley, 2013). Laplante and Downie (2011) researched "what contributes to making a music information-seeking experience satisfying in the context of everyday life" (Laplante and Downie, 2011, p. 202). The authors note that there has been little research to date on information seeking for the sole purpose of enjoyment in the activity rather than other purposes (Laplante and Downie, 2011). The authors also found that there are two types of outcomes that can make a music information seeking experience enjoyable: the gaining of music itself and the gaining of information about music (Laplante and Downie, 2011).

In studying music fandom, some have researched fans' interest in seeking, discussing, sharing, selling and procuring band merchandise, show tickets and other memorabilia online and in person. One study, by Baker (2012), explores how this "material culture of the fans...reflects the values of the people in the online group" (Baker, 2012, p. 519). She argues that the sharing of items brings with it a greater sense of connectedness among community members (Baker, 2012).

Phish and Phish Fans:

Blau (2010) is among the authors who has studied the band Phish, their music and their fan base (sometimes referred to as “phans”). He writes that, “in writing from a phan-centric stance, it is important to note that the tone of my work will be celebratory in nature (Blau, 2010, p. 308). This is common among those who write about Phish and their fans. In positively discussing events, such as concerts, where Phish fans gather, Morris (2014) notes that, “Phish and its events establish spaces of relatively exceptional peace: moments of aesthetic and social harmony. In this sense, Phish events are truly utopias” (Morris, 2014, p. 168). He adds that “Phish means a lot of different things to a lot of different people” (Morris, 2014, p. 171) and describes those different people by analyzing the types of individuals that comprise the fan base.

Weaknesses and Gaps:

The research compiled about Phish and other music fans finds that they exploit technology to not only access necessary information, but also pursue their interests pertaining to music and develop social connectedness. However, after reviewing the literature, some weaknesses and gaps are found as well as areas for further study. For one, the literature does not focus on many online resources for fans besides fan-created forums and it mentions nearly no print sources. This may be due to the fact that information technologies are prevalent, but it assumes other resources have no value to the community. Also, a few authors themselves note that not much/enough research has been done in the area of music fandom. An area of further study could be to find if and how these music fans use brick and mortar libraries and how libraries can assist this community in their information seeking. Also, more research is needed to

find how fans use the information they acquire, how they assess its veracity and more ways Phish fans can benefit from information sharing within the community.

Methodology

As a Phish fan, selecting this group as the focus of my research was a simple decision. More difficult was deciding what aspects of this community to research and where to begin. I ultimately used a diversified method of reading and evaluating scholarly, peer-reviewed and popular literature as well as exploring an extensive variety of websites and engaging in informal conversations with other Phish fans. Beginning research into the Phish fan community involved my looking into books, websites and social media pages from a new perspective. As a fan, I was well acquainted with several band-related books and fan-created websites. Although I had experience using these as a fan, I needed to take a step back and delve into them as a researcher from a more critical and theoretical standpoint. In doing so, I discovered much more to the resources than I had as a fan.

This could be due to the fact that I was simultaneously researching scholarly sources pertaining to information communities, music fans and Phish. I initially found scholarly literature through Google searches, using a mixture of keywords such as *Phish*, *information communities*, *fandom*, *music fans*, *information seeking* and *information seeking behavior* among others. These searches provided several scholarly articles utilized in this paper as well as popular sources which helped inform some of the content.

I then explored library and information science (LIS) databases including Library Literature and Information Science Full Text and Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts with Full Text (LISTA) and music-related databases including JSTOR and Oxford Music Online. This, combined with a search of reference materials found at a local library, gave me a strong foundation in scholarly materials to inform my research.

Popular, community-based and user-generated sources were found with via website searches for Phish and social media site searches. I also had a few relevant books in my personal collection to review and reference. More information was gathered by speaking directly with a few Phish fans who have been involved in the fan community for several years. Once all of the resources were found, read, studied and analyzed, I could formulate a review of the literature, a focus for the paper and create an organized, comprehensive discussion on the topic.

