With a bit of luck...

One library's automation story

In the current economic climate, libraries face a situation where it is almost impossible to maintain a decent level of service let alone contemplate any improvements. Our library computerisation was done on a small budget. It is a success story which I would like to share with all those other special libraries that need to catch up and have not lost hope...

Three years ago when I started with the Gas and Fuel Corporation of Victoria I embarked on a computerisation project. We concentrated on two aspects: serials and cataloguing.

What kind of system were we looking for?
- A PC based system — IBM compatible.
- High standard — e.g. ability to import MARC records.
- A user friendly interface.
- Adding new records or changing existing ones should be very easy.
- A system which does not require special training and is not complicated to master. Also, a software manual which is easy to follow and does not expect the user to be a computer expert.
- First class user support.
- Reasonably priced.
- Produced by an established company committed to the product.

For one reason or another, products which were on the market at the time did not appeal to us, and we therefore resorted to library software advertisements. We came across an advertisement of a US company called Professional Software which seems not to advertise any more. Nowadays their marketing is carried out mainly through library conferences and trade displays.

The publicity brochures we received from the company persuaded us to try evaluation copies of modules we were interested in, i.e. serials and cataloguing. These trial packages met *all* our requirements. The subsequent decision to buy the full packages was reached without any hesitation. We did not encounter any problems in setting up the system so there was no need for support, but we were advised that we could contact the software producer directly by phone, 10 hours a day.

Where do we stand at the moment? We started to convert from the manual system to the new computerised system about 15 months ago. Conversion of the monographs was quite easy, especially as most of our monographs were on ABN. With the serials we had to take it a bit slower as we had a high staff turnover in this area.

We have not completed the changeover yet. Publications which are not on ABN have to be entered manually. Yet the impact on the library is just unbelievable. I can only compare it to the introduction of online searching of overseas databases about 15 years ago. The library image within the organisation has sky-rocketed. We are not perceived any more as mainly document purchasers/suppliers but as an information base. Library staff morale has also risen significantly for the simple reason that we can now provide a far better service. These new automated systems allow better control over library material and provide a more effective information retrieval facility. As this is much appreciated by our users, the result is a much more rewarding work place.

These packages are relatively cheap. For example the Online Catalogue costs only US$900. If you wish to know more about the packages please contact the company directly by writing to: Professional Software, 21 Forest Avenue, glen Ridge, NJ 07028 USA, telephone (201) 748-7658.

I happen to have about 60 brochure sets. If you would like a copy, please forward a stamped (90c), self addressed A4 envelope, mailed for my attention, to: M Dua, Central Library, Gas and Fuel Corporation of Victoria, 171 Flinders Street, Melbourne, VIC 3000.

We are not acting as agents to Professional Software but we will be very glad to share our successful experience with our ALIA colleagues.

Moshe Dua
Librarian-in-Charge
Gas and Fuel Corporation of Victoria

Amendment

Vibra '91

Cataloguers' office bearers: President is Margaret WALLER, not Walker. Our apologies to Margaret. Please amend your copy.

Trevor Wakely