News, Trends and Comments

News

US-UK cooperation

Very shortly before the end of 1984, the Research Libraries Group
(RLG) and the British Library (BL) announced the signing of a "memoran-
dum of understanding" meant to facilitate cooperation in various acti-
vities between the two organizations, as well as the planned establish-
ment of a leased dedicated transatlantic telecommunications line. Ex-
change of records and files between the BL and RLG data bases is one of
the objectives inherent in the agreement, which also foresees explora-
tion of "the value of direct electronic communication for interlibrary
lending". The signing ceremony took place in London on 29 November, and
the special communications link (also connecting the BL's online ser-
vice with the US National Library of Medicine) is to be installed some-
time this spring.

The RLG stated that "a more general environment of cooperation be-
tween Europe and North America" could be one ultimate result of this
undertaking.

For further information contact: British Library Press and Public Re-
lations Section, 2 Sheraton Street, London W1V 4BH, UK, tel. (01)
636-1544; or, RLG inc., Jordan Quadrangle, Stanford, CA 94305, USA,
tel. (415) 328-0920.

Information services – supplier finds demand insufficient

In our August 1984 issue (p. 262-263) we discussed the intended esta-
blishment of a "Japanese Awareness Service" by Engineering Information
inc. – and expressed some doubts that it would prove to be a successful
undertaking. Now recently we have learned of EI's decision to scrap the
project, shortly before it was due to go into operation. (In the mean-
time, of course, INSPEC has announced a service of a similar sort – but
one which represents a far smaller investment on the producer's part as
well as a much lower cost to the subscriber.)

Balancing act

To those who hold that full-text information retrieval systems are
the way of the future in terms of user demand and vendor success, Mead
Data Central has provided one of the prime examples. While other hosts
(for example Data-Star, BRS and now even DIALOG) have begun to move in

this direction, MDC itself has just shown that it can turn the tables -
by way of announcing the "Reference Service". This offering will incor-
porate Management Contents and The Computer Database, from Ziff-Davis
(Information Access Company), as well as Federal Research in Progress
(licensed by the National Technical Information Service), Advertising
and Marketing Intelligence, The Information Bank (produced by the New
York Times), Industry Data Sources (taken over last year by Information
Access Company), and several other files. Aside from indicating a
serious new commitment to bibliographic and other reference data bases,
as opposed to full text, this development means that MDC's image as an
integrated information supplier (an online distributor of its own
data-base products) will become much less pronounced. Some of the files
mentioned above (all of which are to be mounted on MDC's own computer
center) are already available to Nexis and Lexis users through the
"gateway" connection with DIALOG's system in Palo Alto.

Improvement to information retrieval in chemistry

On 8 January, the Institut national de la propriété industrielle
(INPI - the French patent office), the French government-owned Télésys-
tèmes S.A., and Derwent Publications ltd. of London signed a letter of
agreement under the terms of which INPI and Derwent will cofinance the
development of graphics-based input and retrieval software which will
be able to handle the broad generic chemical structures, or 'Markush'
formulae, disclosed in the patent literature. The resultant files will
be commercially available via the Télésystèmes-Questel online informa-
tion retrieval service (DARC system) starting in January of 1986. Mean-
while, file creation is underway - as are search software development
and testing.

The implementation of this new capability will mark a further step in
the relationship between Derwent and Télésystèmes (see ISU vol. 4 no.
1/2, p. 78-79). More than a year ago, Derwent decided to allow Télésys-
tèmes-Questel (and DIALOG) to mount its WPI and WPIL files - which had
previously been publicly accessible online only from SDC. In spite of
the considerable difficulties in loading such data bases, the French
vendor was able to begin offering them to its customers by early Decem-
ber of 1984.

Now Derwent has also announced that it is continuing its financial
backing for a research project being carried out under M.F. Lynch at
the University of Sheffield in the UK - an undertaking described as
"related" to the objectives of the Markush formula project mentioned
above.

