

News, Trends and Comments

News

Using new information technologies

One might have thought that by now, and especially in the United States of America, the idea of information dissemination via electronic media would have become more or less second nature for all those concerned with information collection and provision, storage and use - and certainly not any reason for public debate or controversy. The actual state of affairs seems to be somewhat different. A case in point is the decision by the Congressional Joint Committee on Printing (JCP) to proceed with an investigation into the advisability of supplying Federal Government documents and data collections to depository libraries in machine-readable form. One of the options specified as under consideration is preserving the status quo (hard-copy distribution). Even if a decision in favor of electronic provision is taken, actual implementation will still be a long way off. Only recently has open discussion of the possibility begun to take place (though the JCP's deliberations go back to 1983), and appropriate means of implementation would still have to be identified. Reactions have not been uniformly positive. The library community - either in individual responses or as represented by the American Library Association - is protesting that some institutions are not yet capable of dealing with electronic formats, and that replacement of hard-copy versions (as opposed to optional electronic provision) would amount to a limitation in the accessibility of government information to the public. The Information Industry Association's reaction was swift and predictable: the government should not be going into the business of distributing information in electronic form - such services ought to be provided by the private sector. Indeed the JCP has thought of taking that kind of route for depository material - but doing so would certainly evoke an overwhelming storm of protest from libraries as well as other quarters. Among the organizations which have made a public statement on the JCP plans only the Association of Research Libraries, it seems, was unreservedly in favor of the idea that the Federal government should make available in electronic form as much of its information as possible, as soon as possible. At best, it will probably be quite some time - even several years - before any extensive program is in place, and we can in the meantime expect an even more vehement debate between the US library community on the one hand, and the information industry on the other.

Gateways (1)

The Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) of Dublin, Ohio, has concluded an agreement with BRS for access to the latter's data-base collection by OCLC member institutions. These institutions must however also be individually enrolled as BRS subscribers. They may use a single OCLC dedicated-line terminal for access to either system, and will be billed directly by BRS - or through one of the participating library networks. Searching is by way of the regular BRS command language.

Gateways (2)

The Vu/Text information retrieval system has now become available to users of Westlaw.

Gateways (3)

A gateway to Vu/Text now also exists from the American Library Association's ALANet service.

STI in France (1)

By government decree of 30 July 1985, the French Mission interministérielle de l'information scientifique et technique (MIDIST) has ceased to exist. A portion of its former mandate, along with certain other responsibilities, has devolved on a newly created "délégation à l'information, à la communication et à la culture scientifique et technique" (informally dubbed "DIXIT") within the ministry of research and technology.

Library automation

The library automation firm UTLAS, recently acquired by the International Thomson Organisation, has now appointed an agent for Europe (excluding France). It is Chadwyck-Healey ltd. of Cambridge, UK.

Data bases (selective brief notices)

Several data bases have just come up on **STN International**. They are Math (online version of the Zentralblatt für Mathematik, bibliographic, coverage from 1972 onwards, monthly updates), NTIS (coverage from 1964 onwards, monthly updates), VtB (chemical engineering, bibliographic, German-language, coverage from 1966 onwards, quarterly updates), DETEQ (environmental engineering equipment - product information, trilingual English/French/German), and Dequip (chemical engineering equipment - product information, trilingual English/French/German). All are loaded on the Karlsruhe, FRG, computers. Some were previously available on the INKA service in Karlsruhe.

BRS has added the UMI Article Clearinghouse file (label: UMAC, core coverage from 1978 onwards, monthly updates, online ordering of articles from publications covered), OCLC Easi Reference (file label: OCLC, subject (and other) access to recent OCLC online union catalogue

records (in modified form), quarterly updates, annual reloads; discounts for OCLC members), and Social Work Abstracts (file label: SWAB, produced by the National Association of Social Workers, coverage from July 1977 onwards, quarterly updates). Also newly available are four Information Access Company files: Magazine Index (label: MAGS, coverage from 1959 onwards, monthly updates), National Newspaper Index (label: NOOZ, coverage from 1979 onwards, monthly updates), Trade and Industry Index (label: BIZZ, coverage from 1981 onwards, monthly updates), and Legal Resource Index (label: LAWS, coverage from 1980 onwards, monthly updates).

Now accessible via **Can/OLE** are the CAB Abstracts file, and the Materials Business File.

