
Foreword

April Wreath, Guest Editor

During the past decade, the rapid evolution of new information and media technologies has caused profound change in libraries of all types. While once primarily the turf of medical, scientific, and other special libraries, and limited mostly to online searches of remote data bases and/or audio-visual collections, the current generation of "hi-tech" products has recently invaded and become an integral part of every kind of library. Technology has had a stunning impact during the past decade, providing exciting opportunities while also posing many thorny problems for libraries ranging from the school media center through the academic research institution. Also, the ever-increasing dependence of libraries and media centers on electronic forms of information access has caused a whole gamut of new concerns. Basic questions such as how the money will be found to support the endless need for software, equipment, maintenance, and staff training must be answered. There is also the problem of establishing new policies and procedures regarding the processing of and access to the new media formats.

The central issue that the new technologies have forced libraries to examine, however, is that of self-concept. Has technology changed the underlying mission of the library? Or, are libraries to provide essentially the same services, meeting the needs of their constituents with their capabilities simply enhanced by it? Will the library's role indeed be usurped by information brokers and computer centers if librarians do not hasten to meet the rapidly changing expectations of library users?

Clearly, the burgeoning of information and media technologies has created a sudden and unprecedented demand on the skills of librarians and their staff. Significant amounts of time must be devoted to on-the-job training to learn new products. Additionally, more time will be needed for workshops and other forms of retooling. Along with this development of new skills inevitably will come the need to redefine many of the job des-

criptions of library staff. While automation can enhance job satisfaction, it can also be a costly proposition to upgrade support staff to reflect the new responsibilities and complexities of their jobs.

The costly nature of the electronic media and its maintenance has provided an enormous challenge to library administrators. Even with the best intentions, a library cannot provide a service which its budget cannot absorb. The inherent nature of electronic data and the equipment that drives it is one of rapid obsolescence. Thus, even the most astute strategic planning cannot anticipate all of the actual demands that will be placed on a library's budget during the next decade. How different this fluid situation is from the days when a library budget focused almost exclusively on books, along with adequate shelving to hold the print collections! The need to allocate and balance funding for traditional book and journal collections, in addition to purchasing or leasing the new information and media technologies, will require establishing or rewriting many a collection development policy.

The library's role as provider of resources for education, information, scholarship, intellectual stimulation, or simply for entertainment is undergoing profound change. The rapidity of this change is what makes adaptation especially stressful, along with the related need to question traditional assumptions and chart new directions. This issue of *North Carolina Libraries* examines some of the major philosophical and practical concerns which technological change has offered librarians, and which have had an unprecedented impact on the nature of reference and information services.

The issue is divided into two parts. The first part is devoted to the most recent forms of technology which have essentially altered the types of services which libraries can provide, including access to data bases outside the holdings of a given institution. The second part of the technology issue presents articles on the more familiar topic of library system automation. This application of technology has been used to date primarily to speed up and improve access to more traditional library collections and services.

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Bil Stahl's article on libraries and technology provides the keynote theme of this issue, reviewing the astonishing rate at which media and information technology has evolved, the advantages and the problems it presents to libraries, its increasing use both within and outside the library, and some of the broader implications such changes have for civilization in general. Mr. Stahl has pondered these questions both as an administrator at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and as Chair of the Automation and Networking Committee of the University of North Carolina System.

Two articles on the automation of reference services follow, each representing a different philosophy and approach to acquiring and making available the latest products in CD-ROM and in online data bases. Donna Cornick writes on the problematic aspects of automating reference services, drawn from her experiences in Davis Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her emphasis is on the new and often unexpected skills required of librarians and staff to assist patrons with the wide and potentially confusing array of choices now possible in data base searching. She also covers a number of practical matters, such as space planning to house automated reference services, the costs involved, and ordinary details regarding the increased need for basic supplies, such as printer paper and ribbons. Johannah Sherrer, on the other hand, describes a successful goal-oriented approach to automating the reference department at Duke University's Perkins Library. Their underlying philosophy has been to have each reference librarian make a commitment to improving individual online searching skills. By making new products immediately available, Duke reference librarians experiment along with library patrons in discovering what the new software has to offer. A description is also provided of their bold and innovative service, INFOLINE, which provides an online reference capability via an electronic bulletin board.

Articles are also devoted to the impact of the new technology in school media centers and on the school curriculum in general. As Staff Consultant for School Media Programs, Carol Lewis provides a philosophical framework regarding the teaching of computer skills in North Carolina's public schools. An article by Diane Kessler and Lynda Fowler then offers a case study of the plan developed by the Durham County Schools Media Services for a systematic approach to introducing technology into the classroom as part of the instructional program.

The second part of the technology issue begins with an article concerned with selecting an integrated online system for a public library. Linda Folda points out that if well planned, vendor demonstrations can educate the entire staff as to their needs and the extent various systems can meet these requirements. Robert Bland's article follows in which he asks librarians to reevaluate the way in which online system performance is measured. He maintains that the established norm for judging a system by response time is actually a quite deceptive one. Research to support his theory leads to some provocative conclusions.

The impact of an integrated online system on cataloging operations is next discussed by Patti Easley and Lovenia Summerville. Their perspective is enhanced by five years' worth of experience with Aladdin, the VTLS system at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. And, since there is no one correct approach to major automation projects, such as barcoding a library's collections, two articles by public librarians with opposing views follow. In preparing for online circulation activities, Ricki Val Brown proclaims that "smart barcodes are a wise decision." On the other hand, Harry Tuchmayer contends that "dumb barcodes is the smart way to go."

Finally, Marcia Kolb offers some practical advice in preparing for the next online system. Currently in the planning stages for the third integrated system at the Prince William Public Library System in Manassas, Virginia, Ms. Kolb speaks from experience and points out that once automated, a library's dependence on technology will only continue to grow.



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