

The reality of the virtual library

The John and Patricia Ward Library offers a new kind of learning environment

For many students, the days of waiting for urgently needed books are going fast. The newly opened John and Patricia Ward Library at the University of Western Sydney Nepean houses state of the art electronic features to improve the quality and range of services by using the latest advances in telecommunication and digitised computer manipulation and storage.

The Ward Library is cabled with Systimax Premises Distribution, an AT&T product. There are 130 wall outlets over three levels, each capable of carrying voice, data and image up to 100M/bs on 8 wire cable UTP. Fifty-two optical fibres service the building, from Nepean's Ethernet—a local area network standard. The building has a sophisticated computer-controlled energy management system and is designed to accommodate a microwave radio facility.

Conference facilities are also state of the art. The Ward Library's seminar room has seating for 60 delegates and can be divided into smaller rooms when re-

quired. A visualiser is installed adjacent to the lectern. As well as displaying standard overhead transparencies on to large screen monitors, the visualiser acts like a camera-cross overhead projector, displaying anything in fine detail. Other equipment includes a quality sound system, (with an audio loop to assist the hearing impaired), local and network video, slide and film facilities, compact disc and audio recording capability.

Both PC and Macintosh computers can be connected to the system and all functions can be operated from the lectern, the control room, and by hand held remote.

Nepean's library system was faced with massive growth in student numbers and new courses which required a considerably greater number of information resources than the library had. The new Ward Library was designed to incorporate electronic access to remote information to supplement print collections. The benefits to the Library's users are enormous. The state of art electronic features of the Ward Library have allowed the Nepean Library system to provide new services, to reach the full potential of other technologies already at the Library and to improve traditional services timeliness and quality.

What services can the library now offer?

- Networked access to on-site CD-ROM database between Nepean's three libraries and across Nepean's wide area network.
- The optical fibres and microwave links allow the library to take advantage of developments in networking multimedia, there are already stand alone IMM work stations with growing distribution access.
- Connection to internet and access to information resources stored on remote computers.
- High speed, High volume data transfer to and from

the UNILINC library network.

- Scanning and transmission of documents and images using equipment such as a Canon Microform Digital Printer, or a jtec 12 000 workstation that combines a computer, scanner, photocopier, modem, ISDN terminal adaptor, with data and image management software.
- Provide electronic access to local databases such as to Nepean's slide collection, of over 32 000 slides.

The telecommunications facilities built-in to the Ward Library reach their full potential through the UWS new communications matrix. In 1991, the University upgraded its telecommunications network, replacing an inter-campus network of DDS and Datel 48kb/s with ISDN semi-permanent circuits. Twenty-four optical fibre using 2Mb links were installed between the Kingswood and Werrington campuses and Werrington and Westmead campuses were joined by a microlink of 2 x 64kb/s bandwidths.

The modern university library, with greatly reduced budgets must, not only supply traditional services to an expanded university population, meet the research needs of numerous faculties and departments, but it must also adapt the new technologies to access the expanding information sources worldwide.

The relatively young age of the University of Western Sydney, Nepean Library is at an advantage in the telecommunication revolution. Nepean is keeping up with the opportunities as they become available and is using technology to deliver the traditional library services faster and in better condition than ever before.

The implications for education and research are enormous—the Virtual Library is almost here. The Ward Library is one of the most technologically advanced in Australia. It is using the growing worldwide information resources to supplement the existing collection, to assist the academic community to access specialised information as soon as it is published and to network with other institutions and libraries globally.