New on **ESA-IRS** is Space Patents (file 67). ESA-IRS users now also have access, via a one-way gateway, to the World Reporter service of Datasolve (UK); the file number is 104. ESA-IRS' version of ABI/Inform is now updated on a weekly basis.

The Washington Post (back to January 1984) is now on **Dow Jones News/Retrieval**, as is Investext.

The Materials Business File ("Materials/B") has been loaded by **SDC**. The producer of this bibliographic file is Metals Information. Coverage begins with January 1985, and updating is to be monthly. SDC has also added the INSPEC Backfile (1969-76).

Pergamon-InfoLine is now offering Litalert (current US patent and trademark litigation, updated monthly), and Industrial Research Laboratories (directory information, produced by R.R. Bowker, coverage of USA only, annual updates). Both files are currently exclusive to Pergamon-InfoLine.

Recent additions to **DIALOG** are: Art Literature International (file 191; produced by the Getty Art History Information Program, J. Paul Getty Trust; corresponding to the hard-copy Répertoire international de la littérature de l'art; coverage from 1973 onwards; biannual updates), Clinical Abstracts (file 219; from Medical Information Systems Division, Reference & Index Services inc.; coverage from January 1981 onwards; monthly updates), Consumer Drug Information Fulltext (file 271, produced by the American Society of Hospital Pharmacists, quarterly updates, reloaded annually), Magill's Survey of Cinema (file 299, full-text, coverage from 1902 onwards, updated every two weeks, annual reloads, only on DIALOG II), and PTS Marketing and Advertising Reference Service (MARS) (file 570, bibliographic, produced by Predicasts, coverage from 1984 onwards, updated weekly). DIALOG has split the LC MARC data base into file 426 (publication dates 1980 to the present) and file 427 (pre-1980 and undated). The Aerospace Database (file 108) now covers the period from 1962 onwards, but there are no abstracts in pre-1972 records.

ABI/Inform is a recent addition to the Reference Service of **Mead Data Central**.

The French **G.Cam** is mounting an online service called Sovt, which provides historical and current information on the USSR - in particular on individuals. The producer of the file is the organization which publishes Le Monde.

Cerved, in Italy, now offers ISET (Informazioni statistiche economiche territoriali), on Italian companies.

The drugs information data base Pharmaprojects Online, a product of V&O Publications ltd., is now up on Data-Star. It will be updated every month. Drugs no longer in the development phase are not included.

The **American Geological Institute** has expanded the coverage of its GeoRef data base back to 1785 (from 1961), for North American geology.

The **Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)** is preparing to make available its Economic Outlook file on magnetic discettes, on a subscription basis. Other OECD data collections are eventually to be distributed also on this medium. Economic Outlook can currently be searched online via DRI and I.P. Sharp.

Data bases withdrawn

US Exports	DIALOG
CELEX	EURIS (retrieval service ceasing operation)
CIS/Index	EURIS
Comext(-Eurostat)	EURIS
Medtrain	BLAISE-Link

IM training

The European Institute for Information Management has received a second lease on life, after severe administrative problems following its first year of operation. For 1985/86, the EIIM will mount a series of short seminars conducted - again - by guest lecturers. A new Director of Studies is now in place - Peter Popper, who was formerly with IIASA in Austria.

APOLLO working group

In The Netherlands a working group, on the request of the government, has produced a report with recommendations on the Dutch participation in the EEC's APOLLO project. The report is quite a good survey of the difficulties which have to be overcome, the market for APOLLO and the solutions to a number of problems in the Dutch environment. The report (in Dutch) can be ordered from NOBIN, P.O. Box 80544, 2508 GM The Hague; or from COBIDOC, P.O. Box 16601, 1001 RC Amsterdam. It costs Dfl. 15, which is surprisingly cheap for a lot of information.

Tools of the trade

The third edition of Abstracting and Indexing Periodicals in the Science Reference Library (by Basil A. Alexander; 151 pages; ISBN 0-7123-0716-8; £6) is available from the British Library Publications Sales Unit, Boston Spa, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 7BQ, UK. There are 1,750 titles listed.

The Institute of Metals (Metals Information, 1 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5YY, UK) and the American Society for Metals (Metals Information, Metals Park, OH 44073, USA) are offering for sale the

Metadex User Guide (£25/\$40) and the A-Z Thesaurus of Metallurgical Terms, 6th edition (£30/\$55).

