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Today's technologies have brought about many changes in the workflow and processes of technical services departments. As a supplement to a panel discussion at the Charleston Conference, the purpose of this paper is to focus on issues in the electronic environment as they relate to acquisitions and serials. The electronic environment is a very real, very significant, very time-consuming part of the technical services process, more so today because of all the opportunities for providing and accessing information through electronic avenues.

During the seventies and earlier, tools such as NUC, BIP, CBI, and NST were used heavily in most libraries. Manual processes and paper resources were the norm in most technical services departments. As automation increased, library catalogs became automated. As the eighties approached, there was increased automation and circulation and public access catalogs were added. Then the nineties came and there was more automation with monographs and serials acquisitions joining the ranks of the automated processes. There were CD-ROMs, electronic indexes, databases, consortiums, statewide systems, e-books, e-journals among other medium. As libraries engage in the current evolution of resource mediums from print to electronic, it is necessary to look at policies and procedures as they relate to technical services.

Over the years, materials formats have become increasingly more sophisticated. For printed materials, books, magazines, journals, and pamphlets were the mediums of choice. For various reasons, including storage and preservation, and immediacy of access, technological innovations have resulted in changes in information mediums. We had and still have microfilm, microfiche, maybe a few CD-ROMs, but most importantly, with the innovation in computerized access, we have networks, online database access, and both in-house and remote access. A focus today is on speed and quality information delivery and therefore it is the library's challenge to ensure that patrons get access to the absolute best resources. Of course, funding plays a very important role in this and economic conditions dictate limited funds for additional resources today. However, the library is challenged to provide those resources that will be beneficial for its patrons. A major concern is to be able to provide on-campus as well as remote access to as many resources as possible.

One of today's issues in the electronic environment of technical services is access through print or electronic or both. Many years ago, more than twenty, noted professor F. W. Lancaster predicted that as a result of commonplace computer terminals and elevating costs of distribution of information in paper format, we would become a "paperless society." He revisited that theme during the mid-eighties and at that time saw the progress toward paperless communication proceeding more rapidly than he had first envisioned. Lancaster recognized one of the barriers to the absolute reality of the paperless society was psychological in that people did not feel totally comfortable with records stored in the computer, therefore, they continued to keep paper records. Lancaster also acknowledged the printed book was not threatened because most of the electronic products during that time were just printed resources that were displayed electronically, that is, the same information in a different medium. Very few original electronic works were being published at that time. Then, in the late nineties, Lancaster had second thoughts on the idea of a "paperless society." During the earlier years he viewed the transition from "paper-based" to "electronic-based" communication as desirable but "after the transition actually occurred, however, I became less enthusiastic about the developments and implications and, in the past few years, downright hostile toward them." Lancaster saw the dehumanization process, machines doing the work of people, as a result of contemporary technologies and recognized that too many professionals, maybe librarians, were not critical enough of information technologies. He recognized there were tremendous improvements in physical access to information but questioned the comprehensiveness of intellectual access to contents. Lancaster noted search strategies of patrons produced different results and though each searcher thought he/she had exhausted the literature, they usually came up with different results. Information technologies are good, but they require more and more of the information professional's time, learning new technologies, updating technological knowledge and skills, and participating in groups or committees charged with making decisions regarding technological change in the library.

So today, as we move more toward the provision of more and more online access for whatever resource, what are the issues for Technical Services? Following are some of the issues as I have experienced them. Because other issues arise almost daily, the electronic or technological process should be viewed as a work in progress. With the speed of technological advancements, today's Rolls Royce model might be tomorrow's Cadillac model. While some of us can only afford the Cadillac, we can still dream!

To understand the issues in the electronic environment, one should understand and know the mission of the library, which is to support the educational curricula of the university and to support general research in the region. All libraries have missions and those missions are the driving force of how you go about choosing electronic resources to complement the library's physical collection. Another issue should be the collection scope, which reflects the mission and comes from several areas including:

- Reference input – These are the people in more direct contact with the patrons so their input is very essential
- Faculty input – Because they know what it is their students should have access to
- Patrons to be served – Who are our patrons—students, faculty, staff, community? Again, the mission drives the patron base.
- Identification of resources to be added – Based on input from reference, faculty, and the library's administration and other criteria included in the mission

The third issue involves cost and availability of funding. Economic times dictate the seriousness of this issue. With "shrinking resources," where is the money to provide new resources coming from? Limited funding stifles the growth of libraries and limits their abilities to supply necessary resources. Since cost is such a great issue and dictates purchasing power, efforts have been made and some are in process to aid this issue through consortial purchasing and statewide systems. There are free resources but the issue here is, who's going to monitor the resource to ensure it remains a reliable entity? With the fast pace of technological advances, the issue of technical capability or want the library system is really capable of supporting becomes very significant.

How can the library's resources be combined to function collectively as an integrated information system? A library's provision of "links" for proper combinations of resources ensures effective and efficient access to its resources. The question becomes, can our system handle today's sophisticated technological enhancements? Many libraries in the state are joining together to ensure their patrons have inter-continued on page 81
grated access to resources. Actual technical capability including time and resources is necessary to accomplish this.