Statistics to be collected for international document delivery
services

The Council on Library Resources inc. (CLR) in the USA has awarded a
grant of US$8,000 to the International Council for Scientific and Tech-
nical Information (ICSTI - formerly ICSU/AB: see ISU vol. 4 no. 4, p.
263), to support a project on the comparison of serials usage data from
five major international document supply centers. The project, which
will be directed by David Russon of the British Library Lending Divi-
sion, will examine the interlibrary loan demand for serial titles on
the US National Library of Medicine, Chemical Abstracts Service, the

Centre de documentation scientifique et technique of the Centre na-
tional de la recherche scientifique in France, the British Library Len-
ding Division; and requests passed through the OCLC interlibrary loan
system. The volume of demand for particular journals will be identi-
fied, and the project will compare the overall characteristics of docu-
ment requests made to or through the participating institutions. The
data analysis will be conducted by A.K. Kent of Microbel ltd. A report
of the project is expected to be available toward the end of 1985. For
further information, please contact the ICSTI Secretariat, 51 boulevard
de Montmorency, 75016 Paris, France; tel. 525-6592; telex 630 553 icsu
f.

Library automation

For libraries of all varieties, one of the currently most discussed
topics is 'retrospective conversion' (affectionately known as "recon")
- the process of transferring to machine-readable form the paper-
(often card-)based catalogue records for items already in a library's
collection (or for those items already in the collection when the li-
brary began machine-readable cataloguing of new acquisitions). Some li-
braries have now undertaken retrospective conversion through one means
or another. Many have decided that they should do so, but are not yet
certain how and when they should set about the process.

This being the case, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in
the USA is planning to investigate the feasibility of a coordinated re-
con program involving research libraries throughout North America. Im-
plicit in the ARL study are the attempt to minimize duplication of ef-
fort and the concern that many machine-readable records may not other-
wise meet "minimal requirements for inclusion in a distributed North
American data base". ARL has sent out to all its member libraries a
survey instrument concerning retrospective conversion activities and
plans, in order to gather background information for the study. Given
sufficient funding, a final report on the study will be available for
discussion by mid-May. The ARL initiative derives in large part from
the outcome of a recon meeting organized last July by the Bibliogra-
phic Service Development Program of the Council on Library Resources
(CLR). That meeting, involving twenty-nine invited participants, came
up with nine recommendations for defining and organizing a coordinated
conversion program, and discussed a comprehensive background report
entitled "Issues in retrospective conversion" - which is now available
for US$3.00 prepaid from CLR, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington,
DC 20036, USA.

Meanwhile, actual recon developments are continuing apace - causing
one perhaps to wonder whether any overall coordinated approach will
ever be possible. The Research Libraries Group has already mustered
three grants totaling US$2,150,000 toward realization of the first
phase (scheduled for completion by 31 August 1985) of its own separate
cooperative retrospective conversion program. Equally significant are
the activities of commercial and not-for-profit recon systems and ser-
vices suppliers. One of these is OCLC, whose Online Retrospective Con-
version Service has been available since 1976. Now OCLC is offering a
microcomputer-based service (called "Microcon") which incorporates the
complimentary loan of one or more modified IBM PCs (M300 work stations)
for entry of information onto OCLC-processable discettes. All eight
MARC cataloguing formats are available (e.g. serials, audiovisual

media, maps and others, as well as books). An OCLC recon advertisement suggests that "new conversion vendors" are "appearing all the time". This is quite an exaggeration, but certainly OCLC is far from alone in the market. One recent development, noteworthy because it introduces a new technology to the area, goes under the name MARVLS (MARC And REMARC Videodisc Library System). It is a desktop configuration (IBM PC with 512K RAM and specially designed software, plus digitally-encoded-video-disc player with hardware interface, and analog-to-digital converter), and meant eventually to handle the entire MARC, REMARC and LAWMARC files - around 6.5 million records altogether. MARVLS is a product of Carrollton Press and International Thomson Information. Carrollton has for some time been in the recon business based on magnetic-media versions of its files. MARVLS has also been demonstrated on the Alpha AM-1000VW supermicro, and can operate in a multi-user environment. Leaving aside the question of storage medium, we might note that librarians have also begun to consider optical character recognition as an (input) technique of potential use for recon purposes.

So far, interest in retrospective conversion has been much stronger in North America than elsewhere, but there is a very large potential market in Europe and the rest of the world. It will probably be the North American vendors who will eventually benefit from tapping this market, once they have accomplished further penetration on their home ground.