Discussion

“We’ve got it simple cause we’ve got a band.” – Phish Simple (Gordon, 1995)

Phish was founded in 1983 by Trey Anastasio, who was then a student at the University of Vermont. The original four-person lineup experienced some musical and personnel changes in the first couple years while performing small, regional gigs in and around Burlington, Vermont (Phish.com, 2014). The current lineup of the band, consisting of Anastasio (lead vocals, guitar), Jon Fishman (percussion, vocals), Mike Gordon (bass, vocals) and Page McConnell (keyboard,

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vocals), was solidified in 1985 (Phish.com, 2014). Around this time, the band began to tour extensively and share tapes of their music with fans to market themselves (Morris, 2014).

They began releasing studio albums on a consistent basis starting in 1986. After a decade of touring and recording, in 1995, following the death of Grateful Dead leader Jerry Garcia, “rock critics anointed Phish the heirs to that ensemble’s musical and social legacy” (Morris, 2014, p. 171). Once they garnered a larger following, Phish began selling out theaters and ultimately stadiums and multi-day festivals. Now, after 30 years, their name and musical sound is solidified in pop culture and music history. The band, or their name, has been featured on television shows including David Letterman, King of the Hill, Jeopardy, The Simpsons and Dawson’s Creek (Phish.net, 2015) and their logo is recognizable to fans and non-fans alike.



(concerts.eventful.com, 2015)

Often compared to the music of [redacted], Phish’s music is eclectic and diverse. Garrett (2013) notes that their catalog [redacted] ches on genres as diverse as funk, bluegrass, calypso, and jazz, while Blau (2010) adds blues, heavy metal and classical to the band’s music repertoire. They are grouped in the genre known as jam bands, meaning most of their songs have an element of improvisation, especially when performed live. Morris (2014) indicates that Phish thrives in the live setting. This may be due to the fact that, as a jam band, they never play the same show twice. In each performance, they draw from a collection of more

than 200 original songs and covers and, to honor their jazz influence, play a two-set show (Morris, 2014) featuring extensive instrumental jams mixed with quirky lyrics.

Their music has grown and evolved with them over the years. Currently, the band has 16 studio albums, 12 live albums and 20 live compilation albums (Phish.com, 2014). Considering their extensive discography, it is interesting to note that Phish has never released a hit single. Instead, they continue to rely on word of mouth for promotion and allow fans to make and share concert recordings (Garrett, 2013). Morris (2014) notes that “Phish has achieved remarkable success within the context of an intimate and dedicated fan base” (p. 170) and adds that they have “one of the most devoted fan bases in the history of rock music (p. 171).

“A thousand barefoot children outside dancing on my lawn.” – Phish Down with Disease
(Anastasio & Marshall, 1994)

Phish fans are a diverse group of individuals who vary in multiple aspects including gender, location, age, socio-economic status, education level, ethnicity, background, religious beliefs, and other demographics, but have at least one important commonality: a shared love and respect for Phish and their music. In studying and writing about Phish fans authors have noted the diversity within the community as well as the similarities of their interests and values. Miller (2002) states that “Phish attracts a large crowd of people who share interests such as political ideologies, environmental philosophies and open views to various types of drug use” (p. 44) and adds that “most fit the stereotype of late 20th century hippie” (p. 42). But defining and stereotyping this community paints a narrow picture of this otherwise vast, multi-generational group.

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Regardless of age, race, creed or background, they are a group who enjoy one another's company. In Rabin's (2013) book, You Don't Know Me but You Don't Like Me: Phish, Insane Clown Posse, and My Misadventures with Two of Music's Most Maligned Tribes, he makes an applicable parallel between Phish fans and baseball fans.

