

Purdue Libraries
Libraries Research Publications

Purdue Libraries

Year 1992

The Use of Census CD-ROMs in Texas
Depository Librries

Bert Chapman
Purdue University, chapmanb@purdue.edu

Texas Library Journal, 68 (3)(Fall 1992): 97-100

COLLECTIONS

The Use of Census CD-ROMs in Texas Depository Libraries

by Bert Chapman

The decennial census of the United States is constitutionally mandated for determining congressional representation and various economic purposes.¹ Since its initial authorization, the decennial census and its variant successors have assumed acute importance in national political, economic, and social development. A recent assessment of the census maintains:

*Census statisticians have been the messengers with the decennial news about the trajectory of the population. They, sometimes in consultation with, sometimes in opposition to, the nation's political leaders, have determined the categories and classifications used to interpret population change. In turn, they have created and shaped the very concepts we use to understand social change. They have provided the basal readings, the baseline measures, the figures for the almanacs and categories we think in.*²

Census Bureau data and products can be used to show specific demographic features such as the number of people in certain areas including their average age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Cartographic census products can show the number of single-parent households and the senior citizen population of a specific area while communities can use such data for strategic development planning and determining their eligibility for specific grants.³

Within Texas the use and sophistication of census data has increased exponential-

ly since the 1834 Anahuac Precinct Census.⁴ Texas' U.S. Government depository libraries possessing census materials have traditionally stored these products in paper and microfiche. Recent and ongoing trends in information dissemination technology have seen paper and microfiche supplemented by CD-ROM (compact disk read only memory) which has become an increasingly important part of the Government Printing Office's (GPO) Depository Library Program as evidenced by the 35 individual CD-ROM products available for shipment to depository libraries between November 1988 and Spring 1992.⁵

This influx of CD-ROMs from the Census Bureau and other government agencies has been a mixed blessing for depository libraries. While appreciative of new technology and its apparent promise of enhancing public access to government information, government documents librarians must contend with a variety of problems posed by these CD-ROMs. Some of these difficulties include technical deficiencies in computer hardware and software, insufficient institutional funding for requisite workstations, printers, support staff, ancillary products, and the absence of software for use with some government CD-ROMs due to the fear of the issuing agencies that suggesting or utilizing a given software package would be interpreted as a commercial endorsement.⁶

Determining the use of Census CD-ROMs in Texas depository libraries and the assessments of documents librarians concerning the quality of these products was the subject of a survey mailed to 48 Texas libraries in the spring of 1992. Responses were received from 34 libraries. These libraries were asked whether they received Census CD-ROMs and were given a list of nine products

Bert Chapman is Reference/Documents Librarian at Mary and John Gray Library, Lamar University, Beaumont.

with the request to comment on their overall quality, software quality, user friendliness, documentation, and the time required for adequate patron instruction in their use.

Other questions examined whether these CD-ROMs were used as stand alone items or as part of a network, the quality of software packages used or suggested for use with Census Bureau CDs, the quality of Census Bureau assistance to librarians' CD-ROM questions, the quality of GPO's handling of Census CD-ROMs and related technological concerns, and whether, budgetary conditions permitting, they anticipated having library staffing with primary responsibility for U.S. Government CD-ROMs in the next five years.

Eighty-eight percent of the responding libraries receive Census CD-ROMs. Those not possessing Census CD-ROMs cited insufficient funding and staff as the primary reasons for not selecting and using these products. All libraries but one used stand alone workstations with a cumulative average of just over one drive allocated to Census Bureau CDs with one library mentioning the need for Census Bureau CDs to share space with commercial CD products.⁷

The Census CD-ROMs evaluated for this survey include *County and City Data Book*, *County Business Patterns*, *American Housing Survey*, *U.S. Imports of Merchandise*, *U.S. Exports of Merchandise*, *Economic and Agriculture Censuses*, *TIGER/Line Files* (containing digitized cartographic data), *Public Law 94-171* (reapportionment data), and *Summary Tape File I*. Respondents were asked to rate the diverse qualities of these products using the categories poor, average, good, and excellent, and time required for adequate patron instruction in increments of less than five minutes, five minutes to ten minutes, and more than ten minutes. The top overall responses from each category are listed below:

1. *County and City Data Book*
 - a. Overall Quality—Good 47%
 - b. Software Quality—Average 42%
 - c. User Friendliness—Good 37%
 - d. Documentation—Poor 44%
 - e. Adequate Instruction Time—Less Than Five Minutes 35%; Ten Minutes or More 35%
2. *County Business Patterns*
 - a. Overall Quality—Good 40%
 - b. Software Quality—Average 40%
 - c. User Friendliness—Good 33%
 - d. Documentation—Average 35%
 - e. Adequate Instruction Time—Less Than Five Minutes 47%
3. *American Housing Survey*
 - a. Overall Quality—Poor 56%
 - b. Software Quality—Poor 44%
 - c. User Friendliness—Poor 40%; Average 40%
 - d. Documentation—Poor 40%; Average 40%
 - e. Adequate Instruction Time—Ten Minutes or More 57%
4. *U.S. Imports of Merchandise*
 - a. Overall Quality—Good 47%
 - b. Software Quality—Average 35%
 - c. User Friendliness—Average 44%
 - d. Documentation—Average 39%
 - e. Adequate Instruction Time—Less Than Five Minutes 44%; Ten Minutes or More 44%
5. *U.S. Exports of Merchandise*
 - a. Overall Quality—Good 41%
 - b. Software Quality—Good 35%; Average 35%
 - c. User Friendliness—Good 35%; Average 35%
 - d. Documentation—Average 41%
 - e. Adequate Instruction Time—Ten Minutes or More 44%
6. *Economic and Agricultural Censuses*
 - a. Overall Quality—Average 39%
 - b. Software Quality—Average 39%
 - c. User Friendliness—Poor 44%
 - d. Documentation—Average 44%
 - e. Adequate Instruction Time—Ten Minutes or More 72%

