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Issues in Vendor-Library Relations

It's the Same New Song

Column Editors: Judy Webster (University of Tennessee) and
Barry Fast (Academic Book Center)

Acquiring Electronic Information and Electronic Access: Impacts on an Acquisitions Librarian

by Judy Webster

First they started coming on disks in book pockets, and then they were arriving as independent titles on disks in boxes or on magnetic tape. Next they were CD-ROMS and now, they are everywhere. They are datafiles, and they have become a part of my everyday work life. Each electronic format provides a slightly different challenge. I have learned to deal with questions of location, treatment, storage, archiving, and licensing. The first

question to be answered was what to do with datafiles on floppy disks as accompanying material to standard paper texts. After we answered the question that we wanted to keep the materials together, we learned to be creative in re-packaging many texts into containers suitable for shelving in the regular stack area.

One of the most difficult of the electronic formats is the data we acquire on magnetic tape from ICPSR. I began acquiring datafiles from the Inter-university Consortium of Political Research (ICPSR) in 1990 with the premise that I would treat them as normal orders. Each title we order has a record in ACQ in addition to our membership record where we pay our an-

nual dues. I found it challenging to organize and keep track of titles that I cannot see. I can hold the magnetic tapes in my hand but I cannot determine their contents. The University Computing Center stores the data for us and our users. I found that having the order records available online in our acquisitions system is a good decision for tracking purposes because all I have to pass along to the Cata-

Carroll Interview

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brary may want to take a CD home. Libraries will have to have multiple playback units to reference information electronically. Electronic media will have more and more of an impact.

There will still be room for books. In the last 10 years, as our "paperless" society has grown, paper usage has increased 51%. My products will always have a print version that you can carry and pass around.

ATG: *What specific plans do you have for new products and technologies?*

TC: We are still feeling around for what to do. During ALA, 15 small independent publishers got together to talk about what to do about the Internet and the outernet (Compuserve, etc). Will we as publishers be able to go on the Internet commercially and will people be able to find what's on it? Right now, it's a very scattered shot type of enterprise.

We are doing 3 CD products but the only one I want to talk about is a product for a highly specialized audience — aerospace, electronics and computer manufacturers. It is not a broad-based product. We are trying to carve out our niche. We are hoping to do one for government and hoping to sell it for less than \$100.

We will do more CDs by year end.

CDs used to be marketed by the manufacturer who wanted to sell the player and the content was secondary. Now a new wave of publisher is getting into CDs. Right now, I think that some publishers are charging more for the medium than the content. Buyers aren't looking at content, and they can't evaluate it because in many cases it's too big and too complex. The question is what value has been added by the publisher. Buyers have to find a way to distinguish quality of comparative products on CD. You can have wonderful pricing, but if the data is not accurate, what good is it?

ATG: *Do we need a Ralph Nader of library media products?*

TC: Yes. I would say we need a consumer reports arm. The subject of library reviews came up in Miami and every publisher who was there had horrendous examples of bad reviews in journals. It would be wonderful to get Ralph Nader on it, but he is interested in GATT right now. I think that product reviews will be much more critical in the future. We need to know not just when good reviews are published, but when reviews are inaccurate.

ATG: *Has the Feist ruling had an impact on you and your business? Are you nervous about losing your data because you can't really claim copyright to it?*

TC: No, not at all. By the time people copy our data, it's out of date. The information we deal with is not static. The only impact is that a competitor doesn't have to do all the preparatory work to collecting the data. It takes us time to develop a new product and competitors don't have to go through the developmental process.

ATG: *I'm kind of proud that we have gotten through this whole interview without talking about O.J. Simpson. Are you a sportsman? How about hobbies and reading?*

TC: I play a lot of tennis and love to watch Wimbledon. Everybody in Washington loves the Redskins. My main hobbies other than children are charitable activities. I read business journals and my share of newspapers. I am in the middle of reading the **Haldeman Diaries** which I thought would be boring but they are quite fascinating. I like Irish history and just read Flanagan's **End of the Affair**. ☞

Tom Carroll says that he is getting married sometime in the fall and that he knows that Charleston is a great place to bring his new wife. He says he was last here 40 years ago, on a rocking chair at the Yacht Club which is still there now. Let's look for him at the 1994 Charleston Conference. — KS

logging Department is a paper description of the contents of the tape and a printed copy of our order record. Once a year, we receive a list of data files from the computing center that they are storing on our behalf. The ICPSR data are also available in CD-ROM and through FTP. We acquired one data file by FTP and will probably do more in the coming year.