They [are] all about congregating with like-minded souls, birds of a feather who flocked together to...drink beer in the sun with buddies. Baseball fans and Phish fans each had to have faith that the same eminently fallible group of men – our guys – doing the same things over and over again, night after night, can bring tremendous pleasure even if nothing remarkable happens (Rabin, 2013, p. 163).

He goes on to add that, “baseball and Phish fandom [are] about tradition, about friendship, about camaraderie, about being unhealthily fixated on the performance of absolute strangers” (Rabin, 2013, p. 164).

Nowhere is this tradition and camaraderie witnessed more than in the lot before and after Phish shows. The lot, also known among fans as “Shakedown Street¹,” refers to the parking lot outside of show venues. On days of Phish shows, these typically common, quiet spaces become areas of commotion, capitalism and community. Miller (2002) notes that “most important to this subculture's gatherings is the parking lot, the center of all activity. The primary activity of the Phish [fan] is to buy, sell, and/or trade goods there” (p. 43). As soon as fans are permitted to enter venue parking lots, they create a carnival-like setting complete with music blaring out of car speakers, tents with food and merchandise available for purchase, fans wandering like

¹ Shakedown Street refers to a Grateful Dead song by the same name.

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gypsies toting coolers of drinks for sale, and others looking to buy, sell or trade tickets to the upcoming show. Fans who arrive to the lot without a ticket may be lucky enough to buy or be gifted one from a fellow fan in a transaction fans call a “miracle.”

As seen with many other rock music venues, drugs are also prevalent in the lot. The fact that conspicuous drinking, drug use, bartering of goods, scalping of tickets and selling of copyrighted merchandise is prevalent in this public area makes the lot scene a unique and notorious aspect of Phish fandom. Morris (2104) calls the lot a “space of exception” (p. 168) noting that this market and carnival scene comprised of otherwise inappropriate and illegal activity is an exception to the norms of human interaction, but common in and accepted and valued by the Phish fan community.

“Absorbing all she can for every member of her clan” – Phish Guelah Papyrus (Anastasio & Marshall, 1992)

When gathering before a show or virtually in an online setting, Phish fans are seeking information. This information can come from one another or from other sources. Information needs of Phish fans tend to fall into three different categories. For one, fans may seek facts and information about the band, its members, their albums, songs and significant dates and events in Phish history. Examples of this type of information could be how old Trey Anastasio is, when the album *Hoist* was released, on what album the song Ocelot is found, which member plays percussion, and so on. These facts and tidbits are important for new and long-time fans to be able to access. One community member expressed that he often seeks facts and news about Phish.

A second type of information important to Phish fans is news and information regarding upcoming events such as album releases, tours, concerts, festivals and other live performances. Fans often await the news of new, original songs by the band with much excitement and anticipation. Those who wish to see Phish perform live need to access this information in a timely manner as well in order to procure tickets to the show and arrange transportation. As shows tend to sell out in a matter of minutes after tickets become available for purchase, fans must have accurate information as to exactly when and how to purchase tickets in order to have the best opportunity of procuring them. Phish tends to announce tours about four months prior to the first tour stop. Prior to official announcements, fans take to social media to discuss potential dates and venue locations. A recent review of Phish.net found fans discussing the upcoming tour in multiple areas of the site, one post had more than 20 comments in 5 days (Phish.net, 2015). Fans who are attending Phish shows often require information about the venue location, directions for how to get there, potential rideshares, what the lot rules are and more.

Similar to information about tickets is information about purchasing other band merchandise. Phish fans have the option of purchasing official merchandise such as albums, shirts, hats, stickers, etc. from the band's official website. However, there is also a myriad of other websites available to fans where unofficial, handmade merchandise can be purchased. Websites including Etsy, Amazon and Ebay have Phish-themed items fans can buy. Popular in this community as well is the practice of trading and gifting Phish merchandise. Baker (2012) discussed how rock music fans exchange goods online. In her research, she found that online rock fan communities "regularly offer goods up for sale or trade and sometimes give them away"

(Baker, 2012, p. 519). She illustrates that exchanging goods and materials that are sought by fans brings about a sense of bonding within the group (Baker, 2012). Phish fans are known to make and sell clothing, pins, posters, etc., but may trade or gift these to establish a connectedness with other fans and to reject the ideals of capitalism, an establishment with which many fans disagree.

