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On The Street

The Place of CD-ROMs in Library Collections — A Survey of ATG Subscribers

by Barbara C. Dean (Fairfax County Public Library), Linda Albright (Winthrop University), Eamon T. Fennessy (The Copyright Group), Katy Ginanni (EBSCO), Anne Jennings (Sinkler & Boyd), and Kathern J. Miraglia (Catholic University of America)

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For the April issue of ATG last year, we asked subscribers if their libraries were buying CD-ROM products for patron use, what selection criteria were used, and what products were the most heavily used. At that time, everyone polled said they were buying CD-ROMs for their library, and provided a long and varied list of products heavily used. Although all respondents described the selection criteria used, only one person said CD-ROMs were included in their written collection development policy.

For this issue, we decided to revisit the use of CD-ROMs to see how the place of these products in library collections has evolved. We talked with 22 people and asked them the following questions: Have you increased or decreased the number of CD-ROMs in your library in the last year? By about how many? Are CD-ROMs included in your collection development policy? How are they being made available to library users? Are they standalones or networked? Are CD-ROMs used to distribute information, preserve, it, or both?

Two respondents said their library had about the same number of CD-ROM products now as they did a year ago. The other people reported increases between two and 338 titles with most libraries adding fewer than 50 titles. In some cases, the increases were due in part to the production of government documents on CD-ROM. Two librarians mentioned the high price of CD-ROMs as a deterrent to buying more while two other libraries have solved this problem at least partially by participating in regional cooperative programs.

Ten people reported CD-ROMs are included in their written collection development policies, a significant change from one year ago. Nine libraries do not include this format in their policies. One person noted his library's policy includes electronic journals some of which are purchased on CD-ROM. Another person reported his library's policy is subject specific rather than format specific making the inclusion of CD-ROMs inappropriate. Three librarians intend to add CD-ROMs to their policies shortly.

As to whether CD-ROMs are provided as standalone resources or networked, sixteen libraries provide both. In one case, reference sources are networked and government documents are standalone. One person noted the networked CD-ROMs in their library were more popular and more heavily used than the standalone. Four libraries only offer standalone now, but two libraries hope to network their libraries' products in the next year or so. Two libraries network all their CD-ROMs. Three libraries make some products available for circulation, another noted some users can dial in to the products.

The respondents were evenly split between the use of CD-ROMs for the distribution of information and for both distribution and preservation. One library uses CD-ROMs to preserve the indexes and abstracts they no longer purchase in print while another uses the format to preserve a few full-image databases. Several people voiced concerns about the format as a suitable means of preservation. No one yet knows how long information will be available on CD-ROM. If the technology changes, and I'm sure it will, will libraries have to keep the currently used discs and players in order to ensure the information will be accessible in the future?

The following people were among this month's respondents:
Marian Blecker, Health Sciences Library, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Linda Carr, Boston University
Peter Crosby, University of New Hampshire
Joyce Durant, Francis Marion University
Patricia Henderson, University of Alabama
Lee Krieger, Gettysburg College
Dennis Lambert, Villanova University
Yvonne Lev, Towson State University
Frederick Lynden, Brown University
Christina McCawley, West Chester University
Ann McHugo, Dartmouth College
Mary Munroe, Georgia State University
Ofelia Rabassa, City University of New York Graduate Center
Marilyn Ramsey, University of San Diego
Darshane Razzaghi, University of Texas-Pan American
Steve Richardson, Furman University
Mary Sawyer, Williamsburg Regional Library
Becky Sheffield, Ball State University
Loles Solis, Appalachian State University
Karen Summerhill, Georgetown University Law Library
Kathy Vaejabadian, Los Alamos National Laboratory
Joe Weber, Christopher Newport University

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