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Not Fit For Print

Gingrich in Cyberspace and the Architecture of Information

by Tony Leisner (Dawsons)

In case you missed it, this January, House Speaker **Newt Gingrich** held what may someday be viewed as an historic meeting. Entitled **Democracy in a Virtual America**, the conference brought together a sampling of influential people to start defining the political and social ramifications of cyberspace. The meeting was covered by political reporters and according to **Fortune Magazine**, one of them had to ask how to spell "byte," so the tech level wasn't too high.

As a librarian, you should know about this conference and understand implications of the outcomes. The participants endorsed a previous document called "**A Magna Carta for The Knowledge Age**." Never heard of it, you say? Me either. Probably because of all the noise the traffic on the information highway is making.

The document is important for librarians and users of cyberspace. It calls for deregulation of telephone and cable companies so they can share lines and bring you interactive multimedia. Small phone companies already can carry both voice and video and are engaged in limited trials. It suggests eliminating copyright protection for many forms of "knowledge." The document further asks for financial standards for the information age so that depreciation cycles can match reality where technology becomes obsolete so quickly. It was also Gingrich who brought the **Librarian of Congress** to the forefront on the first day of his speakership. The press has a long tradition of not reporting favorably on Republican initiatives, and you might have to go looking for coverage of this event, but you should know about it. Big business and politicians are beginning to see the benefit of working together, and you will be effected.

And speaking of big business, **Bill Gates** provoked me no end when he asked the question, "what if information were free?" I had to stop and think about information and what kind is already free and how it is constructed and who gets a bite out of the bucks involved. Information from the library is not free. It has a cost as any librarian who has wrestled with a budget knows all too well.

Is information free if it is an advertisement and the cost is only deferred to the

purchase event? Is it free if no one is willing to be responsible for the content or validity? That would make it valueless but certainly not free if the end cost was a bad decision based on bad information.

Since I didn't just fall off the turnip truck, my instincts tell me that if the information is free then Bill is planning on making money off some process related to the information. Perhaps the best way to analyze Bill's question starts with an understanding of some basic traits of information. Let's call this the Architecture of Information since it forms the design of information structures.

For simplicity's sake, we can break information into four groups. **Data, text, sound and images.** Data is the x's and o's that make up statistical, accounting and other numeric bases. Text, of course, represents the articles, letters, documents, reports, journals and explanatory bases. Sound is radio, personal conversation, tapes and recordings and warnings like sirens are information as well. Images are pictures, graphics, movies, television, signs without words, scanned documents. And now you see where things start to overlap.

What, for example, is a scanned page of the **Wall Street Journal** which includes a sketched image of a person? Text? Image? An image of an image? Is a siren and flashing lights a multimedia information system? Of course it is, but to describe it as just information is not enough because it asks us to do something and this leads us from type of information to functions of information.

This is where the rubber hits the road and money is made and lost. Once again, we will use four categories for this discussion. **Generation, processing, storage and transmission.** Generation is the raw creation of original content information. This is the area where so many are concerned about copyrights and permissions as a source of future revenue. Movie studios are sold for fortunes based on the value of their archives of original copyright protected films.

Movies combine sound and image and are readily converted or processed into other formats. Converting a 16mm movie into a video cassette means that someone has changed the format of the original

information but has not changed the content. At this point, two functions have taken place, generation and processing. But these are just costs so far and no money has been made. Once the movie is converted to video it still has to be stored somewhere and then the content has to be transmitted from the film to images and sound that the user can understand. That may be the role of the television station or your own VCR in which case you are engaged in self-service transmission.

At each stage of the four functions someone had a chance to make money but the flow doesn't start until money begins changing hands, and this is at the transmission or delivery stage. This is exactly where and how **Bill Gates** intends to win the hearts, minds and wallets of millions of people. Let us suppose you are a user of **Quicken**, the world's best selling software package for money management. Gates just bought the company that makes Quicken because Quicken enables users to pay bills electronically.