The third type of information relevant to Phish fans is how to obtain music. Since no two performances of a song performed live are ever exactly alike, fans often seek a particular song from a certain show to add to their personal music collections. Most recorded music by bands such as Phish is considered the intellectual property of the artist and is thus protected under copyright laws. What's interesting to note is that Phish fans seem mostly immune to this legal and ethical debate regarding free music. This could be due to the culture of music trading established by bands such as the Grateful Dead and perpetuated by Phish. "Like the Grateful Dead, Phish long ago adopted a passive attitude toward fans who recorded their shows illegally" (Morris, 2014, p. 176). Phish offers professional soundboard recordings of their performances for a nominal fee, but the act of trading music among fans is still popular. Although Phish does not appear to be stringent regarding copyright, fans need to be aware of the topic.

"How can I answer questions I've known?" – Phish A Song I Heard the Ocean Sing
(Anastasio & Marshall, 2004)

Phish fans often seek the various types of information described above from a variety of sources and must have convenient and reliable access to information to make their search rewarding and successful. One community member I spoke with, who has been a member of the

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Phish fan community for more than 15 years, said that both the way he searches for information and the amount of information he finds have changed over time. He notes that in the 1990's, before the internet was so pervasive and long before smart phones, he would get most of his information solely from the band's newsletter. This contained a finite amount of useful, accurate information and was only available by mail and a few times a year.

Now, however, he notes that all of his information seeking is done online. This brings to mind Dresang's theory of Radical Change. Dresang speaks of information seeking in the digital age and notes that modern technology and its advances allow us to form connectivity with one another in online communities and have more access to information than in the past (Stevens, 2015). The community member I spoke with would agree with Dresang's digital age principals but also finds it funny that, although now there is so much more information available to the community, it is not always as accurate as it once was coming from official newsletters. Forums and Facebook groups that provide him with much of his information are made up of individuals who may knowingly or unknowingly post inaccurate information about the band, tour dates, song lyrics, set-lists, etc. This makes him and other community members aware that they may need to do further research to find whether or not what they read is truthful and correct.

He adds that aside from discerning the accuracy of the information he finds, he has not had any other challenges getting the information he seeks. On the contrary, he describes how easy and convenient it is, with so many websites and sources right at your fingertips and from any device or location. This is reminiscent of Zipf's theory, The Principal of Least Effort. Zipf noted that we want the easiest way to get the most in return (Stevens, 2015). What is easier than

typing the word 'Phish' into a search engine and getting immediate results or checking Facebook from a smartphone and seeing new posts updated with new information?

This ease of locating information has also led another community member I spoke with to serendipitously find other information while actively seeking information on a separate topic. For example, while seeking information about an upcoming Phish tour, he discovered that one of the band members recently received a prestigious award. This can also happen when music fans are listening to music online via services such as Spotify. Spotify is a legal, peer-to-peer streaming service that allows access to tracks found by artist, title or album (McLean, Oliver and Wainwright, 2010). This type of streaming often mixes searched-for artists with similar ones, giving the listener a chance to explore new music. This is exactly what Erdelez (1999) speaks of in her theory of Information Encountering. She notes that "information encountering occurs when one is looking for information about one topic and finds information relating to another one" (Erdelez, 1999, p. 25). In an online environment with copious amounts of information about Phish available, this "bumping into information" can happen often.

