"The Digital Economy: What Is It? And Do Librarians Have a Role?

Presented by Vinod Chachra
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The emerging digital economy is global in scope. It promises to establish a global community in which we will discover and invent new ways to work. learn, teach, think and play. Radical changes can be expected in the workplace, education, health, financial services and leisure activities. A key to the success of the digital economy is the realization of electronic commerce. Businesses, government, non-profit organization and individuals alike will play an important role in the transition to electronic commerce and the digital economy.

Many technical, legal and intellectual issues have to be addressed before electronic commerce becomes commonplace. Moreover, these issues have to be addressed in the global arena. My presentation will provide an introduction to the key elements of electronic commerce and outline the initiatives the government is taking to facilitate the development and deployment of electronic commerce. Two key elements are secure transactions and electronic signatures. I will define electronic signature, discuss their role in securing transactions, and discuss what local governments are doing to accept them.

Libraries have an important role in the digital economy, but not every library has to play the same role. Some libraries can create information by providing digital access to their unique collections; others can purchase and use information by participating in electronic procurements, receipts, claims and payments. Still others can facilitate information access by providing venues and resources, help fight censorship and yet provide focus and direction by creative support and selection, democratize information access for present generations, and preserve it for future generations. My presentations will share some of these ideas and other initiatives that are being considered or implemented.

Vinod Chachra, president of VTLS Inc., is an internationally recognized lecturer and consultant in the field of information systems planning. After earning his Ph.D. in industrial engineering and operations research at Virginia Tech, Dr. Chachra served that University in many capacities. Beginning in 1975, he designed the original Virginia Tech Library System (now called VTLS). From 1983 to 1985 he was vice president for computing and information systems and in 1985 founded VTLS Inc., which provides state-of-the-art library automation systems to more than 360 libraries worldwide.

Chachra has been active in the library profession for more than 20 years. He represented Virginia in the White House Conference on Library and Information Sciences in 1979, served on the legislative committee for library networking in Virginia, and is a former member of the White House Conference on Library and Information Services Task Force. He designed the statewide library networking system in West Virginia and was appointed as consultant to the Ministry of Education in Finland to help establish a national research information network. In 1992, he was invited to be a member of the ALA delegation to Romania and to serve on the ALA International Relations CommitteeÕs Bibliotheca Alexandrina subcommittee. In addition, Chachra served as consultant to the Virginia State Library to help design the Virginia Libraries Information Network (VLIN) and the statewide union catalog. Currently, Dr. Chachra has been re-elected to serve another three year term on the Board of Directors of the National Information Standards Organization.