



NEWS

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Electronic Information Resources in the Library: 20 years on

1977-87

The Barr Smith Library acquired access to its first on-line database twenty years ago, when it subscribed in 1977 to MEDLINE through the National Library. Subscriptions to DIALOG and ORBIT followed in 1979. 'This new and little known computer-assisted reference service' was promoted then (as now) for its advantages over print of flexibility, currency and speed of searching.

By October 1987 we had access through 12 suppliers to an extensive range of databases. But while use of this service increased annually, it was for a long time limited to a small group, largely academic staff in the sciences and engineering. Complex search mechanisms generally meant that searches were mediated by Library staff, rather than undertaken direct by the user. Also the fee for searches was passed on to the user, and searches on many databases could be costly — this in spite of Library staff expertise in searching and initiatives like the introduction in 1983 of mini-searches for a flat fee of \$10.

1987-97

In October 1987 the first notice was given of proposed subscription by the Library to a number of databases in 'the new CD-ROM format' which users could search for themselves. This change in format and the possibility of a service that was both free (to the individual user) and direct (unmediated by Library staff) was a major turning point in acceptance of electronic bibliographic databases.

The first CD-ROM purchases were made in 1989 (*Business Periodicals Index*,

Social Sciences Index, *Cdata* and *Dissertation Abstracts*) and were set up on dedicated terminals in what quickly became an expanding resource for access to electronic databases. The appointment in 1990 of a Technician to service the electronic database area recognised the growth of demand for the databases and the need for user education and assistance. **Joan Manners** has seen the area grow from one machine with two databases to the present 24 machines with close to 150 databases, and an enormous increase in use of individual databases in all disciplines.

By the start of 1993 there were more than 40 CD-ROM databases (some with a range of specialised sub-sets). Network access allowing remote use was implemented in 1992 for *Medline*, *Biological Abstracts* and *Current Contents*: in 1995 more than 70 databases were available in this way and in 1996 access was greatly simplified by the acquisition of an ERL server for over 40 popular Silver Platter databases.

*An academic library is not [only]
a storehouse of books
it is a machine to link the
potential user of knowledge
to the sources in which that
knowledge is recorded*



Joan Manners

Additional databases have been made available in CAUL [Council of Australian University Librarians]-sponsored trials which, (commencing with *Current Contents* in September 1993, followed by *First Search* in 1994, by *CitaDel*, *Lexis-Nexis* and others in 1995 and *Britannica Online* in 1996) have provided the opportunity to test a number of databases before purchase.

In 1996 the total number of databases available through the ERL server reached 100. The electronic database service has expanded to 24 machines, some of which now provide access to databases on the World Wide Web. The arrangement of databases on particular machines is in broad subject groupings — Medicine, Science, Engineering, Social Sciences, Economics, etc. — with some databases of general interest like *Encyclopedia Britannica* available on a range of machines, allowing users one-stop desk top access to a wide range of sources relevant to their research interests.

From an initially arcane resource, electronic database searching is now integrated into undergraduate coursework and the regular education programs of the Library. The vision of the Library as a window onto the world of information is rapidly being realised.

Future trends

The creation of the position of Electronic Information Resources Librarian in 1995 recognised the complexities and rapid pace of development in the broad field of electronic information and the need to ensure the proper integration of electronic database acquisition with collection management and resource allocation.

As Electronic Information Resources Librarian, **Stephen Cramond** has responsibility for evaluating and recommending databases and software for purchase, and for liaising with the Library's Systems staff and the University's Information Technology Division, to ensure the services selected can be and are made available, as well as organising the CAUL-sponsored database trials. From his experience in the position Stephen observes a number of trends in database development, and comments on some of the implications:

Databases

- There is a distinct move away from proprietary CD-ROM products to WWW access. Databases formerly offered on compact disc on a PC platform are reinventing themselves as Web databases accessible via the Internet, and as a result there has been a great leap forward in ease of access. There is a general feeling that CD-ROMs have reached the end of the road in larger libraries, as they are limited from the network point of view (moving to Windows from DOS exacerbated network problems), relatively expensive (libraries have not only to buy but to catalogue, handle and maintain CDs, whereas on the Web all mounting and maintenance can be done by the supplier), and are usually limited to a PC platform.
- database packages like *FirstSearch* and *CitaDel* (which provide access to a selection of subject-specific databases), previously available through a telnet interface and requiring user password information, are also being made available through the Web. The original group of separate Library Information Service machines with Internet access have now been incorporated into the Electronic database service with icons for the databases to which they provide access.

