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1996: Collection Development and The Charleston Conference Expand to Include the Wide Wide World of Electronic Options

Personal observations by **Rebecca T. Lenzini** (President and COO, CARL Corporation) <rlenzini@carl.org>

According to the statistics, it was inevitable. *The Gale Directory of Databases*, a year ago, listed roughly 10,000 databases from 3500 database producers and offered by 810 online services. ***ATG***'s December 1996/January 1997 issue (p.10) quotes BiblioData as listing 6500 titles in the 1997 edition of *Fulltext Sources Online*. And 2 pages later (p.12, ***ATG***, December 1996/January 1997) we're told that applications for domain names on the Web have grown from 400 per month in 1993 to 45,000 a month in March, 1996!

Given that the task of collection development has always been to "...allocate the library's financial resources in as effective a manner as possible toward the acquisition of materials in support of the larger institution's goals" (quoting my own definition offered to the Oklahoma conference, March 1996), and given the figures above, I think it was inevitable that online services and publications would make their way into the forefront of collection development and our beloved **Charleston Conference**.

In fact, I think we can rightfully establish our own measure of collection development relevancy by who comes to Charleston. In the early days of the conference, librarians and booksellers dominated. Friends and colleagues from BNA, B&T, Yankee, Midwest, Scholarly, Academic and others were consistently present.

In the mid to late 80's, serials vendors wormed their way in, expanding attendance to include representatives from EBSCO, Faxon, Dawson, BHB, Harrassowitz, Readmore, Majors and, more recently, Swets and Rowecom. Document delivery services such as UnCover were welcomed early on, even though we represented online services. UnCover fit well to Charleston because the index was really a tool leading to document delivery — another form of materials acquisition. This theme was legitimized over several years by speakers such as **Chuck Hamaker** and **Tony Ferguson**, who analyzed the ways in which services like UnCover could be made an integral part of collection development.

Publishers, of course, were always in attendance, but my memory says that in the early days their representatives were frequently presenting slides designed to explain away large price increases for printed materials. The debate in those years was "access vs. ownership," as I'm sure most readers of ***ATG*** will recall.

These days, publishers (and others) at the conference are busily presenting their new online offerings; most, if not all, are Web-based and designed to serve users at their desktops backed by institutional sponsorship and funding (i.e., library subscriptions). It is now possible to browse the offerings from literally hundreds of publishers on the Web.

My own observations are that their offerings, once past the opening screens and logons, are remarkably similar to one another. This fact could be a feature of the "standardization" effect of the Web, or could be just a byproduct of the nature of journals — most of which are displayed first by title, then issue number, then issue contents, article abstract and finally the article itself. The print paradigm is living well on the Web, by my observation.

There are, in fairness, several important distinctions between the Web offerings from publishers and their printed versions. 1) Many online versions offer preprint display options — a great addition. 2) Some online offerings include hot links from citations — another great addition for users. 3) All appear to be handling illustrations, graphics and grey scaling with dexterity (and beauty). 4) Some of the jazzier versions (i.e., Springer's latest ejournals) also include multi-media, imbedded references and reproductions of models with cad-cam type abilities — again, features which users will love.

But speaking of primary publishers, the winning debate for 1996 was clearly "aggregated vs. standalone" resources, referring to the role of the middleman and that of the primary publisher in the ultimate provision of electronic information. This debate is one which I predict will carry into 1997, though given the speed at which new options and services are appearing, the debate could be substantially different or even resolved by this time next year. New players and new models of information provision, all relevant to collection development, are appearing rapidly. Some of these new players even sent representatives to Charleston, making them worthy of mention in this article.

Aggregators

The case for the aggregator is simple: no user wants to search the information haystack a title at a time, or a publisher at a time. Users want to search the world of information, retrieving just the best and most relevant pieces. Herein lies the challenge and the opportunity for our profession, and several entities, both for-profit and non-profit, are hoping to seize the day. I think there are at least three categories of aggregators right now.

Group 1. Aggregators who load all the data in one place.

This group believes that, in order to offer truly powerful multi-resource searching and delivery, along with desired levels of control over access, the data must be resident on a single system. Examples of this model include:

— **Infonautic's Electric Library**, which loads the fulltext of some 700 journals, 100 newspapers, standard reference materials, photo archives, maps, Cliff Notes, Shakespeare plays, etc., into one database, adds a natural language search interface and a very sophisticated search engine which understands synonyms, proximity and other factors, to create a fantastic tool for students and other general information consumers.

