

Automated acquisitions

Survey of needs and current practices

The Standing Committee on Technology (SCOT) is a sub-committee of the Australian Book Trade Committee. SCOT includes representatives from three sectors: publishers, book sellers and librarians. One of its terms of reference requires it to provide its constituents with information and advice on developing technologies in the area of information distribution.

We believed we could perform a useful service by gathering information on the expectations and present practices of our sectors, and by disseminating this information through the appropriate journals. Stuart Hall and I have attempted to cover the library sector between us. The following is an analysis of replies from the tertiary sector — Stuart will be reporting on other sections of the library field.

Firstly let me thank the 49 tertiary respondents (100 per cent return rate) not only for their speedy replies but also for their tolerance of the imperfections of the survey instrument. We passed the form to several colleagues for comment but neglected to have them pre-test it fully by filling it in. Consequently some ambiguities have surfaced in the analysis. We also attempted, as far as possible to use questions that had been used in the surveys sent to publishers and booksellers and this resulted in some inconsistencies in the form as a whole. We felt that it was important to slant the survey in this direction as our colleagues in publishing and bookselling are interested to discover how their own automation activities might best mesh in with the needs of their library market. Whatever its shortcomings, the survey has gathered information that I think is worth passing on.

More than two thirds of the libraries already use some form of automation to support orders verification and file maintenance and almost as many use systems to create supplier orders and for financial management. Those who did not indicated that they would like to do so.

Only about a quarter claimed automated help in capturing orders data, and about half expressed no interest in

moving in this direction. Only two libraries are presently communicating with suppliers electronically but more than half were interested in this possibility. Libraries were very clear on the subject of electronic funds transfer between themselves and their suppliers: nobody does it, and very few expressed an interest.

There is a wide variety of systems in use: Geac (2), Urica (7), Appleworks (2), local systems (10), LIBS100, Dynix (2), VTLS, Adlib, CLAS and Ocelot. Many use ABN for verification, with other sources in use including Dialog, Bibliofile, BIP and BBIP on CD-ROM and CLANN. BenNet and ILANET are being used by a few for communication.

In verifying information for ordering, libraries most commonly used printed sources (BIP etc.), followed in order of popularity by publishers' catalogues, ABN, CD-ROM products and online search of publisher/bookseller databases. However libraries who do not use these last two sources expressed a strong desire to do so in the future.

In using an electronic database libraries graded their preferred means of access as follows: ISBN, author/editor, title, author/title key, keyword within title, sub-title, series, publisher, subject, Australian distributor. Other desired access points that were suggested by respondents included LC number, ISSN, author/subject, approval plan, year of publication and author/keyword.

The next section asked respondents to grade 'the major elements of a possible electronic ordering system'. The question was lifted from a draft of the Booksellers survey and does not represent a full list of all the elements that librarians would require in their acquisition systems. However the listed elements were graded as follows: electronic access to bibliographic information and to availability information were the clear winners, with interest also in accessing information about current order status. There was some interest in using the system to order electronically and to receive statistical information on orders and prices. Again there was a resounding lack of interest in electronic funds transfer.

Regarding the current means of communicating with suppliers: mail was the overwhelming winner, with tele-

phone and fax being the next preferred means of communication, with personal contact, telex, and electronic mail lagging far behind.

Finally respondents were asked to grade the reasons for communicating with their suppliers apart from the routine placement of orders and the receipt and payment of invoices. Very clearly the majority of the traffic was in the two categories of responses from supplier (e.g. item out of print) and checking reason for non-supply; checking availability details and noting incorrect supply were next in order of use, followed by checking of price, querying invoice details and checking bibliographic details.

In summary, libraries in the tertiary sector are already generally using automation in their acquisitions activities with a fairly wide variety of systems available and in use. The impression was that libraries are concerned with the efficiencies of managing their own orders activity and are generally satisfied with the present forms of communication between themselves and their suppliers. They would prefer more information to be available electronically (on CD-ROM or online) but they have yet to be convinced that there is a payback from increased inter-system communication, whether in the form of downloading of data or of EDI (Electronic Data Interchange) — electronic mail, electronic invoicing and funds transfer, teleordering etc.

Results have also been received from the survey of the Publishers sector and will be fully reported in the appropriate journal. Jim Hart, who conducted this section of the survey, made the following comment: 'The Australian publishing industry seems to have a reasonably high level of computerisation in the general accounting and administrative areas, but has been slower to adopt technology in the more industry-specific fields (e.g. editing and production), and seems very cautious about introducing major changes such as teleordering. A number of larger publishers are interested in EDI but don't see a need for it yet. Others, clearly, see it as a more distant option.'

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