Crossing the Pacific by VAN

In cooperation with a number of companies in Japan (including Matsushita Communications International, and two banks), GTE Telenet is making plans to establish value-added communication services between that country and the USA. Concurrently, of course, new VANs (some undoubtedly involving US providers) are about to be offered in the domestic Japanese market, once Nippon Telegraph and Telephone is partially privatized and exposed to competition effective 1 April 1985. Meanwhile, the US Government has been exerting enormous pressure on Japan to open up its telecommunication (including satellite) equipment market in a meaningful way to potential US suppliers. So far this market (valued at ca. US$4 billion p.a.) has been virtually closed to outsiders, but it looks as though efforts on behalf of foreign companies are destined to be successful. It has been a long and uphill battle.

Patent office automation

The US Patent and Trademark Office is in the process of a massive scheme to automate its operations, a process which will last for approximately another five years. (This project is the subject of an article to appear in the next issue of ISU.) Of considerable significance, however, is the fact that the undertaking has clear international ramifications - largely because of a trilateral agreement with the European and Japanese patent offices. The arrangement foresees a sort of cooperative development involving exchange of data and software, and agreed technical standards for conversion and interchange of textual and image information. Automation of the Japanese and European patent offices should be completed somewhat later than that of the US PTO, and the European office - unlike the others - will retain a

portion of its information in paper-based form. Meanwhile, the Japan Patent Information Center has recently agreed to provide machine-readable citations of Japanese patents, to the International Patent Documentation Center (INPADOC) in Vienna, at least partially by means of a telecommunication link. INPADOC then translates them into various European languages, for supply upon request.

Data bases (brief notices)

Recently added to the files available from the **Data-Star** online service in Switzerland are Current Biotechnology Abstracts, Chemical Hazards in Industry, Laboratory Hazards Bulletin, and the Agrochemical Databank. All are products of the Royal Society of Chemistry in the UK. Further additions are Clinical Notes Online (from IRCS), and Abstracts in BioCommerce (from Celltech and IRL Press). The Chemical Business NewsBase (European emphasis, with weekly updates), also from the Royal Society of Chemistry, is scheduled for availability in the near future.

EDS (the former Unilever Computer Services Limited) in the UK has also mounted the Chemical Business NewsBase.

New (in January and February) on **DIALOG** are: CLAIMS / Reassignment & Reexamination (file 123, from IFI/Plenum Data Company, to be reloaded biannually), National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health data base (file 161, bibliographic, coverage from September 1973 onwards, updated quarterly), Pro-files (file 235, produced by Marquis Who's Who, quarterly updates, presently limited to information on active "online professionals"), P/E News (see our previous issue), FINIS (Financial Industry Information Service, file 268, from the Bank Marketing Association, bibliographic, coverage from January 1982 onwards, updated every two weeks), Thomas Register Online (file 535, corresponding to the Thomas Register of American Manufacturers, to be reloaded annually), and IRS Taxinfo (file 284, selected full texts, to be reloaded annually). It was also during January that WPI actually came up on DIALOG. (WPIL was up on 1 December.) The data bases Population Bibliography (file 91), Aquaculture (file 112) and Insurance Abstracts (file 168) will no longer be updated by their producers, and will become "closed files".

In 1984, DIALOG added a total of thirty new files - not counting data-base divisions - amounting to more than three million new records (WPI of course not included, as its implementation was delayed until the new year). Seven files were reloaded with major modifications.

ORIADOC is a file which aims to list all information services, both private and governmental, in France. Though not yet complete (it is scheduled to contain approximately 8,000 entries by the end of 1986), ORIADOC is now accessible online via **Télésystèmes-Questel**. The same host has also recently mounted INPI-Marques (trademarks registered in France, coverage from 1981 - eventually from 1975 - onwards, updated weekly).

The Institute for Scientific Information's Arts & Humanities Citation Index is now finally accessible to users in online form (as "Arts & Humanities Search"). As mentioned in our December issue, this data base was already loaded in a test mode on **BRS** - which has now added it to the list of publicly available files. Coverage is from 1980 onwards,

and updating every two weeks. BRS has also announced that the Combined
Health Information Database (bibliographic, full coverage from 1978 on-
wards, quarterly updates) is ready for searching on its system; the
file specializes in health promotion and education, arthritis, and dia-
betes.

Pergamon InfoLine has announced that the data base JordanWatch (in-
formation on all 1.6 million registered companies in the UK) is to be
available on its system as from 18 February 1985. Another upcoming file
is Ceramics Abstracts. Produced by the American Ceramic Society, it
will be exclusive on Pergamon-InfoLine. This vendor is also setting up
a new primary document online ordering service: current suppliers in-
clude the Pergamon Patent Search Center, Information on Demand (a Per-
gamon subsidiary in the USA), and the British Library's Science Refe-
rence Library in London.

