

AV MATERIALS: a computer based catalogue

Audiovisual materials might as well not exist if you can't discover what you need for a particular application. There are ways of finding out, but it is a somewhat hit-and-miss business.

The British Library reports an important development which could mark the beginning of a national information system for teaching and learning materials.

The British Library has put catalogue entries for over 5000 items of audiovisual materials into its computerised on-line information service. Until now this has been restricted almost entirely to books. And the entries are printed in the first experimental edition of what is hoped will become a permanent feature in this field, the British Catalogue of Audiovisual Materials.

THE NEW CATALOGUE

The items include filmstrips, slide sets, overhead transparencies, sound cassettes, film loops, multi-media packs and others. In fact, almost every medium is represented except 16 mm film, and most of the subjects of the curriculum are covered. Finding an item on a particular topic has been made as easy as possible by the use of the Dewey classification, and by the provision of an elaborate subject index based on the scheme devised by the British Library. There is also a title/series title/author index.

Resource cataloguers will find the printed catalogue especially useful. Not only has Dewey classification and the allocation of subject headings been done for them but each entry, as might be expected from the British Library, is a model of how to catalogue an item to an authoritative national standard. An introduction describes the principles employed. Users of the computer system will be interested in the detailed search facility which is mentioned at the end of this article.

SOURCES

The majority of the items have been reported by the Central Library Resources Service of the Inner London Education Authority which has one of the most representative reference collections in the country. The British Universities Film Council has listed the films held by its Higher Education Film Library, and eight publishers have provided information about selections of their recent output.

HOW IT BEGAN

The idea behind this development was deceptively simple although its realisation took much work by many people. It was inspired by the example of book cataloguing. There are hundreds of publishers who, between them, issue thirty or more thousand books each year. There are also countless publisher's catalogues, bibliographies and specialist listings. To track down a particular

book, or a book on a particular topic, had become such a time-consuming task that in 1950 the British National Bibliography was created to bring together, in one listing, basic information about every book.

The British National Bibliography is now produced by the British Library, and has become an indispensable tool for librarians.

Moreover, because of the sheer quantity of material computerised preparation became necessary, and the complete data base is available to anyone outside the British Library who pays a small subscription to the British Library Automated Information Service (BLAISE). All that is needed is a computer terminal, a telephone, and a small box known as an acoustic coupler.

HELP FROM BL

So the argument ran, why not ask BL to add AV materials to the data base? After all, a document is a document, whether it is in print or some other medium. This would do more than make it easier to track down the materials since it would help users to discover everything on a particular subject, books as well as audiovisual materials — a truly multimedia approach.

The British Library were sympathetic but naturally treated the suggestion with caution, both because of the technical problems (no other national library, to my knowledge, has yet gone multimedia) and because their resources were already stretched. However, they agreed to finance and run a pilot experiment, the outcome of which is the experimental edition of the British Catalogue of Audiovisual Materials and the availability of the information through BLAISE. CET, after making the original suggestion to the British Library, has worked closely with them throughout and conducted the necessary feasibility studies.

It should be emphasised that the new catalogue is not intended to replace the valuable catalogues that already provide detailed guidance about particular types of materials for particular applications. Like the British National Bibliography, it is a back-up reference tool and a quick guide to what is available. The data base as it grows, partly through the co-operation of the audiovisual cataloguing agencies themselves, will help them to collect and organise their information. A national data base resembles a lake in which everyone can go fishing — except that the same fish can be pulled out again and again by the same or different people.

THE FUTURE

What comes next? The British Library, with some support from CET, is starting a year's work on a supplement to the experimental edition of the catalogue, but is understandably reluctant to commit itself to an indefinite

involvement until it knows that this is needed. I am sure it is, but evidence is required. So buy the catalogue if you can. And please let me know as soon as you can what you think of it and how it might be improved. Feedback was never more necessary.

A note to librarians. The recent revision of the UKMARC format in the context of the second edition of the Anglo American Cataloguing Rules takes full account of the integrated treatment of non-book materials in the Rules. The modifications include a field for information about physical characteristics, using a six-character faceted alphabetic code. This permits detailed searching on BLAISE for a specific physical form in addition to the use of the standard search qualifiers. For example, searching is possible on the following, separately or in any combination: audiotape, type of container (reel, compact cassette etc), tape width, number of tracks, mode (mono etc), speed. It continues to be possible, of course, to perform complex subject searches by combining indexing terms. If you would like further information, please write to me in the first instance.

The British Catalogue of Audiovisual Materials is available from the British Library, Store Street, London WC1 at £15 post free, (£18 overseas).

Leslie Gilbert

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Hey PRESTEL

PRESTEL, the world's only operational live viewdata service, was demonstrated in Melbourne and Sydney in late November by executives from the British Post Office.

A PRESTEL TV set with inbuilt modem and automatic dialer costs about £1000 in the UK and may be purchased or rented. It operates from a simple key pad.

The British PO envisages an international service by PRESTEL quite apart from national viewdata systems operating within individual countries.

Representatives from the British PO are discussing with Telecom and OTC the possibility of mounting trials between Australia and the UK in 1980.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT FROM

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Ross and Keith Smith anniversary exhibition

THE 60th anniversary of the first flight from Great Britain to Australia by the brothers Ross and Keith Smith, is being commemorated in an exhibition which opened at the National Library of Australia in Canberra on 10 December. The exhibition, comprising photographs, paintings, and other memorabilia from the National Library, the Australian War Memorial and the Mitchell Library, Sydney, will continue till the end of January.



Photograph shows a model of the twin-engined Vickers Vimy used in the flight.