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Collections & Technology Trends in Academic Libraries 1996/97

by Corrie Marsh (Ovid Technologies, Inc.) <cmars@ovid.com>

These are just a few observations and trends I seen from "on the road" this year:

Observation: It is now almost impossible to isolate collections decisions from information technology choices.

Trend: The formation of electronic resources committees composed of reference librarians, collection managers, and often systems staff. In combination these groups can effectively (and often efficiently) evaluate network technology, search engines, and budget considerations.

Observation: The majority of college and research libraries have a shared vision for sophisticated client/server systems for high performance, wide-area access to collections and databases.

Trend: Two-fold; first, even though the libraries realize the performance and customization benefits of local, wide-area servers, they are often without the staff to maintain these systems, or reluctant to do so. Instead, many select online central services which provide aggregated resources and maintain access systems. Second, academic budget dollars for developing high speed WANs continue to go to campus computing efforts. Those libraries with close relations to computing benefit from support for local systems, while others without this support are only able to expand remote access through private funds and grants.

Observation: While we're on academic computing trends, we're seeing more and more library directors turn technocrat.

Trend: Actually, what is happening is not a new trend; it began in the late 1970's and early 80's, but has taken another decade to catch-on. Campus administrators have discovered that the library is more often the center of technical innovations. As a result, we are again seeing a new wave of directors or automation directors becoming campus administrators. There is a secondary trend here, or a warning if you will — in some smaller libraries the directors have been losing their leadership to campus computing.

Observation: The Charleston Report (v.1#1) stated this Summer that the majority of library materials budgets would continue to be spent on printed books and

journals well into the 21st Century. The same report also documented that 10.5% of the SMU budget when to electronic services, as well as predicted that 25% of materials budgets will be spent on electronic resources by the year 2000.

Trend: Once libraries add up the costs of the continuing upgrade of equipment, software investments for enhancing and integrating access systems (such as Z39.50 capabilities), in addition to the increasing demand for databases and fulltext resources, I believe this proportion could be even higher.

Observation: The continuing debate over access vs. ownership...

Trend: Many academic librarians have become experts at comparative cost analysis for access systems versus collections management. Basically, these studies evaluate the costs of journals online versus maintaining the on-shelf or CD-ROM subscription. The users' demand for delivery in any format is the prevailing factor. As libraries move toward the access model, both for indices and journals, the newest trend is to integrate these systems, as well as supplement them with document delivery services.

Observation: Document Delivery Services — mediated or end-user oriented?

Trend: Not consistent; it depends primarily on who is paying. Both the librarian and end-user agree that it is important to put the means of sending an electronic request at the finger-tips of the end-user, but this is where the scenario becomes quite complicated. If the end-user is allowed to automatically order any document, while the library absorbs all costs, the legitimate concern is the needless duplication that will take place for materials that are already available on-the-shelf, or even other electronic resources. We are dealing with the Nintendo (or is that Sega?) generation here — they are going to "push the button" before looking in the stacks, and it's not true that the majority are going to have Dad's credit card to pay with. On the other hand, there are thousands of new remote users who are more than willing to pay for articles delivered to their remote desktop for the time savings. The library as a mediator only increases already over-burdened interlibrary loan and document delivery services, regardless of who pays for the document.

All is not lost, though. There is an electronically mediated solution. The key is for linking the library holdings in all formats with the electronic resources. The trend will actually be information technology systems that not only aggregate all electronic resources, but also link dynamically to bibliographic holdings data to "alert" the end-user where to "connect" to the document.

Observation: Academia is outsourcing everything.

Trend: Libraries are outsourcing any activities in order to control costs and obtain fixed expenses. This trend started with catalog records (the uncontrolled expense of searching for bibliographic records) and has now boomed. Libraries are seeking full-service vendors who select, supply, provide catalog copy, and consolidate payments. Further, libraries are seeking agents for imaging, article delivery, network administration, and licensing. The costs of selecting, technical processing, and computing services have become unmanageable. In the past five years, I have only talked with one administrator who takes the time to individually select and negoti-

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ate costs of each item for the collection, and none of these were cataloged. To back up a few steps, some of the more intriguing outsourcing trends involve technology. Several institutions have now outsourced their entire campus computing activities, as well as staffing. Not surprisingly, the reactions are quite mixed. Imaging, digitization, and licensing are "in". Scanning, storage, and transmission are the important services under consideration. Licensing services, especially by database aggregators who provide licensing agreements for multiple providers are probably the "hottest" trend (credit to **Cliff Lynch** for his comments at Charleston last year). These aggregate services alleviate the need for multiple database licenses, negotiate costs, and provide services in one contract. At present, it appears the best service to libraries is full service (try finding that at the local gas station). In other words, librarians will pump their own gas, but they are more than willing to outsource processing and licensing.

Observation: Users want electronic full-text and graphics.

Trend: Libraries are buying fulltext and graphics and want more Which, in turn, is affected by:

Database providers and publisher trends: While the demand exists for providers to get more and more text, publishers continue to be guarded — for good reason since most libraries cannot afford to purchase the print subscription in addition to the electronic text. Publisher flexibility will be the fundamental element; those that can offer their publications through any electronic means, through themselves or secondary providers, will have the largest sales. The traditional large publishers are doing so as evidenced by their flexibility to meet this demand. They are offering their publications through their own access systems, as well as licensing subscription through aggregators and secondary providers; thus, they are maintaining sales of their publications in academic libraries. The actual licensing standards are another inconsistent area. The successful publishers will be those that can offer affordable consortia packages, site licenses, and even small user levels depending on what fits the academic customer best.

Observation: There are ever-increasing efforts for consortia license agreements.

Trend: In fact, consortia arrangements have become so entangled that a given library might actually belong to six or more consortia. These may range from neighborhood to local to state or nationwide organizations. One of the latest patterns I have seen is institutions breaking away from formal organizations and forming "unofficial" groups. Another is large statewide projects on the behalf of all schools, public libraries, academic institutions, and often including corporate libraries. One thing is for certain, there are huge cost savings in licensing electronic resources for two or more libraries over single library purchasing; in fact, the more libraries involved, the greater the savings.

Trend: The World Wide Web and Windows are the emerging interface preferences in all libraries.

Observation: I have experienced some amazing observations about this trend; they basically come down to one thing — terminals vs. The Web. In reality there are many libraries with hundreds of terminals left over from their first generation ILS. Those who are just buying their first systems or even the next one are at a better advantage since they are purchasing PC's with the new project. This year, I have not been in any library with a new ILS which is not installing PC's in all public access areas with the intention of running Web interfaces for all information technology systems. It is a frustration for these other academic libraries with their outdated terminals. I have actually seen an article by an university president promoting the Web, while that same campus library has 200 terminals in public services. Another story was about the librarian who said the library removed Netscape from all reference workstations because the students preferred this to the reference network.... I don't want to beat a dead horse, but "dumb" terminals do make interesting flower holders.

Observation: In the corresponding column, Kim Long makes an excellent point about the skills and knowledge people bring to service. Information technology is expanding library service.

Trend: Technology is an opportunity for academic libraries to increase public recognition and actively promote their services. Expanded networks and growing electronic resources are reaching more users. Users are now able to contact the library from anywhere at anytime. Their continuing praise and the administration's continued support are the proof of this successful service.