The revised **EPRI** Thesaurus is now available from the Electric Power Research Institute, Research Reports Center, P.O. Box 50490, Palo Alto, CA 94303, USA. It is free to EPRI members, but others pay US\$35 in North America, or US\$70 overseas.

DM45 apiece is the price for guides to the data bases **DOMA** and **ZDE** - from FIZ Technik, Ostbahnhofstrasse 13, 6000 Frankfurt a.M. 1, FRG.

ASLIB modifies its course

Having begun life in 1924 as the (UK) Association of Special Libraries & Information Bureaux, ASLIB has over the intervening years broadened the scope of its interests and activities, and more recently chosen to style itself as the premier European organization concerned with matters of "information management". Along the way, it however managed to bite off more than it can now in fact chew. Some time ago it abandoned the task of organizing the EURIM (European Information Management) conferences - the last one took place in France in May 1982. Now it will be eliminating certain of its ongoing functions and services, effective with the beginning of 1986 in most cases. For one thing, the Online Searching Service will cease. Also, the consultancy and research functions are to be phased out. Furthermore, the Current Awareness Bulletin will no longer be supplied as a standard benefit to all members. Oddly enough, all these changes are part of what ASLIB calls its "development plan". This plan calls however for increasing the staffing levels and expanding the activities of both the Publications Group and the Professional Development Group (into which the Information Resources Group, including the former Online Information Centre, is to be subsumed). ASLIB has approximately 2,000 (organizational) members, located in the UK and about seventy other countries.

STI in France (2)

It seems that the powers-that-be in France are seriously interested in improving the national system for managing access to scientific and technical information. They are talking about setting up a coordinating Agence nationale de l'information scientifique et technique (ANSTI), and in general increasing the efficiency of on-demand document supply. A key element would be the CNRS' existing Centre de documentation scientifique et technique (CDST) - which would however relocate to Nancy in the industrial northeast of the country.

People

The **Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux** have announced several new appointments. Tony Woodcock will be sales and marketing manager. Chris Cannon (previously new products manager at INSPEC) will serve as area sales manager for Europe (for machine-readable products). The new regional sales manager for the Americas and the Far East is Elaine Cook.

The new executive director of the **National Federation of Abstracting and Information Services**, succeeding M. Lynne Neufeld, is Elizabeth L. Unruh (formerly with Data Courier and DIALOG).

In connection with its move from New York City to Washington, DC, the **Special Libraries Association** has experienced an almost complete turnover in its staff. Some of the new appointments are as follows: David Malinak - director of communications (including promotion and press relations); Kathy Warye - director of professional development (including education and research); Beth Cobb - assistant executive director for administrative services (including finance, personnel, and data processing); John Reynolds - director of publishing services; Tobi Brinsek - manager of information resources (including the library). Richard Battaglia, continuing with the Association, becomes assistant executive director for program services (including meetings and government relations).

BIOSIS has promoted Carolyn Bowman to the position of group leader of education and training.

Pamela R. Cibbarelli has become vice president for marketing and sales for **Inlex**, a library automation company located in California.

Trends

Circuits technology

The bio-chip is coming closer, thanks to Japanese researchers. The Tokyo Institute of Technology has come up with a prototype bioelectronic switching device. It employs a protein substance (rhodopsin) found in the retina of fishes' eyes, on an ion-sensitive field-effect transistor. Applications would be in analogue circuits.

Telecom concerns

It seems that many US information professionals - both those in the commercial sector and others - are becoming more eager to monitor and to influence telecommunications developments for their own purposes, through collective channels. The Library and Information Technology Association (LITA) - a division of the American Library Association - has constituted a Telecommunications Interest Group. One of its objectives is to make vendors aware of needs within the library community, and of the potential of the library market. With the establishment of this Interest Group, the LITA Telecommunications Committee will cease to exist. The change allows more active programming and professional services efforts in the area. At the same time, the Telecommunications Committee of the Information Industry Association's recently constituted Financial Information Services Division has become quite active - especially with regard to government regulatory activities. It is now, for example, coordinating the preparation of IIA's response to the FCC Computer Inquiry III.

Paying by the minute

"to help the many new DIALOG users who are not professional searchers to better understand the actual cost of searching" is the reason given by this vendor for now showing connect-time rates in minutes, rather than hours, on its price list (effective October 1985). The data-base catalogue will indicate both per-minute and per-hour charges.

