

Coalition expresses concern over information industry merger

At a recent meeting, representatives of library consortia from around the world expressed concern at the news of yet another information industry merger which is further concentrating control of access to publicly-used information into a few commercial hands.

The acquisition discussed at the meeting of the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) was the purchase of SilverPlatter Information by Wolters Kluwer, a multi-national publishing company. Wolters Kluwer already own Ovid Technologies, which provides an alternative to SilverPlatter for library users to move from bibliographic information to the full-text of scientific and medical literature. SilverPlatter is widely used as a 'front-end' to numerous databases. According to ICOLC, the owner-

ship of two major access-routes by the same company presents a potential threat to users of information, particularly as the new owner may consider consolidating software platforms and also owns substantial numbers of the full-text journals accessed. Monopolistic control can lead to unjustified price increases and limited service options for users.

The acquisition of SilverPlatter by Wolters Kluwer is part of a wider concentration of access to information into the hands of a few giant multi-national companies. The acquisition of Harcourt General Inc by Reed Elsevier Inc is currently being examined by regulatory authorities in several countries. Library organisations across the world have been vociferous in pointing to the danger for society in such mergers. Open and unrestricted access to information is

one of the corner-stones of democracy, and control of access to the world's information by a few powerful commercial interests is developing rapidly.

The ICOLC first met in 1996 as the Consortium of Consortia (COC). The Coalition is an informal, international group that currently comprises more than 100 library consortia in North America, Europe, Australia, Israel, China, and South Africa. The coalition membership primarily serves higher education institutions by facilitating discussion among consortia on issues of common interest. The Coalition also meets with the information provider community, creating a forum for discussion about product offerings and issues of mutual concern. Further information about the ICOLC and its participating consortia can be found at: <http://www.library.yale.edu/consortia>. ■



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