Mead Data Central has augmented its Nexis service with the full texts
of numerous general-interest, specialist and financial publications -
including Financial World, Fedwatch, Marine Engineering Log, Life, In-
foWorld, Time, and Sports Illustrated. Concerning MDC's "Reference
Service", see item above, under "Balancing act".

The Library and Regional Documentation Center of the Asian Institute
of Technology (in Bangkok) produces a bibliographic data base called A-
sian Geotechnical Engineering, which focuses on publications from that
particular region. It contains ca. 26,000 references to items from 1973
to the present, and has just been loaded for online searching (as file
70) by **ESA-IRS** . Another new ESA-IRS file is BRIX (file 77, bibliogra-
phic, coverage from 1950 onwards) dealing with construction and buil-
ding maintenance. Further information on "format X" (including standard
codes) for downloading has also now been released by this vendor.

Koda Online is a newly established online information system, belong-
ing to the Reed Publishing conglomerate, and located in West Sussex,
England. Its only offering so far is a large file incorporating the
contents of twelve Kompass directories. These provide data on companies
in, respectively: Belgium, Denmark, France, the FRG, Italy, Luxemburg,
The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK. The
data base has been dubbed EKOL (European Kompass On-Line). We have
heard some suggestion that EKOL was also destined to be mounted for pu-
blic access via another online service, located on the European conti-
nent, but as far as we know no such plan has actually come to
fruition. Koda Online is incidentally enhancing its version in order to
increase specificly the coverage of UK business establishments.

Newly added to **Vu/Text** are: The Chicago Tribune, and The Wichita Ea-
gle-Beacon.

Företags Data is the name of a new data base which contains informa-
tion on "almost all Swedish enterprises and organizations". It is in
Swedish, and available on **Data Arkiv** in Stockholm.

Aramis is a new Swedish host specializing in occupational/labor mat-
ters (data bases: Alcdok, Amilit, CISILO, NIOSHTIC) and environmental
affairs (data base: Serix). At the moment only dial-up service is pos-
sible; connection to Datapak should be accomplished sometime this
spring. For further details, please contact: Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen -

ASS, Biblioteks- och Dokumentationssektionen, 171 84 Solna, Sweden; tel. (08) 730-9000; telex 15816 arbsky s.

Imminent on **SDC** is the Standards Search File - indexing standards and specifications from the Society of Automotive Engineers and the American Society for Testing and Materials.

A directory to machinery manufacturers in the FRG and West Berlin is now searchable as a bilingual file on **FIZ Technik.** The German-language version is called EK-VDMA, and the English-language equivalent BG-VDMA. The printed directory is a publication of Hoppenstedt. Annual updates are scheduled.

Finsbury's Textline (also accessible via ESA-IRS by means of a gateway arrangement) now incorporates also the BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, and a portion of the Tass service, as well as certain other new sources relating to various parts of the world. Finsbury's US representative is now Information Access Company.

ECHO, having itself taken over the maintenance of the DIANE Guide data base, is now updating it much more frequently; it had previously been so far behind developments as to be nearly useless. This is of course a data base of data bases, and now contains information on more than 650 files accessible on western European online information retrieval systems. ECHO is also making available the (revised) DUNDIS data base - an online version of the Directory of United Nations Data bases and Information Services.

It appears that the file Cancernet, produced for the most part by the French **CNRS,** is to be discontinued.

The data base Economics Abstracts International has been re-named Foreign Trade & Econ Abstracts. It is produced by the **Exportbevorderings- en Voorlichtingsdienst** in The Netherlands.

The Engineering Meetings data base from **Engineering Information** is soon to have a print/microform counterpart - called Engineering Conference Index.

EIC/Intelligence has two new print/microform bibliographic files in the areas of artificial intelligence, and computer-aided design / computer-aided manufacturing (CAD/CAM) respectively. The producer is arranging for online versions to be released in the near future.