Aside from the internet, fans have several other options when seeking information. Lee and Downie (2004) studied music seeking behaviors and found that fans are most likely to seek the title of a song, lyrics, artist and genre information, sample tracks, the price of an album and album reviews from various sources. They also explored why fans search for music and found that many do so for entertainment, to build their personal music collections, for information to verify or identify a work and/or learn about an artist and their music (Lee & Downie, 2004).

When considering where music fans in general visit for music information, the findings parallel the conversations with members of the Phish fan community. Community members reported seeking music information from others in the fan community. Music fans also tend to visit music stores and question acquaintances or friends to obtain information about music most frequently (Lee & Downie, 2004). According to Lee and Downie's (2004) findings, the use of a library or a music librarian is not often sought by individuals seeking information about music. The following tables show their findings regarding music fans' information seeking behaviors:

Table 1: "How often do you go to the following places to search for music or music information?"

	Positive Response	Never
Record Store	77.5%	22.6%
Acquaintance's/ Friend's Place	76.6%	23.4%
Library	35.9%	64.1%
Academic Institution	27.5%	72.6%

(Lee & Downie, 2004, p. 4)

Table 2: "How often do you ask the following people for help when you search for music or music information?"

	Positive Response	Never
Friend/family member	84.6%	15.4%
Record store staff	45.7%	54.3%
Musician	31.7%	68.2%
Online community or forum member	19.8%	80.1%
Teacher/instructor	19.6%	80.4%
Music librarian	11.5%	88.6%

(Lee & Downie, 2004, p. 4)

These statistics show that there is a social side to music information seeking, one which Phish fans have been known to exploit. "Music information seeking is not just a private and isolated process, but also can be a public and shared process" (Lee & Downie, 2004, p. 5). Fans gather in person and virtually to seek and share information and "make use of collective

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knowledge or opinions on music created by other community members in their searching process” (Lee & Downie, 2004, p. 5).

“I need a new way to express myself so you don’t have to guess.” – Phish Thunderhead
(Anastasio & Marshall, 2002)

The internet has allowed fans the ability to not only access information, but also create and generate it themselves. As Bennett (2012) notes, “the arrival and expansion of the internet have changed music fandom quite significantly” (p. 545). Baker (2009) also adds that the study of online fandom has found grounds in academia. And McLean, Oliver and Wainwright state that “social media and mobile technologies facilitate high levels of time and free space connectivity, which serve to strengthen disparate communities with a common interest” (p. 1373).

The research done by authors such as Watson (1997) and Zheng (2011) finds that members tend to predominantly rely on information found on user-generated online sources such as Facebook, Wikipedia, and fan-created forums such as Phish.net. In studying the Phish fan community almost 20 years ago, Watson (1997) noted that technology provides “the ability for individuals to access information from a group-mind, and to participate interactively in computer-mediated communication spaces with others holding common interests towards a set of internal group norms” (Watson, 1997, p. 106). This idea of group-mind is similar to Flanagin, Hocevar and Samahito’s (2013) concept of information pools which the authors note “comprise a substantial portion of the rich information environment available online” (p. 1). Zheng (2011) studied fans’ use of social networking and online forums and found that these “technologies have

made great contributions to communication” (Zheng, 2011, p. 744). Watson (1997) adds that “we should begin thinking of community as a product not only of shared space, but of shared relationships among people” (p. 120).

Phish fans have become a virtual community with a vast online presence, much of which is fan-created. Liao, To and Hsu (2013) define a virtual community as “a social network of individuals who interact through social media, potentially crossing geographical boundaries to pursue mutual interests or goals” (Liao et al., 2013, p. 893). In speaking with another member of the Phish fan community, she noted that she mainly uses Facebook groups and fan forums to find information. These social networking resources are not created by the band or its management, but rather by and for fans. When accessing these sites, this particular fan most often seeks information about tour dates and news about the band. However, there is a myriad of information available to her and others. There is often lively discussions about shows, songs and set-lists.