Comments

Data bases

One of the inherent problems with bibliographic data bases is that the coverage will in most cases be judged inadequate by at least some users - whether from the point of view of time span, or from that of subject scope, or from that of geographical coverage, or perhaps from that of document types indexed. Another possibility is that the literature in some languages is poorly represented - and not only in certain files, but across the whole spectrum of, say, available online information resources for science and technology. Such has been the conclusion drawn by the Dutch online users' association (VOGIN), which has furthermore been looking into redressing the situation. Its idea is to create a new data base which would be restricted to coverage of Dutch-language S&T literature, under the name "Nedlijn". Eventually the project could be extended to cover also the social science fields. The national government has shown interest in the possibility, to the extent of providing funds for a sort of feasibility study. Those involved seem to be operating under the assumption that such an eventual service could be self-supporting. If that becomes a proviso for establishing it in the first instance, we won't expect to see it in place for a very long time if ever - however admirable the intention may be.

National policy

The West Germans have long had to suffer under smug criticisms from elsewhere that their efforts to promote the provision of specialized information (Fachinformation) were flawed by a too highly structural approach, and by a stifling of potential commercial ventures in view of massive government subsidization. Long ago, in fact, the notion of an extensive system of subject-area-oriented national information centers had to be abandoned as unrealistically cumbersome and expensive. (Twenty of these had originally been on the drawing-board, and only twelve ever came into operation, all of them under either sole or partial government sponsorship; of these twelve, four - DIMDI, FIZ Karlsruhe (INKA), FIZ Technik (via INKA), JURIS - functioned also as online hosts.) Now the Federal government has completed a re-evaluation of its approach to specialized information, and the Bundesministerium für Forschung und Technologie has issued a hefty (111-page; ISBN

3-88135-167-1) document entitled "Programme of the Federal Republic of Germany for Specialized Information 1985-88". The fact that it put out two English-language versions (one complete and one abbreviated), as well as the original German, suggests that it felt some concern to let a broad international audience know what its viewpoint and intentions are - very likely in reaction to previous criticisms of German policy. Subsequent statements by at least one BMFT representative (see ISU vol. 6 no. 1) reinforce this impression.

One of the first considerations - in fact probably the keystone - of the program is to create a state of "mutual dependence" between the FRG and other nations (and thereby to avoid "vulnerability"). It would be well to keep that particular aspect in mind; for one thing, it explains in large part the German decision to join in the creation of STN International. That move was by some called a betrayal of European efforts to redress the US dominance of the online data-base business. The Germans clearly don't agree. Another principle inherent to the program is that the government should restrict its information provision activities, and support, to those appropriate for meeting its proper "duties, goals and principles". It should not impair competition in the marketplace, but should try "to avoid new subsidies and to correct existing ones, if necessary". The government is committing itself to the encouragement of private ventures, and even to investigating the privatization of "state interests and public services". Specialized information services offered by the public sector should be priced in line with market conditions, and aim toward greater cost recovery. The program document embodies numerous further positions and suggestions, such as: that the German telecommunications infrastructure needs improvement (e.g. higher speeds, greater capacity, better interfaces); that electronic-based services for economic information be developed exclusively by private enterprise; that DIMDI will increase its data base offerings, and the GRIPS search software will be further developed; that the government will encourage the activity of private information brokers; that study, teaching and research in information science should be expanded, to become comparable with the US and UK situations.

Federal government spending on the program over four years is projected at DM939 million (it was ca. DM750 million on Fachinformation during the previous four-year period). Provided here are balance-sheet figures for several existing information centers. From them we can see, for example, that in 1985 FIZ Karlsruhe planned to recover - through "income from the sale of information services" - only 30% of its costs; DIMDI expected to do even less well at 15%; the prognosis for the IZ Sozialwissenschaften was 4%; FIZ Chemie and FIZ Technik foresaw a relatively better performance - at 44% and 39% respectively. It is hard to see how such operations will ever become self-sufficient. In any event, we must recognize that the FRG government approach to specialized information services support develops from its attitude toward general research policy. The country is certainly no slouch when it comes to R&D spending: that spending in 1985 will amount to around DM52 billion, or approximately 2.8% of the gross national product. Most of the money comes from the private sector, but still the Federal government is chipping in more than DM13 billion.

Other Europeans (and not least the British) are fond of poking fun at German information (and telecommunications) policy. They will probably continue to do so, but in the meantime they will have to adjust their criticisms to the altered circumstances.