Data bases withdrawn

Bioethics	MIC-KIBIC
Health Planning & Administration	MIC-KIBIC
New York Times	Data-Star
Paperchem	SDC

Telecommunications environment

Last spring, the European Association of Information Services (EUSIDIC) distributed to its members a draft set of guidelines regarding "Telecommunications for Publicly-available Information Services". We quoted from, and commented on, these guidelines in our June 1984 issue (vol. 4 no. 3, p. 192-193). Now EUSIDIC has officially

released a (slightly revised) definitive version of the guidelines -
which it regards as "uncontroversial in the eyes of most of the
telecommunication world". For additional information, you may contact
the EUSIDIC Administrative Secretariat, P.O. Box 429, London W4 1UJ,
UK; tel. (01) 546-7968.

Medical information - foreigners will have to pay more

In consequence of a policy decision taken by its board of regents,
the National Library of Medicine is to increase royalty charges for any
consultation (online and offline) of its data bases by users located
anywhere outside the boundaries of the USA. The new pricing, which
takes effect on 1 April, applies also to non-domestic access via US
host computers.

International acceptance

The CCITT has recognized Japan's CAPTAIN system as a third interna-
tional standard for videotex services. The other two are the CEPT stan-
dard (European) and the NAPLPS (North American). CAPTAIN was designed
to handle the more than 3,000 characters making up the Kanji writing
system.

Tools of the trade

Extensive details, in standardized format, on hundreds of **thesauri**
(monolingual, bilingual and multilingual) are contained in the new
Thesaurus Guide: Analytical Directory of Selected Vocabularies for
Information Retrieval, 1985 - which has been prepared by the GID on
behalf of the Commission of the European Communities. The 784-page
guide is available for Dfl.200 from Elsevier Science Publishers
(North-Holland), Book Order Department, P.O. Box 211, 1000 AE Amster-
dam, The Netherlands; or (for the USA and Canada), Elsevier Science Pu-
blishing Co., P.O. Box 1663, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163,
USA.

The 1985 **BIOSIS Previews** Search Guide may be ordered for US$85 (in-
quire concerning a discount if you purchased the 1983 edition) from BI-
OSIS User Services, 2100 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103-1399; tel.
(215) 587-4800 or (800) 523-4806 (toll-free); telex 831 739. Available
from this same address is also the new **Zoological Record** Search Guide,
at US$50.

An online user's manual for **Foreign Trade & Econ Abstracts** (the for-
mer Economics Abstracts International data base) - incorporating also
the thesaurus and list of periodicals - is available for Dfl.130/US$45
from the Exportbevorderings- en Voorlichtingsdienst (EVD), Bezuiden-
houtseweg 151, 2594 AG The Hague, The Netherlands; tel. (070) 797221;
telex 31099 nl. The EVD is now also publishing a newsletter concerning
the file; subscriptions are without charge.

The 2nd edition of the **Biotechnology Abstracts** User's Manual may be
ordered at no cost from Derwent Publications ltd., Rochdale House, 128
Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8RP, UK, tel. (01) 242-5823, telex 267 487

derpub g; or, Derwent inc., 6845 Elm Street, Suite 500, McLean, VA 22101, USA, tel. (703) 790-0400.

US$45 ($36 for APA members) is the price of the forthcoming Thesaurus of Psychological Index Terms (for use with **PsycInfo**), 4th edition, from the American Psychological Association, Order Department, P.O. Box 2710, Hyattsville, MD 20784, USA.

You may order free the revised user's guide to the **Martindale** file (on Data-Star), from the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Eritain, 1 Lambeth High Street, London SE1 7JN, UK; tel. (01) 735-9141. The new Martindale Online Drug Information Thesaurus, available from this same address, costs £35.

EIC/Intelligence is offering, at US$55 each, new user manuals for its data bases **Energyline** and **Enviroline.** Orders to the producer at: 48 West 38th Street, New York, NY 10018; tel. (212) 944-8500 or (800) 223-6275 (toll-free).

Engineering Information (Sales Department, 345 East 47th Street, New York, NY 10017, USA; tel. (212) 705-7620 or (800) 221-1044 (toll-free); telex 4990 438 enginf) has issued updated versions of the Subject Heading Guide to Engineering Categories and the Publications Indexed for Engineering - 1983. Each costs US$30.

Recommendations for examining documents, determining their subjects and selecting indexing terms is the title of an item (BS 6529) recently issued by the Eritish Standards Institution (Linford Wood, Milton Keynes, UK). The price is £10.20.