Acquiring CD-ROMS offers two additional types of challenges. The first is negotiating **license agreements** and the second is **disc management**. License agreements are continually evolving, the proverbial moving target. Just when I think that I have worked out all the disagreements between the publisher or vendor and the university counsel representative, the publisher revises the license agreement, and we must begin all over again. Most CD-ROMS are governed by some type of license agreement that ranges from the "shrink-wrap" type to a full written agreement that must be signed by a vice president of the University.

These license agreements also involve disc management to some extent. For some titles that are updated, publishers require that we return the superseded disc. In addition, each title is priced differently according to the number of simultaneous users and the networking situation. I created a spreadsheet to assist me in keeping track of the CD-ROM titles we have and their status regarding license agreements. Apparently, it has become a helpful tool for others because I often get requests for a copy of the latest version. I am now distributing it automatically to a list of interested colleagues, but I did not create it for that purpose. In general, I try to fit the acquisition of electronic information into the mainstream and avoid reliance upon secondary supporting systems. I look forward to the time when my CD-ROM management spreadsheet will not be needed.

Negotiating license agreements for CD-ROMs occupies a substantial portion of my time. For the past three years, we have purchased significant numbers of subscriptions to citation databases in this format. We currently maintain subscriptions to 53 CD-ROM titles, and approximately 30 of these are networked. Since most of our license agreements must be reviewed by university counsel before signature by a university system-level official, I play a liaison role between the publisher or vendor and the university administration.

I am encouraged. License agreements are getting better! Most titles now have networked options priced by simultaneous users and site licenses rather than by number of machines or buildings. That's defi-

nately the way to go, in my opinion. Controlling the use of electronic information by building is irrelevant and too restrictive. It negates the great advantage of having the data in machine-readable form. Why should we have to require our users to access data from certain buildings or even specific machines on campus? I can understand and fully support publishers' concerns about the misuse and unauthorized use of data, but I believe that librarians now have the capability of controlling and monitoring access to electronic data in a way that should alleviate most of the concerns I have heard expressed.

I must also maintain an awareness of our hardware configuration for the CD-ROM network. I work closely with library systems staff to determine whether we will have enough individual drives to contain the number of CD-ROM discs that we plan to order each year, and just as soon as I think I know we do, one of our CD-ROM titles already on subscription will expand the backfile coverage and the number of discs we are currently managing will change.

For the Libraries' Scholar's Workstation Project, I gained experience in negotiating license agreements for several online services our users will access over the Internet. The Scholar's Workstation Project was funded by NEH to explore the feasibility of mini-electronic branch libraries in three remote locations on campus. We selected several online services to offer as part of this project — **Dow Jones News Retrieval, NewsNet, CARL Uncover, Faxon Finder, Genuine Article, and LegiSlate**. Acquiring these services

meant that I had to convey to publishers a full description of our networked environment and various types of assurances of how we would be monitoring use and who would be accessing the data.

Acquiring electronic journals is another area of responsibility that involves many of these factors: license agreements, hardware, and software. The easiest ones to handle are the pointers to a file held elsewhere. Titles we want to provide our users on the gopher just get added to the index with a pointer to wherever the data is archived. It's those pesky ones that cost money and require signed license agreements that we are still debating how to handle.

We are constantly working on improving the ordering and receiving processes for electronic materials. It is still a goal to make them routine, perhaps as routine as the average journal title ever is. I don't envision electronic materials becoming as routine as books, but I hope that I'm proved wrong on this one.

Electronic materials have changed my work life. I find them interesting and challenging, but the skills I have called upon to acquire them are ones that I was already using regularly. I have just expanded them. Communications and work flow management are needed in acquiring books. A knowledge of copyright law and the application within libraries is something that all acquisitions librarians should already know. It's true that I've had to learn PC skills and develop knowledge of our campus network environment, but I would have had to do that just to exist comfortably in my organization. ☛

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