On Phish.net, there are fan-created discussions, blogs, forums, discography, venue information, FAQs and more. Watson (1997) notes that “it is one of the largest fan communities on the internet” (p. 110). He illustrates the community aspects of this forum by discussing how new users learn the acceptable norms by reading posts and seeing how other users respond to flames (Watson, 1997). These rules can also extend to expectations of fan behavior offline at shows. Rules and group norms also assist in protecting the group from outsiders who may troll the forums to express views that are negative or in direct opposition to the community’s values and interests. Watson (1997) also explains that Phish fans who participate in generating content or participating in forums often feel closer to their fandom than fans who don’t.

Fan-generated content is also created and shared in real time with the help of smartphone and mobile device technology. Bennett (2012) states that “it [mobile technology] has not only allowed fans to find and connect with each other at shows, but also to tweet and text concert set-lists and other information as they happen, thereby allowing non-attendees around the world to feel part of the event” (p. 545). Fans who post songs, review, videos and set-lists help other fans stay connected to the community.

Thus, even though they are not physically present and are in different time zones, fans are gathering to share their opinions and knowledge...in such a way that they not only feel part of the “live” music experience, but also create their own (Bennett, 2012, p. 548).

Flanagin, Hocevar and Samahito (2013) found that “there has been a dramatic rise in user-generated content, where individuals are increasingly responsible not just for consuming, but also for procuring, many of the information resources online” (Flanagin et al., 2013, p. 1) They found that people “tend to find information contributed by similar others to be more credible and are also more likely to indicate that they will act on this information” (Flanagin et al., 2013, p. 10). They also note that “sharing and seeking information online may allow us to engage with others who may be widely dispersed and geographically distant, but perhaps still hold perspectives that are somewhat similar to our own” (Flanagin et al., 2013, p. 10).

The power in these fan-generated websites is undeniable. Not only do they allow for fans to create, share and receive information, they can also foster change on a larger scale. One example of this is when fans who wanted a studio recording of the Phish song Split Open and

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Melt (a live favorite) took to discussion forums, the band itself actually answered the need by including a jam from that song in a song on their next album (Watson, 1997).

“Who can unlearn all the facts that I’ve learned” – Phish Chalk Dust Torture (Anastasio & Marshall, 1992)

As explored above, resources available to the Phish fan community include scholarly and research-based materials as well as popular, user-generated and community-based ones. Both research-based and community-based sources provide a wealth of information to Phish fans.

Phish fans can access information both in print and online, and there are benefits and disadvantages to both. For example, print sources are bound to the date of publication and therefore updates cannot be added as they occur. Fans seeking the most current information are not likely to find it in print sources. While frequent updating is much simpler for online sources, the ease of updates can lead to a surplus of information fans must sift through to find particulars. That said, as research states, fans mostly utilize online sources to get information. Nonetheless, fans should not discount the information available in research-based sources in print and online.

Research-based sources can provide background information and facts which are accurate and correct. Fans getting information from research-based sources do not need to question the accuracy or veracity of their findings. This is a benefit to using these types of sources for information. However, with the exception of a few sources such as biographies and Phish’s official website, content in research-based sources tends to be minor, brief and trivial. Fans

seeking more comprehensive histories and more abundant information may be dissatisfied with the offerings in dictionaries and encyclopedias.

Conversely, community-based sources provide fans with more information than is often needed or sought. Community-based sources make up for the gaps left by some research-based sources both in amount of content as well as frequency of updates. However, fans need to be aware that not all user-generated content is accurate and may require researching official sources in order to determine information veracity. That said, community-based sources are more prevalent than research-based ones and can provide fans with detailed, current information. Some community-based sources allow fans to participate in creating the content and providing a sense of ownership of information and fan content. Options to read and contribute information is a benefit of this type of source. Other benefits of community-based sources include the opportunity for fans to find real-time updates and communicate directly with other fans.