Getting specific

The data-base publishing division of the Information Industry Association (IIA) in the USA is planning to form four new special committees, on: "marketing issues", "general policy issues", "product development issues", and "operations issues". Further special committees within the division have not yet been ruled out.

Getting together

An INSPEC users' group is being formed, under the initiative of the data-base producer.

EUSIDIC spring technical meeting

Organized by the transborder data flow chapter, this meeting has as its theme: "An examination of the exchange of electronic information in Europe". The three discussion sessions are entitled: "the European data network environment", "privacy versus freedom; protection versus abuse", and "how governments can help". The dates are 16-17 April 1985.

Document delivery: BLLD

The British Library has reported that during the financial year 1983-84, requests for documents received by its Lending Division increased by 3.9% (2,772,000 requests) over the previous year. This development represented "the reversal of the decline in demand for the supply of documents ... which began four years ago". Demand from overseas set a record at 576,000 requests. The BLLD itself indicates that the lion's share of foreign demand for photocopies, according to its most recent survey, came from Japan (13%), followed in order by France, Spain and the USA.

Enough to get by?

Appropriations for Library of Congress operations in fiscal year 1985 amount to US$236.01 million - not including supplemental amounts for certain specific projects. The National Library of Medicine has received $47.87 million, and the National Agricultural Library $11.4 million. The LC is asking for just over $253 million in fiscal 1986 and probably will receive it, but the NLM and the NAL may well find themselves cut back slightly.

How it's done

The Special Libraries Association (235 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003, USA; tel. (212) 477-9250) has published a new book under the title Private File Creation / Database Construction: A Proceeding with Five Case Studies, edited by Marjorie M.K. Hlava, president of Access Innovations inc. It is described as "a practical guide to designing and producing online bibliographic-citation collections", and costs US$15.

UN network and data-base access

After initial funding approval by the General Assembly, the United Nations is to set up during 1985 a dedicated telecommunications network. It involves leased voice/data circuits as well as satellite communications routed via the Intelsat system. The UN is also, through its ACCIS Technical Panel on Data-base Access, preparing draft guidelines for use by its various agencies to govern access to their data bases.

Not a bad year, in fact

In our previous issue, we mentioned some slight inconveniences encountered by IBM during 1984, but would now like to report that the company showed, for that year, a net profit of US$6.58 billion (up 20% over 1983) on sales of US$45.9 billion (up 14%).

People

Paul Hunt has become, as of 7 January, managing director of **Derwent** Publications ltd., replacing Monty Hyams in this position. Since last

summer (see <u>ISU</u> vol. 4 no. 4, p. 273) Hunt had been serving as "managing director designate".

Expressing a desire to become personally involved more directly in the information business, Bob Willard has resigned from the staff of the **Information Industry Association** (IIA) - where he was vice president, government relations. Joining the IIA staff is Al Thompson, as director of the financial information services division.

The new chairman of the **International Electronic Publishing Research Centre** is Jean-Manuel Bourgois, president and director general of Bordas Dunod Gauthier-Villars in Paris. As IEPRC chairman he succeeds W. Gordon Graham, chief executive of Butterworths.

Andrew H. Uszak is retiring as senior vice president at the **R.R. Bowker Company,** and has set up his own firm under the name InfoPub Consulting.

Linda Resnik is the new executive director of the **American Society for Information Science** (ASIS) - succeeding Samuel Beatty, who stepped down on 30 January. Resnik's employment background lies principally in educational television. She has master's degrees (marketing, and journalism/public relations) from North Texas State University.

Information Consultants inc. has a new senior marketing representative in the person of Kay Pool, who comes from Questel inc. (the US affiliate of the French online distributor Télésystèmes-Questel).

David C. Cole has become president and chief operating officer of the **Ziff Corporation.** He had previously been chairman and chief executive of Ashton-Tate. At Ziff, he is succeeding Philip B. Korsant, who moves to the position of chairman and chief executive of the firm.

