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Acquiring Minds Want to Know — CAUSE

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Going to a conference not dedicated to libraries can be daunting. Will I know anyone there? What should I attend? How do I know what programs will be good and relevant? What do I really want to get out of this conference?

In 1996 I attended **EDUCOM** for the first time and found that I didn't have a focus and went to meetings that sounded interesting or relevant. Sometimes the meetings were about libraries, sometimes they weren't. It was an interesting conference, but I felt that I didn't get as much out of it as I could have.

This year I went to **CAUSE** in **ORLANDO FL, DECEMBER 3-5**, for the first time to see how it differed from **EDUCOM** (at the **CAUSE** meeting the two organizations voted to merge next year). The content seemed similar and some of the same attendees and vendors were there. Typical topics covered campus information policies, applying new technology to teaching and learning, intellectual property, mergers of computer centers and libraries, improving customer service and support, Web publishing, and the nature of information. Concurrent sessions addressed practical applications and gave valuable information about the speakers' triumphs, trials, and errors from which others could learn.

Librarians were there in small numbers as attendees and presenters. Some of their presentations included the work at **Virginia Tech** on their electronic scholarly publishing activities, developing the digital library at Michigan, and creating instructional materials on the Web.

The keynote speakers ranged a bit more freely in providing entertainment and in giving opinions. **Helen Samuels** of MIT defined information as forms (activities that generate information) and types (publications, catalogs, research) and as "an asset that needs to be managed." She urged everyone to clarify ownership issues and assign responsibilities for the custodianship of information. She viewed custodians as the creators AND the users of information.

Tom Davenport of the **University of Texas** discussed "infoculture," as opposed to "technoculture," and asked, has it improved, and who's in charge? In his view infoculture is the water and technoculture is the plumbing. He stated

that access and availability were less important issues than attention, appetite and appreciation.

Closing speaker **Dennis Snow** of the **Disney Corporation** addressed excellence and management in terms of developing a storyboard, where the leader is the keeper of the story and its standards. (Apparently this is how Walt Disney operated.) He advised organizations to promote "plussing," whereby their "cast members" (i.e. employees) "stay on model" while injecting creativity and detail to the story. The highest priority of the Disney corporation service standards are safety, courtesy, and the show. Efficiency was not at the top of the list. It was stimulating to hear about the Disney approach to management and excellence.

In the exhibits at **CAUSE**, I didn't spend much time looking at hardware, but got to spend some time looking at software such as **Lotus Notes** and **Domino**, which is going to be implemented at **ODU** in the next year. I really had time to get a sense of how the software operates and would fit into our plans. I also looked at the **IBM** software for the digital library and gave them some useful pointers on improving the descriptive aspects (they need to talk to some catalogers!).

CAUSE isn't nearly as big as **ALA**, so it's easier to get to interesting sessions. Also, attending this conference was different from **EDUCOM** because I had a focus, a mission, a cause (pardon the pun). In November I was asked to chair an **Old Dominion University** committee on intellectual property and electronic media to develop recommendations on the content of our burgeoning Web pages. Although I knew a lot about copyright and licensing, I wasn't sure what all the other issues might be. Along came **CAUSE** just at the right moment.

Quite a few sessions dealt with campus information policies, which in many cases included intellectual property issues. I focused my attention on these. In the next column I'll talk about information policies and intellectual property and give you a sense of what it could mean for the future of higher education and your campus. 🌩

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