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Integrating CD-ROM: Some Advice From the Field

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"Never saw any product receive such unanimous support;" "User response overwhelmingly positive;" "Not prepared for how much people would like it;"—these are just a few of the comments obtained recently during a telephone survey of librarians who are currently using CD-ROM indexes in their university libraries.

The public services unit at Hunter Library was asked to add CD-ROM database searching as a new reference service in the 1987–1988 academic year. In the literature search, we found descriptive information on CD-ROM's potential, discussions of standards, new product announcements, and technical developments, but very little practical information to serve as a guide to libraries preparing to add CD-ROM database searching. A notable exception is the excellent discussion on planning for CD-ROM by Graves, Harper, and King.[1] We decided to conduct a survey to gain insights into experiences of libraries already swimming in the sea of CD-ROM.

Working under the assumption that the larger libraries have the available resources necessary for experimenting with new technology, we decided to survey forty large university libraries in the Southeast. Our initial contact was by letter with an enclosed self-addressed stamped postcard asking if the library was operational with CD-ROM. If so, we asked for the name of a contact person and a convenient time for a telephone survey. Thirty-three library directors responded for an 83 percent response rate. Of the thirty-three respondents, twelve libraries (36%) were operational. Excluded were beta test sites and videodisc systems. In June 1987, eleven of the twelve designated librarians were contacted by telephone at pre-arranged times and responded to a series of questions regarding their experiences in planning for and using CD-ROM. Due to scheduling problems, we were unable to contact one of the twelve librarians.

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Since CD-ROM products were not generally available until 1986, it was not particularly surprising to find that two-thirds of the libraries implemented the service in 1987. Considering the logistics of planning and purchasing, it is surprising that any libraries were able to be operational with CD-ROM in 1986.

Survey Results

The survey was divided into four parts. The first part was concerned with administrative issues such as funding, security, and impact on reference services. The next two sections dealt with selection of software and hardware, while the fourth section was open-ended for general comments.

Administrative Issues

Funding. Although funding for start-up costs came from a variety of sources such as grants, endowment, academic departmental funds, and friends of the library, the most commonly cited source was the current operating budget. Table 1 gives a breakdown of funding sources.[2]

Table 1. Funding Sources	
Current Operating Funds	- 5
Endowment	- 3
Grant	- 2
Friends of Library	- 1
End of Year Monies	- 1
Student Support Fund	- 1
Special Institutional Fund	- 1

Most of the contact persons were unable to provide information on supply costs. Three librarians reported that supply costs ranged from $25 to $125 per month per workstation.

No libraries are charging fees and there was no indication that any are planning to do so. Several librarians in the survey were unsure how they would

fund the ongoing costs of CD-ROM. Most were planning to try to integrate the cost into their reference and materials budget with or without an increase in that line item. One library was creating a new line item in its budget. Since the CD-ROM databases duplicate the information in print indexes, the possibility of discontinuing print indexes in favor of CD-ROM, thereby partially recouping ongoing costs, exists. Only one librarian in the survey had discontinued a print subscription. Interestingly, this same librarian was planning to re-subscribe to the print copy because of the need by patrons for back data not covered in the CD-ROM file. Four librarians stated that they were not giving any consideration to discontinuing print while all of the others are evaluating to determine feasibility of dropping print subscriptions. One librarian stated that the annual cumulative index to ERIC would be dropped, but the soft copies would be retained for those times when CD-ROM is down or in heavy use.

Online Search Services. Several librarians noted that they had experienced a significant decrease in the volume of online search requests and that the searches currently being done online were significantly enhanced because of preliminary searching done on CD-ROM.

Only one library had end-user online searching prior to the introduction of CD-ROM. Two other libraries have since initiated end-user online searching along with the introduction of CD-ROM. It was an initial assumption on the part of the authors that libraries with early entry into CD-ROM would have also been pioneers in end-user online database searching.

Bibliographic and Point of Use Instruction. Formal bibliograhic instruction has not been impacted to any great extent among the libraries surveyed at this time. Over 80 percent of the libraries are doing point of use instruction. Only one library has integrated CD-ROM instruction into its program of bibliographic instruction. Another library is conducting demonstration sessions on a sign-up basis and this has proven to be very popular with patrons.

Physical Location and Accessibility to CD-ROM. Of the libraries surveyed, 73 percent placed their CD-ROM workstations in open areas near the reference desk. The remaining libraries provided rooms within the reference area for the workstations. In all cases professional staff was readily available to provide assistance to users.

CD-ROM service is available to patrons during all

the hours the library is open in over 60 percent of the libraries. In some cases technical assistance and security are provided by graduate student interns and security personnel when the reference desk is closed. In the other libraries, the service is available only during the hours the reference desk is staffed.

Software Selection

The most frequently purchased database was ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) from Silver-Platter, followed by PsychLit. Other databases purchased included ERIC from DIALOG, MEDLINE, SocioLit, Le Pac Government Documents Option, Books-in-Print Plus, Ulrich's PLUS, Compact Disclosure, DATEXT Corporate Information Database, Dissertation Abstracts, and Newsbank. Table 2 gives a breakdown of the databases purchased by the surveyed libraries.

Table 2. Databases Purchased

NAME	NUMBER
ERIC (SilverPlatter)	6
PsychLit	5
Compact Disclosure	3
ERIC (DIALOG)	2
Corporate Information Database	2
Le Pac Government Documents	1
SocioLit	1
MEDLINE	1
BIP PLUS	1
Ulrich's PLUS	1
Dissertation Abstracts	1
Newsbank	1

ERIC was a first priority in 45 percent of the libraries and was available in 64 percent of the libraries surveyed. Decisions on purchasing priority were based upon a variety of reasons. Although availability, price, and in one case curriculum support for a single discipline were factors, online usage was the most frequently cited reason for purchase.

