Technical cooperation Between Libraries and the Advanced Subscription Services

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In view of this IATUL's conference theme "Libraries and the Communication
Process" and especially today's theme "Communication with the World Outside",
the best contribution we could make was to create a remote link with our
computer in The Netherlands so that you would be able to communicate with an
agent in a quite different way.

Thanks to Mr. T.J. Tanzer and his staff at the Ecole Polytechnique de Lau-
sanne we could use a new terminal, installed for this conference, as well as
library facilities for which we are grateful.
We hope that this opportunity to look into an advanced library subscription
service system has also improved communication between librarians.

We have started this new and active dialogue at the Essen Symposium on Serial
Automation, organized by one of the IATUL members, Mr. A.H. Helal, October
1980. As a result we have been invited to participate actively in several
national and international conferences this year. In addition, some libraries
have contacted us directly regarding specific automation developments in
their own environment.

IATUL Proceedings, Volume 12, 1980, presented a report by Mr. Terry Waller,
Project Development Manager, on the development, design and operation of the
Swets system. Although new features have been added and many routines have
been upgraded, the information given still stands for the system.

Today we would like to communicate with you about the cooperation between
libraries and library subscription agents, concentrating on the technical
know-how that agents may offer.

Agents literally stand between publishers and libraries, serving them both.
The primary role of an agent was - and still is - a trade function: buying
serial titles at the request of libraries.

A large majority of libraries employ one or more agents for the acquisition of traditional and (more and more) non-traditional material, such as micromedia, magnetic tapes, video, etc. With the advancement of facsimile transmitters and receivers, the development of databases and networks agents might also become active as suppliers of documents and data in general. This is an even lower margin business than serials already are.

The relationship between libraries and agents, but also between publishers and agents, is changing. For their own economic survival publishers tend to lower discounts to agents, with the exception of a few very large agents who actively promote and distribute their titles. Some publishers now better appreciate the agent's role as handling costs are being reduced by such cooperation, but other publishers might try harder to sell directly.

The main ingredient agents offer is service. Looking at the principles of serials management and the status of technical processing in libraries, we may expect that the library community will require an even larger variety in and a higher quality of service than is being offered at present.
Basic services will become more and more flexible, hopefully maintaining the current moderate price level. Special services will become more and more available as facility tools for acquisition, collection management and administration. To mention a few of our present specialties: the Swets Info System with detailed customer status reports and Three-Year-Subscription-Surveys with a detailed analysis of publishers' prices, currencies, and handling charges per subscription, per budget code, per subject field and per country of publication.

The economic aspect of the relationship between libraries and agents is changing because of the continuous sharp increase in prices, drastic currency fluctuations, effecting - especially this year - libraries buying US and British material from abroad, and the large number of new titles still being announced. On the other hand more and more titles cease or merge, but there is still a net growth.
Many libraries are or will be forced to rationalise their serials list with their budgets getting more and more tight. In this respect we are looking forward to a study of the use of periodicals at Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden, conducted by Mrs. N. Fjällbrant.
In addition, libraries might have to reduce staff costs.

In our view there will be need of a more intensive cooperation between agents and libraries, which goes beyond acquisition and covers the area of serials control. Manually this has already become a major problem area, partly also because of the high percentage that serials represent within most library collections. It is complex, labour-intensive and henceforth costly.

It has often been said that when these two aspects, labour-intensity and repetition, occur, automation presents itself. However, the actual recording of serials presents too many questionmarks to be solved by a straightforward automation. Serials are exceptional in their appearance and behaviour.

We now have enough experience to handle most problems. With the rapidly increasing number of periodical subscriptions that is coming in through our offices in the USA and The Netherlands (at present over 75,000), we had to automatize to a very high degree. But not all serials can be controlled fully automatically, e.g. irregular publications and several book series. Both offices work online. We check in by title, achieving a significant scale economy, and let the computer allocate the issues. Any necessary claims are immediately sent to publishers concerned. We can link with extensive purchasing records and are also able to claim from there. We consider this a real advantage when comparing our concept with the average automation effort in libraries.

This consolidated check-in system, in combination with a fully controlled distribution to libraries worldwide, by airfreight, is being offered more and more successfully. For libraries with either mail and/or staff problems and for those libraries that need to receive material from other continents as quickly as possible, technological support is available, whereby we (principally) calculate additionally at cost level. The price of this additional service, which we market under the name FAST ®, has gone down recently.

This is one typical example of a service that has been developed by us on request of libraries. There will be more. In the area of serials management, agents might be able to diminish clerical or at least non-librarian processing activities offering know-how, capacity and actual processing at a favourable cost level. It is up to you to guide us in developing valuable services.

We would like to conclude this short contribution with the old parable about the grasshopper, who decided to consult the wise owl on a personal problem. The problem concerned the fact that the grasshopper suffered from severe pains each winter. After a number of these winters, in which all of the grasshopper's known remedies were of no avail, he presented his case to the owl.

The owl, after patiently listening to the grasshopper's misery, offered a simple solution: "Turn yourself into a cricket and hibernate during the winter."

The grasshopper jumped away joyously, thanking the owl for his wise advice. Soon however, after discovering that this important knowledge could not be transformed into action, the grasshopper returned to the owl and asked him how he could perform his metamorphosis.

The owl said: "Look, I gave you the principle. It's up to you to work out the details."