When funding is available, the issue of choosing a vendor and price negotiation becomes relevant. Some vendors have very similar services. How do you choose? And when a vendor makes a very generous offer, how do you know if it is genuine? One should always make choices based on what you actually need and reputation and reliability of the vendor as well as cost. You want value for your money and you especially want to consider promptness of technical support. Comparison of what is being offered with other similar systems helps one get a better understanding of the resource and will ensure sound decisions are made.

Electronic resources require registration and licensing. During the online registration process, the library is often required to agree to the publishers’ legal terms of use before completing the subscriber activation form. Patron terms are sometimes denied access to online publications when there are limitations placed on the library in the number of workstations that can be used to access the journal. For example, one publisher says you can only activate five workstations. If there are twenty workstations, what do you do? Another issue here is offering online access through IP address and then requiring users to login with a username and password. This is why the issue of technical capability is so important and the potential to limit our ability to provide good resources that would be used. These kinds of issues limit customer satisfaction too even though it is recognized that publishers have various reasons for their licensing process. Still, the library’s goal is to provide quality service and empower patrons to be able to get what they need.

In the electronic environment, payment options have become a significant issue. Prior to being able to use a charge card or electronic billing, the process was very manual and very time consuming. The charge card is a technological feat that really helps those who are allowed to use them when making purchases. There are limits, however. There is also the issue of consortium cost sharing and payment options but vendors work with libraries to make this transaction as smooth as possible.

As funding is limited and has decreased, the issue of medium becomes more significant. Should the library keep print and have access to the electronic resource? The issue of cost cutting is crucial and if using only one medium (electronic) cuts your costs, what are the long-term effects of providing those necessary resources in electronic format only? Will new technologies emerge and will they support the older electronic resources? In today’s world with budgets dwindling, where is the money for newer technologies coming from? All of these are necessary questions or issues that have to be resolved. It is very important to concentrate on actual content when determining what it is you need and how to minimize duplication of coverage in databases. The ultimate goal should be to create a completely accurate research environment that supports the mission of the library. Equally important is to look at ease of access and printing capabilities.

E-books pose a different issue: are they being used or will they be used? How will they be used? Will they be accessed through electronic readers, in-house library check out, or remote access? Remote access to e-books allows those students who wait until the last minute to complete assignments some way to find information after the deadline. Another issue here is difficulty of accessing e-books if a patron has not registered within the library first. Most patrons really appreciate being able to find information through e-journal databases and just clicking for print. It saves time and physical output, though the exercise would do us all good. Another major issue is individual licensing. Those responsible for licensing know the process is very time consuming. URLs change so the concept of durable URLs and registration tracking is welcomed. Another serious issue here is should the library cancel the print? What happens if access is lost and the library doesn’t have the print? Then, there’s the issue of period coverage. Sometimes a selection is offered free but the backfiles are at an additional cost. There’s the issue of the rolling wall coverage where you have access to backfiles in one database and three to five years of current material in another. Linking technology helps. There’s also the issue of actual electronic access. There are publishers who require IP authentication but users still have to log on with a unique ID and password each time they access the site. This issue is being minimized with one vendor’s authentication helper, which allows you to “store authentication information one time for all users so that when a user links to a journal with stored information, it is displayed for their use.”

Before automation, it was easy to keep circulation statistics but hard to keep up with other uses of the collection, especially serials, since most of them don’t circulate. Today’s technology enables us to keep more accurate and better usage statistics. Use statistics in turn allow libraries to see how collections are being utilized and to make adjustments to resources available as necessary.

Finally, as libraries become more and more technically literate and more detailed statistics are made available, responsibility for data collection and interpretation becomes an issue.

Many libraries have run out of storage space for book and journal shelving. Even microforms dictated that space be made available for their storage. Today’s issues of storage in the electronic environment includes the question of how fragmented or electronic data storage. Questions to be answered include, where, how, who controls, and accessibility. As publishers change platforms what are the implications for libraries? Libraries find themselves entering into agreements to maintain platforms for accessing archived resources.

Bundling is an issue that has reached its time in the field of library resources. How good, really, is bundling? Maybe not as good as it has been promoted to be? There is the question of whether certain titles are bundled just to have a reliable or steady source of income. Through bundling, libraries with limited financial resources are able to get some of the more costly journals needed.

In today’s market and with today’s budgetary restraints, keeping up with other libraries becomes a moot point. But, through consortium building, libraries are able to offer more varied resources for individual patron use.

Among other issues for technical services is that of job responsibilities and how new tasks have been incorporated into routine workflows. Technological advances have forced library acquisitions to involve more online searching and downloading of records in addition to completing licensing applications. Areas of responsibility become clouded as librarians engage in more and more access to resources through electronic means.

More than twenty years ago, Lancaster predicted a technological rise that others doubted. He acknowledged those changes not necessarily seeing them as for the better. Technological innovations have aided in the “dethumanization” of libraries especially as we move to offer more and more remote patron access. As librarians, we have the responsibility to ensure access to electronic resources which not only complement the library’s print collection, but also make provisions for access to many resources not owned by the library. The challenge is to provide as much electronic access as affordable and necessary but at the same time look to the library to balance access with quality service.

Endnotes
5. Ibid.