Trends

Data base on a plate

We, like other information industry observers, have for the last few years been waiting to see when exploitation of the optical disk would become a commercial reality for purposes of data-base storage and distribution. This is now beginning to happen, at least in the USA. The MARVLS system we have already mentioned, above under "Library automation". Another example is Information Access Company's InfoTrac system (offering indexed references to almost half a million periodical articles, in a microcomputer-controlled environment, with monthly updated cumulations from the producer), to be available in May. Yet another is the "Silver Platter Service" announced by International Standard Information Systems (ISIS) of Massachusetts, and also based on microcomputer access. Whereas the former works with a twelve-inch disk (supplied by LaserData), the latter uses the CD-ROM (a technology developed in large part by Sony and Philips), and also permits online access to files on remote computers. Information Access Company's system provides citations from its own data-base products; ISIS, on the other hand, is negotiating supply arrangements with established third-party data-base

producers, though public availability of its service is still about a year away. Other new entrants in this area are (Laser)Disclosure, and the recently formed (see <u>ISU</u> vol. 4 no. 4, p. 273) Wilson-Cambridge. CD-ROM is also incidentally the format chosen by The Library Corporation (Washington, DC) for its Bibliofile package, which supplies the LC MARC data base for purposes of library catalogue production - using a disk player connected to an IBM PC.

In this connection we note also that the keynote address at the upcoming IIA mid-year conference on 16 May will be delivered by John Hartigan of the Sony Corporation of America, and entitled "The coming CD-ROM revolution in information publishing". This is only the beginning. The online information era is giving way, partially, to that of local mass storage. Various sorts of companies have now made their moves, or will soon be getting into the game - data-base producers, library automation vendors, even the traditional online distributors (first perhaps BRS, whose marketing agreeement with Reference Technology we have previously noted).

Re-enter: the search intermediary

After a dismal public reaction to its user-friendly front-end software package - In-Search - for conducting searches on the DIALOG information retrieval service, the Menlo Corporation has come out with a less pedestrian, "Professional" version (called Pro-Search) for the experienced user. This version may also be used for data bases on BRS (as will be the case also with the improved end-user version), and as a "general communications package" for online retrieval. The price tag for each version will be US$495.

Perhaps it is now incidentally the time to ask ourselves just how successful have been the various attempts to expand the general end-user market for public data-base access services by means of (over)simplifying the technical and administrative procedures involved. Apart from the Menlo experience, we might note that Easynet (see our August 1984 issue, p. 268-269) has apparently not attracted the anticipated level of traffic. What ever happened to the Wiley/BRS "Exec Info Service" (see our December 1983 issue, p. 355)? What also of the fact that offerings such as Knowledge Index (DIALOG) and After Dark (BRS) found that they owed a large proportion of their (off-hour) usage to intermediaries drawn by the lower rates, in spite of limited data-base coverage and the unsophisticated search interface? System designers concerned with catering to the inexpert/occasional user are now tending to incorporate two levels of access and interrogation procedure - i.e. also for the professional (intermediary) user. This user was supposed to disappear under the new order, or at least to alter fundamentally his role in the information provision/evaluation environment. Certain kinds of online information - numerical data in the natural sciences, legal and to some extent medical information - have met with widespread acceptance among the ultimate users in the fields involved. Possibly some full-text files, in other areas, will show a similar trend (though effective full-text <u>searching</u> can also be a demanding proposition). Nonetheless, the predicted explosion of the end-user market in general could be much further away than some spokesmen for the industry would have had us believe. Perhaps it will in fact never occur.

Divestiture

In the Trends section of our December issue, we noted the generally bullish attitude prevailing with regard to data communication services. Now we note that the giant multinational corporation ITT intends this year to sell off a further US$1.7 billion of its assets, in order to concentrate on 'high-growth' businesses and to help in reducing its debt. Excluded from these divestitures, significantly, are ITT's telecommunications operations. These of course include international record carrier and electronic messaging services, as well as very major equipment production activities especially in Europe. ITT's natural resources and food group will, as a result of the restructuring, be almost totally eliminated. The remaining groups are industrial technology, financial and hotel services, and telecommunications. The publishing division (including Marquis Who's Who and G.K. Hall) may be taken over by Macmillan.