7. *TIGER/Line Files*
 - a. Overall Quality—Average 50%; Poor 50%
 - b. User Friendliness—Poor 100%
 - c. Documentation—Poor 67%
 - d. Adequate Instruction Time—Ten Minutes or More 100%

TIGER is used by only two respondents due to the absence of software on the CD and the difficulty in obtaining workable software from commercial sources at prices libraries can afford.

8. *PL 94-171*
 - a. Overall Quality—Good 48%
 - b. Software Quality—Good 41%
 - c. User Friendliness—Good 33%; Average 33%
 - d. Documentation—Average 40%
 - e. Adequate Instruction Time—Less Than Five Minutes 52%
9. *Summary Tape File I*
 - a. Overall Quality—Excellent 45%
 - b. Software Quality—Excellent 40%
 - c. User Friendliness—Excellent 40%
 - d. Documentation—Good 40%
 - e. Adequate Instruction Time—Five to Ten Minutes 45%

Six software packages Go, Extract, D-Base III, Marplot, Lotus 1-2-3, and SPSS were evaluated for their usefulness in a library environment with Go, Extract, and D-Base III being used on Census CDs. The top rankings on the suitability of these software products for library usage are:

1. Go—Yes 95%
2. Extract—Uncertain 43%
3. D-Base III—Uncertain 48%
4. Marplot—Uncertain 95%
5. Lotus 1-2-3—Uncertain 52%
6. SPSS—Uncertain 68%⁸

Forty-eight percent of respondents had called the Census Bureau for assistance with 55% of these viewing the Bureau's promptness in responding as average and 50% each viewing the quality of Census Bureau service as good or average. Fifty-

two percent felt GPO's handling of CD-ROM products had been average and 38% poor with one depository praising GPO for making the technology accessible but criticizing GPO for having unrealistic expectations of the ability of depositories to cope with this technology. In addition, only 61% of those responding anticipated having a staff person with primary responsibility for handling U.S. government CD-ROMs within the next five years.⁹

The appearance of CD-ROMs from the Census Bureau and other U.S. government agencies has revolutionized the operations of U.S. depository libraries. These institutions must now cope with publications in paper, microfiche, and an increasing number and diversity of electronic formats as they strive to fulfill their statutory responsibilities in an era of staffing and budgetary constraints.

While documents librarians appreciate the advances in government information technology, accessibility, and dissemination, the results of this survey reflect considerable diversity of opinion about the quality of Census Bureau CD-ROMs and their suitability for use in a library environment.

Survey findings also demonstrate a pronounced ambivalence by librarians toward the handling of electronic information dissemination by GPO and other U.S. government agencies and concerns over their ability to provide the resources, equipment, and training necessary for the optimal maintenance and utilization of these products.

There are no definitive answers to these dilemmas at this time. Instead, depository libraries in Texas and the rest of the nation will contend with Census CD-ROMs and other government electronic products by using institutional resources, external funding if available, and the talent and resourcefulness of individual librarians to help patrons access, manipulate, and utilize the valuable information they contain. □

Note: Readers who would like a detailed breakdown of survey results may contact the author.

Endnotes

¹U.S. Constitution, Article I Section II and Article I Section IX.

²Margo J. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), pp/4-5.

³Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, "Communities Can Benefit From GIS Mapping Services," *City & County Financial Management*, May-June 1992, p. 3.

⁴For additional description of this important document see Jean L. Epperson, "1834 Census-Anahuac Precinct, Atascosito District," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 92 (January 1989): 437-47.

⁵U.S. Government Printing Office, "CDs Shipped to Depository Libraries Since 1988," *Administrative Notes: Newsletter of the Federal Library Program*, 13 (April 30, 1992): 6-8.

⁶See U.S. Government Printing Office, "Topic 4-Technical Support," *Administrative Notes: Newsletter of the Federal Depository Library Program*, 13 (April 15, 1992): 19; Michael T. Ruhlin, "The Gathering Storm: Government Information in CD-ROM Format," *New Jersey Libraries*, 24 (Summer 1991): 18-21; and Susan M. Ryan, "CD-ROM's in the Smaller U.S. Depository Library: Public Service Issues," *Government Publications Review*, 19 (3) (May-June 1992): 269-78, for further summary and analysis of these issues.

⁷Survey Results. The only library networking its Census Bureau CD-ROM's was Perry-Castañeda Library at the University of Texas at Austin using a Novell Ethernet network.

⁸Survey Results.

⁹Survey Results.

B.
be
a
lo

. Ov
. Pre
circ
. Con
car
. Fre
lati
. Lov
. Fre
. Pre
. Fre
pur
Call o
broch



For
con
fort
Sar
TLS

Sp
Adu