— **OVID**'s biomedical and other collection products, which add fulltext, abstracts and images from many publishers within a given field and completes the picture with its own powerful search engine.

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— **OCLC's Electronic Collections Online** (ECO), which similarly loads full files from multiple publishers and features archival files as well.

— **CatchWord**, which I include in this category even though it has some differences from the others. Notably, CatchWord actually stores the data in several locations, providing back-up and speeding system response.

Both CatchWord and OCLC offer conversion services for publishers, in addition to their aggregator role for libraries and their users. Other services may also fit this model, but those listed are offered as an indicative, not an exhaustive list.

Group 2. Aggregators who link to fulltext.

— **Blackwell's Journal Navigator**, which I understand creates a multi-publisher index including abstracts, but ultimately links to the publisher's own image files, offering various mechanisms for delivery (i.e., PDF, standard doc delivery, etc.).

— **Swetsnet**, which is still in development, but is intended to operate in a similar fashion.

— **Dialog@CARL,** which will make its debut at ALA Midwinter in February 1997, and will include links to either fulltext or document suppliers (notably UnCover and KRI SourceOne) from the Dialog indexes.

Many other firms, including EBSCO, are busy creating compelling products to serve this aggregator need. In 1997, those of us who are Charleston attendees should pay close attention to all these developments.

Model 3. Targeted aggregated products.

There are several notable offerings either available today or just emerging which are aimed less at the library and more at the end user of the information.

— **KRI ScienceBase**, a Web interface to multiple Dialog files designed for the end-user scientist, with links to fulltext and document delivery.

— **ScienceDirect**, Elsevier's powerful entrant, which will feature the fulltext of their 1200 journals with Embase and Geobase (as well as other indexes) used as first-line indexing tools. ScienceDirect will also be available to other publishers, who may include their works. Availability is announced for first quarter 1997.

— **BioMedNet**, an online "club" or community, focused on those scientists in the field of biological medicine. BioMedNet includes online meeting rooms, a job-line and other humanistic services in addition to citations and fulltext from publishers in the field. Of note, BioMedNet intends to fund itself through advertising — and will "rent" online meeting rooms to drug companies or others who wish to use the "facilities" for market research, etc.

Other Options

There are other endeavors worth mention which don't fit neatly into my proposed models.

— **JSTOR**, a project initially funded by the Mellon Foundation, which is digitizing ten core scholarly journals in the field of economics and history. This project focuses on the back runs of these journals and anticipates distributing copies of this electronic "collection" to interested libraries.

— **CADMUS Digital Solutions**, which offers its "Journals-At-Home" service through its Internet host which houses journals published by the American Heart Association, the American Society for Investigative Pathology, the American Society of Microbiology as well as the *Journal of Immunology*.

Trends and Issues

All of these new solutions and the hundreds being developed by primary and secondary publishers are of relevance to collection development — all of which means life is becoming more confusing not less so. However, we must remember that we are in an exciting time of transition. It is healthy for a number of players to vie for the library's business, as well as the end user's.

Over time, those products and services that you select and do business with will thrive and the others will disappear, a pattern familiar to anyone who has studied nature or markets. It is most important that you remember that the library has money to spend and that end users are not interested in paying from their pockets. You are in the driver's seat. As an editorial aside, I think we need to understand quickly how important we really are as librarians; the profession needs to stop worrying about fading from existence and get busy filling the millions of holes which exist in the services we offer to users.

Enough of the soapbox. Several trends were in evidence in 1996 and are worth mentioning.

1. Licensing of electronic information is the model of choice. Transaction pricing, while appropriate and beneficial for some areas (particularly document delivery), does not fit the needs of publishers (for guaranteed revenues) or libraries (for fixed budgets).

2. Consortia represent "the new buying power" for scholarly information. As we noted above, this is a time of transition and opportunities to negotiate are highest during these times of uncertainty. The official or unofficial consortia who are now negotiating with online suppliers and publishers are breaking new ground for both buyers and sellers.

3. Publishers will be wise to work with as many aggregators and channels as possible. We do not yet know and should not limit the user's chosen path to the same piece of information.

1996 was a fabulous year for all of us involved in collection development. I maintain that we sit in the "cat bird's seat" — let's see who comes to visit us in 1997!