A bill is information about how much you owe. A check is information about how much you have agreed to pay. By using Quicken you can also record the amount you are paying in your financial records and budget so you are doing the following: Creating information, processing the information, and storing it on your system. When you pay the bill electronically, you are also transmitting the information.

Microsoft Corporation is creating their own network which will likely become standard with new versions of DOS or Windows and guess which network you will be able to transmit your electronic payment through in order to pay your bill? Guess who will get a little fee from someone for each of these transmissions? Microsoft isn't alone in understanding the role of transmission. **American Express** and **America Online** are teaming up to get in on the game and there will be others as the quest for dollars continues.

Speaking of fees for transmission . . . the phone companies who have traditionally transmitted sound and then later text and data, now want to transmit images.

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Interesting Problems

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Conclusion

Writing collection development policy statements are still a beneficial use of a librarian's time because they force the selector to thoroughly think through the issues and put down on paper what they propose will bind their decisions. However, as technology and user needs change, policy statements will have to be revised

and what seems to be the most reasonable policy today will become unreasonable tomorrow. ☹

¹ Adapted from "Collection Development Policy Statements for Electronic Resources," presented at the 1994 Charleston Conference, The Savage Marketplace, Charleston, SC, November 1994.

² Dan Hazen, "Collection Development Policies in the Information Age," *Col-*

lege and Research Libraries, 56 (January 1995): 29-31.

³ Association of Research Libraries, Office of Management Services, *Manual for the North American Inventory of Research Library Collections*, Revised Edition, (Washington D.C.: ARL, OMS, 1988), 19.

⁴ Nancy Powell and Mary Bushing, *WLN Collection Assessment Manual*, 4th Edition, (Lacey, Washington, 1992), 32-33.

International Dateline

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libraries and to electronic document delivery; it will also initiate discussions with rights owners on possible solutions to the problems found. The Steering Group will be selected from amongst members of EBLIDA, preferably with copyright experience and with a connection to one of the 12 selected Telematics projects within the Libraries Programme. Selection will be subject to approval by the European

Commission. The Steering Group will meet three times during the life of the project. The first meeting took place in January 1995. Discussions with rights owners will follow the third (and final) Steering Group meeting, which will take place in June of 1995. The Steering Group will be comprised as follows: one person will be selected from each of the following groups: University library sector, National library sector, Public library sector, Research library, Other intermediary, Professional lawyer, Representative of Euro-

pean Commission. The first workshops have already taken place. The first was held in Portugal on the 2nd of November, 1994 and the second in Norway on the 1st December, 1994.

For more details about EBLIDA and its activities, please contact Mr. Dan MacCarthy at the EBLIDA Head Office. Address: P.O. Box 43300 2504 AH The Hague, Tel: (31+) 70 309 0608, Fax (31+) 70 309 0708; Email: Eblida@nblc.nl ☹

Editor's Note: Don't miss the contribution by another of our International Correspondents, Gita Gunatilleke, "Electronic Resources in New Zealand University Libraries," this issue, page 20 — KS

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The cable companies who do transmit images and sound now want to get a piece of the data and text business, and they both want movies on demand. If they do succeed in getting together to provide information on demand, then the stream of money flows from the creator to the processor to the storage and access provider to the transmitter. But if copyright is not readily available for all types of information then one less party gets paid in the stream. And if the transmitter also is the storage place for the information, then that player gets the whole thing.

So now you can understand why the phone companies want to buy the content owners and why Microsoft wants to own the network transmission capabilities. Ameritech wants to be involved in controlling more than just the phone lines. Blockbuster wants to get closer to a cable service and Disney wants to learn how to create (process) new versions of their content. Information, like the water in Lake Michigan may be free, but if you want it delivered to your door twenty miles away from the lake, then a lot of money will change hands before your thirst is quenched. ☹