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On The Street: A Survey of ATG Subscribers - What Were They Up To in 1994?

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On the Street

A Survey of ATG Subscribers — What Were We Up to in 1994?
by Barbara C. Dean (Fairfax County Public Library), Eamon T. Fennessy (The Copyright Group) and Kathy Miraglia (Catholic University of America)

Your investigators decided to repeat the 1993 year-end survey because of its popularity with readers. We again asked subscribers what the biggest issues or high points were in technical services for 1994, what they anticipated would be the biggest issues or high points in 1995, and what was happening in their libraries and regions. The survey continues to be an unscientific sample. Our methodology is to look at each page of the subscriber list and pick out one librarian who has not been called as part of a previous survey. We made an effort to contact not only academic libraries, but also special and public libraries to represent a cross-section of ATG subscribers. In the interest of our institutions’ budgets, we did not call anyone outside the U.S. and Canada. We selected one person from each page, assuming there was someone who fit our rigorous criteria, but we were unable to contact everyone in the time we had. Consequently, we have 20 responses.

In 1994 libraries were preparing to purchase new integrated systems, implementing new systems, reorganizing technical services as a result of implementation, or adding new modules to existing systems. Other new technologies continued to be a focus of interest and activity as well. Libraries are establishing document delivery services or making Internet access available to library staff and users.

Outsourcing, with the specific mention of PromptCat, was on subscribers’ minds. We talked with Kay Granskog at Michigan State who noted they tested OCLC’s new PromptCat. She said participating in the project gave the staff an opportunity to think about the difference between cataloging and simply checking in materials. Other respondents noted they wondered whether the user is better served by outsourcing than by doing the work in-house.

Not only are our methods of providing materials changing, but the kinds of materials we buy is also changing. More information in electronic format is available and they come with their unique considerations. While the Association of Research Libraries was identifying the new electronic publications on the Net, some libraries were trying to assimilate them into their collections. Of course this raises the eternal

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problem of copyright and electronic publications. On another note, there is a greater emphasis on the purchase of Africana and multicultural materials. Glenda Alvin (Trenton State College, NJ) noted this was one of the concerns discussed at the second annual conference of ALA’s Black Caucus as was the working relationship between Black librarians, authors and publishers.

Budgets continue to be an area of concern. More than one respondent noted that not all libraries take advantage of new technologies, and some are coping with the traditional workload as well as adding new tasks while their workforces dwindle. Consequently, staffs in many libraries are being asked to become more flexible as they are asked to take on more and different tasks. Linda Lyle had the unenviable task in 1994 of having to plan for a major budget cut and a major budget increase just in case either occurred. Robert Thompson noted his library had a larger than normal materials budget and the staff was hard pressed to spend it all in one fiscal year.

Many respondents see 1995 as being a year to continue projects begun in 1994 or to consolidate changes made. Libraries who either investigated the purchase of a new ILS, or prepared bid specifications for a system in 1994, will purchase and implement a system in 1995. Those who implemented a new system in 1994 will continue the process of re-designing work flow, reorganizing staff, or training staff and users. Two respondents mentioned continuing retrospective conversion projects as a highlight for 1995.

Interest in PromptCat will remain high. Some libraries will consider implementing the service while librarians everywhere will monitor its affect on technical services. The establishment of new document delivery services will continue as well the cancellation of serial subscriptions to pay for the electronic publications.

Other technology-related issues will include upgrading computer capabilities, looking for cost-effective alternatives to searching on OCLC, and investigating the possibility of coupling acquisitions with OCLC’s gateway. Ordering on the Internet was also mentioned as was the need to think how the acquisitions unit will handle it. How to adequately copyright electronic materials will continue to be a question looking for an answer.

Libraries not yet effected by downsizing may see it in 1995. Other libraries’ staffs may continue to dwindle making it even more difficult to handle the ever increasing variety of tasks.

Librarians are caught up in the debate over what libraries and acquisitions will look like in the future. Like everyone else, our respondents have plenty of questions, but no answers. The questions include: what will technical services look like, what will be the role of libraries, what new types of materials or resources will be available, will libraries survive the electronic age?

The third question on our survey was what exciting things were going on in specific libraries. Many of the answers are represented in the reports of issues and highlights for 1994 and 1995; others are unique. Phyllis Hulse reports Texas Instruments is centralizing all eight of its corporate libraries for cataloging, subscriptions, and document delivery. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is training consumers to access its information system. The military school on Maxwell Air Force Base has been accredited to offer a new masters program which means expanding the library’s collections in appropriate areas. The AAUP is involved in an effort by university presses, local libraries, and computer centers to develop new configurations for promulgating scholarly information.

From the answers to the question about regional efforts, it is obvious cooperative programs continue to develop and flourish. New projects are taking shape. The Greenville Technical College is involved in planning a network of public and academic libraries to provide public libraries with access to college library services and provide the academic libraries access to the large state libraries in the Appalachian Region. The University of North Carolina at Charlotte is working to become more closely involved with its sister school, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Other groups of libraries are developing union catalogs and making them available to library users, or preparing to adopt the same ILS.

Various respondents participate in established cooperative programs. The Washington Research Library Consortium has opened a shared storage facility, the Illinet Online University and OhioLink offer union catalogs. OhioLink hopes to offer patron initiated borrowing in 1995. The Michigan Research Triangle celebrated its second birthday with members continuing to work on cooperative collection development and other cooperative projects in technical services. Offering a 24-hour telephone reference service is under discussion by participants in the Chicago Library System.

Some projects underway are outside a formal consortial setting. A group purchase of FirstSearch and Ariel will be made possible for higher education in Virginia by the “virtual library” initiative. The AAUP is working on an online catalog of university press publications to be available on Internet. NIH participates in DocLine which gives libraries nationwide access to National Library of Medicine and NIH intra-library lending.

From our survey results, it is clear libraries are not standing still. They continue to adopt new technologies and explore ways to provide improved services for their users regardless of changes in staff size and funding.

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