

November 2013

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Recommended Citation

Crismond, Linda F. (1994) "Media Minder / The Electronic Challenge," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 6: Iss. 4, Article 31.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.1660>

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Media Minder

The Electronic Challenge

Column Editor: **Linda F. Crismond** (Vice President for Public Relations, Professional Media Service Corp.)



The most dramatic change in libraries in the last decade of this century is the shift from the purchase of an in print collection to access to electronic information. We have come a long way from the installation of a stand-alone circulation system to the integration of automated systems in all aspects of the operation. By 2000, there will be few libraries, even in remote areas, who do not have the capability to connect electronically.

The Urban Libraries Council recently surveyed its members on collection development and asked the members to project the mix of expenditures among paper, electronic, and audio/visual formats to the year 2000. Although these large public libraries felt that the percentage of expenditures on materials would remain relatively constant within the operating budget (from 15% to 15.9%) over the ten years, they did see a dramatic shift away from paper. In 1990, paper acquisitions represented 86% of the budget with electronic materials being 4% and audio/visual being 10%. At the end of the decade, this mix will change to 69% print, 18% electronic, and 13% audio/visual.

The more aggressive respondents see paper materials being less than half of what they purchase. All reference materials would be acquired in electronic form, whenever possible, and the periodicals collection would be eliminated with service provided through document delivery systems. The increase in a/v is a projected continuation of the current popularity of these materials. In fact, audio books are the fastest growing service in public libraries today.

The projection of electronic services, however, is not based on past experience but rather on an anticipation of the future demand and availability. Electronic acquisitions is defined as both the purchase of a product and of the rights to access a database. Public libraries have not incorporated electronic services into the library as rapidly as have school and academic libraries. Public libraries tend to react to demand, and the demand has not been there. But, as every issue of **Time** magazine has some citation to the Information Superhighway and, as sales go wild in computer stores for CD-ROM players and multimedia machines, we are beginning to hear from the public. Two years ago there was much speculation about the role of the library and librarians in the electronic world. Now, all the public librarians I talk with are offering public access or have a vision and plan of how to transition (transform) their library.

Another survey, conducted by one of the major database distributors, Information Access Company (IAC), indicated that 59% of all libraries added to their CD-ROM subscriptions in 1993. The survey reported over 800 responses and showed academic libraries increased their CD-ROM subscriptions at a higher rate, 62%, than public libraries, 55%.

Consider these consumer trends as identified in a study on Economics of Multimedia Title Publishing published by SIMBA Information and reported in the July 18, 1994 **Publishers Weekly**. Personal computer-based CD-ROM drives will increase from 5.4 million at the end of 1993 to 10.5 million by the end of 1994. Consumer multimedia devices are forecasted to jump from 1.4 million to 3.1 million in the year. And, who are the leaders in the home use market? The projections are Sega Genesis CD from 950,000 to 1.9 million (primarily used for games); CD-I from 300,000 to 600,000; 3DO players from 30,000 to 400,000; and

Kodak Photo CD from 175,000 to 275,000.

While most of this equipment is used now to support games and entertainment, it represents a large enough equipment base to be attractive to the publishers of educational material. The multiplicity of formats and the lack of standardization and compatibility remains as the challenge both to the individual consumer and the library.

There are plenty of products from which to choose. The SIMBA study reports that sales of multimedia titles will increase 77% in the year from an estimated \$222 million in 1993 to \$394 million in 1994. Last year, there was a cartoon of a publisher at the Frankfurt Book Fair in the electronic products section proudly displaying on a near empty table their one CD-ROM title. This year, the typical large publisher has established an electronic division and put a vice president in charge of it. We are even seeing the first of "remaindered" CD titles with the price of the earlier versions of encyclopedias and directories falling like a rock.

The acquisition of electronic media introduces a new range of issues: how to buy it; where to find the best selection of titles; the lack of availability of reviews; equipment requirements and support service agreements; and cataloging and processing questions. Perhaps the most challenging, however, is the price you pay and the usage agreement which must be signed.

In the Summer, 1994, **Library Administration & Management** Edward A. Warro from Loyola University, Chicago, summarizes many of the issues in his article, "What Have We Been Signing? A Look at Database Licensing Agreements." He advises that librarians must work with their attorneys before signing the agreements. "Gone are the days when librarians could legally provide unrestricted access to information sources," he concludes.

Both libraries and publishers are new to establishing a fair price for a product in an environment where there can be multiple remote users. One model is to pay per usage, like libraries have done with OCLC for many years. Another model is to establish a subscription price. With databases being offered as an information service as part of the public access catalog, publishers, however, are more insistent on a site license agreement that recognizes their potential lost sales and establishes a price based on the number of real or potential users, stations, and/or building locations. In video services, multiple viewers are often taken into account by a "public performance rights" price that can be three times higher than the regular prices. For electronic media, no such easy solution has been found.

It is clear that acquisitions librarians are faced with many questions as the mix of materials in the collection changes. We will have new partners and new sources of supply. Legal considerations will become more prominent. It will be essential to be familiar with the library's computer equipment configurations and usage patterns. The rest of the decade is a time of dramatic change and growth in library services, and acquisitions librarians must be a part of the planning team. ☞