Regardless of where a fan might reside or which type of source a fan might use for information, there is a book, dictionary, encyclopedia, website or social media platform available to likely meet his or her information need. There are also several avenues by which fans can contribute to the abundance of information available to others. This gives Phish fans control over their own information seeking as well as the power to communicate their knowledge with other members of this information community.

Conclusion

*“If you got a question please direct it to the number on your screen.” Phish Windy City
(Anastasio & Marshall, 2009)*

It is clear that the Phish fan community is a vast, unique and significant group of individuals who require certain types of information from various sources in order to thrive. Over the past 30 years that Phish has been in existence, the community has been growing and changing, as have their information needs and the way they seek and obtain information. Currently, as with many information communities, Phish fans are exploiting technology to not only find and share information, but also to connect, purchase goods and meet other fans. The needs of members of this community are being met by numerous websites, social media platforms, books, and personal interactions at Phish events. However, even more could be done to reach and assist Phish fans in their quest for information.

Given the information needs of these fans, and knowledge of their information seeking behaviors as well as the resources available to them, what does this mean for library and information science (LIS) professionals? According to informal conversations with members of the Phish fan community, fans rarely, if ever use 'brick and mortar' libraries to obtain necessary information about the band. As discussed above, fans almost entirely rely on internet sources. This, according to the fans I spoke with, is due to the ease and convenience of having copious amounts of information literally at their fingertips. Libraries, however, should not disregard this population and Phish fans should not overlook libraries.

Information professionals can assist the fan community in several ways. First, they can include more band-related content to their library collections. In my search for a particular book for my research, I attempted to access it using interlibrary loan, only to find no libraries in my

state had the book available to loan. The lack of access to relevant materials could be the fault of the LIS professionals or the fans. Some librarians may view fandom material as trivial and not worth keeping in their collections. However, Burnett (2009) notes that, “the value of materials and collections is not primarily defined by how librarians view them, but is a function of users’ worldview; materials perceived to be trivial or unimportant by some may be extraordinarily important and meaningful to others” (Burnett, 2009, p. 708). And he adds that, “libraries must take into account those varying worldviews rather than relying on notions of value and importance divorced from the lives of their users” (Burnett, 2009, p. 708). Conversely, if music fans and Phish fans are perceived as not being frequent users of libraries, librarians may be justified in their disregard for materials aimed at this community.

However, a mutually beneficial solution would be for librarians to reach out to the Phish fan community and encourage them to use libraries more often. By offering programming of interest to music fans and also positioning themselves in places where they will be visible to Phish fans, libraries can potentially reach this community for the benefit of all. Understanding the information needs of Phish fans can help guide programming aimed at fans. For example, fans value purchasing tickets to concerts and obtaining music by the band. Programs that help fans use ticket purchasing websites such as Ticketmaster would be useful and beneficial to this community. Also, programs aimed at helping fans access free or low-cost music online safely and legally would be of interest to fans who wish to increase their digital music collection without the threat of obtaining computer viruses or legal ramifications from illegal downloading methods. Libraries that offer free music streaming to patrons could also be valuable to fans.

LIS professionals who wish to break down borders between themselves, their libraries and the Phish fan community have the option of meeting fans where they are – in the lot. Librarians can demonstrate to fans their willingness to offer access to information to all by bringing a selection of used books (maybe from a book sale section) to Shakedown Street when a Phish show is taking place nearby. Since fans are mostly a nomadic group, this may not facilitate many library card signups or generate new patrons, but it will give fans the opportunity to interact with libraries in a place that matters to them. Doing this would accomplish two worthwhile goals simultaneously; fans could borrow or purchase these books to read while on the road touring with the band and fans may begin to perceive libraries as an option to access information on and off of tour season. With an extensive summer tour as well as a major festival planned for August of 2015, Phish is not slowing down anytime soon, and neither are their fans. Fans will continue to require information and LIS professionals can help meet this need.

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Appendix A

Song lyrics and band logo cited:

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