The compact disc is shelved in a variety of locations such as the reference office, reference desk, circulation desk, in the disk drive, and beside the disk drive. The most frequent location (46%) is in the disk drive.

Hardware Selection

Hardware selection was usually determined by the

purchased databases. In one case, available hardware determined database selection. Most libraries did not purchase hardware from the database vendor and only two purchased a complete workstation from the vendor.

By far the most popular configuration was one workstation per database. One library, however, had two workstations for five databases. There was a slight preference for Hitachi CD-ROM drives over Philips CD-ROM drives. Almost half of the libraries (45%) reported compatibility problems between software and hardware, although only a couple had had problems with equipment downtime.

General Information

Would you do anything differently if you were planning to add this service now and did you encounter any surprises?—these questions generated the following useful responses:

- Purchase Hitachi CD-ROM drives because they take up less space.
- Do a 3- or 4-month trial for each database before purchase.
- Get 640K memory—greater speed is worth the price.
- Spend a longer period of time in planning.
- Provide more time for staff training.
- Place the workstation in a public area immediately.
- Difficulties with DIALOG and ERIC were a surprise.
- Difficulty in replacement of ink jets and poor print quality.

Discussion and Literature Survey

Less than 3 years have passed since CD-ROM was announced as a product with amazing potential. Beginning in 1984 and throughout 1985, library service and supply agencies vigorously promoted new products—predominantly prototypes—based on CD-ROM and other types of optical media at major gatherings of people in the information business.[3] The potential for applications of CD-ROM in libraries and information centers is nothing short of dazzling."[4] Nugent says that, "in terms of the benefits they offer they appear to have been designed specifically for libraries."[5]

To date only a few libraries are providing CD-ROM services. An increasing number of libraries are planning to implement the service very soon. A primary concern for any library considering CD-ROM is the source of funding—capital outlay start-up costs as well as ongoing costs. Implementing this new service requires an initial commitment of resources for equipment and a revision of the materials budget to absorb considerable ongoing expenses.[1] This is a difficult commitment because it is not yet clear how these products will compete for funding within a library's materials and access budget(s), as compared to more traditional formats.[6]

In addition to the budgetary impact of adding CD-ROM service, the impact on a variety of reference services must be considered. Libraries and librarians are faced with increasingly difficult problems in the management of information as well as the inherent problems of providing access for patrons. In addition, as online searching, library-use instruction, automated catalogs, and other new reference functions continue to evolve inexorably, reference departments are not being adequately funded or staffed.[7]

The impact on the reference desk itself is expected to be considerable. Institutions that offer end-user searching are seeing it become a dominant theme in instruction sessions.[8] The experience described by Eaton at the University of Vermont (UVM) is noteworthy. She states that, "in the fall of 1986, about one-third of UVM's instruction sessions focused on computer searching, either as part of a continuum of information resources or as the sole topic under discussion. That figure promises to be higher in the spring of 1987."[9] Eaton also states that, "UVM has chosen what some would view a conservative method of offering end-user searching. Individuals must be trained before they are allowed to search, and they must make half-hour appointments for use of all systems (except INFOTRAC)."[10]

Although only two libraries in this survey had developed specific instruction sessions, point of use instruction appears to be demanding an increasing amount of reference desk time in all libraries. Most librarians are in the process of evaluating the needs of users in relation to this new service before attempting to develop formal programs of instruction. As Eaton notes, "until more products are on the market, we can only speculate about the demands which the new products will make on library staff."[11]

The impact upon both print and electronic information publishers is uncertain. According to Roth, "this new technology is pushing the information industry to re-examine the very nature of its business, the basis of obtaining profits, and the

creation of new information products for traditional markets."[12] Possible impacts include decreases in usage of online databases and discontinuance of print index subscriptions. Impressions gathered in this survey do indicate that online database search requests are decreasing. It may be that even though an initial decrease will occur, CD-ROM will actually create a whole new market of online users. Although librarians are evaluating discontinuing print indexes, there is no strong movement in this direction. Print, online, and CD-ROM technologies are different enough from one another to make it unlikely that any one will supplant any of the others. All three technologies can and will co-exist.[13] A probable scenario is that this new technology will be integrated by librarians into existing information systems rather than being viewed as an add-on or replacement.

The impact upon interlibrary loan is yet to be determined. Past experience with increased demand for document delivery as a result of online search services would seem to indicate that CD-ROM will greatly increase the quantity of interlibrary loan requests.

Conclusion

The decision to place CD-ROM database searching in a library is one which demands careful consideration. Miller suggests that the old reliable needs assessment is an applicable tool to use in planning.[14] What are the immediate information needs and opportunities?; What will they be in 5 years?; What should our priorities be, measured against cost, resource enrichment, improved access, and so on? Herther believes that, "as long as librarians keep the goal of maximizing access, we cannot lose, no matter what posture we ultimately take on optical products."[15]

The public services unit of Hunter Library has appointed a CD-ROM task force. The purpose of this task force is to conduct a needs assessment as suggested by Miller. This needs assessment has been augmented by the information gathered from the survey described in this article. The survey has tempered enthusiasm with a realization of costs both in terms of direct financial outlays as well as the impact upon staff time and other reference services. As appropriate, the task force will plan for the implementation of CD-ROM database searching. The most important task will be assessing the impact of CD-ROM on reference services and budget. Additionally, the task force will examine the most effective means of utilizing staff in working with this new service.

We feel certain that CD-ROM will drastically impact reference services. Further research and study of this impact is critical to the successful utilization of CD-ROM products, services, and systems in libraries.

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