Comments

Autotranslation

Automation offers a number of buzz-words ('machine-indexing', 'content-addressable retrieval', 'x-th generation' something, 'knowledge engineering' etc.) which are the science fiction of our profession. Another one is 'automatic translation'. For a large part of our readership this is not a problem: these persons have English as their mother tongue, and expect other human beings (like me) to communicate in that beautiful language. Some people, however, are in a lesser state of bliss: they have to cope with the difficulties of expressing themselves in another mixture of sounds. "Some", in the previous sentence, is an understatement: the European Community for example is a mixture of (nine, ten, eleven? your correspondent lost the count) countries with their respective languages. One of the recent ISU editorials described the problem of interfacing: now, consider the intricacies of dealing with the translation of nine languages into each other. If my mathematics are correct, this means eighty-one translation interfaces. The European Commission set-up for this, thus, is impressive: they are spending lots of money to avoid adopting a common language (online searchers, please, note: not your uncommon, common command language (desk editor: does this sentence need a common comma?)). It is needless to say that you can spend a lot of money to develop automatic interfaces. The Commission's SYSTRAN is a nice example of such a project. However, it is not an ideal solution to the problem, and there are numerous attempts to tackle it in a different way. One of them is by the Dutch software house BSO: they have proposed to reduce the level of interfacing by adopting Esperanto as a common interface. They have now been granted about two million pounds sterling to develop their system into something really workable. Is Esperanto (or any other artificial language) then really the third-(or fourth- or fifth-)generation human language?

Local area networks

A report by International Resource Development inc., dating from last
year, states that the market for local area networks is growing more
slowly than was expected. One of the reasons mentioned is that there is
such a bewildering choice of technology that potential users cannot
make up their minds. In our opinion, this cannot be true: have you fol-
lowed the choice of and the market for personal computers?

Medical robots

The Dutch weekly "Automatiseringsgids" had a nice heading for an item
(my own translation from Dutch): "Only 7 percent of family doctors au-
tomated". This is a superbly inappropriate usage of the word "only": it
shows the highest level of robotization in the world!

Communication standards

The crux of automation over the last two years has been compatibili-
ty: if you buy something in hard- or software, be sure that it will
communicate in the future network of your organization. Pressure from
users, and their own estimated prospects of survival, have led various,
relatively minor, gadget suppliers to join hands and make proposals to
the European Community to adopt OSI (the open-systems interconnec-
tion). The twelve of them are quite large companies in our area, but
missing are some predominant ones, like IBM, DEC, Wang and Hewlett-Pac-
kard - who do not join that common approach for a variety of reasons,
of course, but try to progress individually:
  - HP have made a statement of intent that they will be able to
accommodate OSI for their main lines of supply.
  - DEC have announced their SNA(IBM technology)/DECNET gateway, e.g.
to provide communication between DEC-All-in-One and IBM (DISOSS).
It will be available mid-1985 and is an essential attempt to tie
together applications in administrative and scientific/technical compu-
ting.
  - Although IBM have officially adopted X-25 protocols, their way of
implementation is still unclear. With their steady market share in
mainframes and their tremendous success in PCs, they seem to adopt the
attitude of the laughing third: "I'm Being Most powerful and waiting
for you to adopt my own standards."

Quite an unhealthy situation for users - but, maybe, in the longer
term, helpful to find the way into a future of survival of the fittest
(cleverest, mightiest, most inventive, most innovative) supplier?

                                                    Cor van de Weteringh
                                                    February 1985

Not giving up

"The removal of existing obstacles to the creation of a European in-
formation market" and "reducing regional discrepancies in information
market developments" are apparently two of the goals of the new Euro-
pean Commission five-year program approved toward the end of last year
with a budget of 25 million European currency units (approximately
US$17 million). The former is probably entirely impossible, and at any
rate not within the power of the Commission; some would even hold that
it is not really desirable. The second is perhaps laudable, though we
are not sure exactly what it means. Perhaps the Eurocrats would wish to
clarify this one for us. A more reasonable and understandable objective
is that "Existing services will be extended to new Member States"
(i.e. Portugal and Spain, acceding to the Community as of 1 January
1986) - but just who is going to be responsible for doing this? In the
meantime, the Commission is going ahead with its scheme to construct a
"Community information market policy" which it hopes will "establish
fair and equitable terms for European entrepreneurs" and reduce
unemployment, in addition to the other desiderata which we have heard
rehearsed so often by our colleagues from DG XIIIB.

Services for fee or free

"On the basis of economic investigations using different approaches
it might be concluded that information is a "quasi-commodity" and thus
the market of information can be defined as a "quasi-market". ... The
dangers of an enormous inflation in the information sector must be eli-
minated, but a library system which is based only on state subventions
and provides services free or almost free of charge can not be effi-
cient." This from a report on a meeting of the FID Social Science Docu-
mentation Committee held in conjunction with the 42nd FID biennial con-
gress, 1984. The statements have particular reference to the situation
in Hungary.