- there is a major shift to full-text databases. Within this there are two trends — secondary abstracting and indexing services are also re-publishing electronically under licence from the original publishers and linking the data to their indexes; and publishers themselves are providing search interfaces to their own material (though to date rather less sophisticated than the indexing/abstracting services, they have the advantage that they are more current than the secondary services). While full-text databases seem attractive, for the Library it means subscribing to a great range of titles and providing terminal access, and for the user it means having to search many databases (which may mean moving from one terminal to another) in any subject search.



Steve Cramond

- some suppliers are offering a range of formats: the supplier IAC, for example, offers a flat fee subscription for which we get full text but with a range of options — plain text, html with images, or using Acrobat software to allow reproduction of the original printed text.
- there is increasing competition and re-packaging of products and new suppliers entering the field: for example, IAC has recently entered the former preserve of Wilson Indexing products.
- there is considerable potential for Australian database development — specifically Australian material in electronic format is still limited, although some significant Australian finance and business databases are appearing.

Funding arrangements

- The total resource implications of replacing print with electronic databases are still unclear, particularly as arrangements are constantly being reviewed by providers. For Library purchases there have been two separate budget lines, one for CD-ROMs and one for 'other' electronic material (remote database access fees), but this separation has become increasingly meaningless and these have now been merged into one electronic database budget line. Costing of electronic database purchases should take into consideration establishment and maintenance of access.

Access and equity issues

- The Library is constantly expanding the number of terminals in the electronic databases service, and provides remote access to networked databases from within the University and by individuals with modem access; the University's Information Technology Division is currently reviewing dial-in access arrangements.
- access to any particular database may be limited by the licence agreement which specifies the number of concurrent users.
- access to many databases is limited by the terms of agreement to registered University of Adelaide Library borrowers.

A list of the databases that are available can be found on the computer catalogue under menu Option 16, About Library Services (Services/Electronic databases and CD-ROMs/alphabetical list, or through subject guides) or through the Library Information Service available on many of the machines in the electronic databases area.

Joan Manners provides training in the use of databases by appointment: and planning is under way to provide group training in the use of specific databases. Research librarians also assist in training in databases specific to their areas of subject responsibility.

Joan can be contacted at the Library on 8303 3850 or by e-mail: jmanners@library.adelaide.edu.au
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Susan Woodburn

Théodore de Banville gift

Dr. Peter Hambly has been presenting to the Barr Smith Library volumes of Théodore de Banville's *Œuvres poétiques complètes: édition critique*, publiée sous la direction de Peter J. Edwards, which are being published in Paris by Honoré Champion Éditeur.

Dr. Hambly, who was Senior Lecturer from 1964 to December 1994, and who is presently Visiting Research Fellow in our French Studies Department, is a member of the editorial team for the Banville. His latest gift to the Library, Tome II, contains 'Odelettes' — *texte établi*, Notice, Variantes et Notes par Peter S. Hambly.

French scholars will be grateful to Dr. Hambly for his work on Banville; the Library is grateful for his kindness in donating these handsome volumes to our collections for the benefit of current and future users.

Alan Keig

Reciprocal Community Borrower

A new type of library membership is being offered to members of the public: Reciprocal Community Borrower membership means that a person may join at any one of The University of Adelaide Library, Flinders University Library or the University of South Australia Library, and be able to borrow from all three libraries.

A fee of \$175 provides membership for one year from the date of registration.

Existing Community borrowers may upgrade their membership to Reciprocal Community Borrower status for an additional fee of \$75.

Borrowing conditions are the same as the lending library's existing Community borrowing scheme — full details and application forms are available at the Barr Smith Library's Services desk, which is open from 9 to 5 Monday to Friday (telephone 8303 5124).

Mary Georgopoulos

Interlibrary Loans charges

The Library is continuing to subsidise interlibrary loans, but there will be increased charges for overseas and Fast Track (urgent) requests received from 7 April 1997.

PHOTOCOPIES

Australia: \$5 for 1-30 pages + \$5 for each additional 30 pages or part thereof.

Fast Track: \$15 for 1-10 pages + \$5 for each additional 10 pages or part thereof.

Overseas: \$15 for 1-10 pages + \$5 for each additional 10 pages or part thereof.

Charges for Fast Tracks and overseas requests were formerly \$10 and \$5 respectively.

BOOKS

Within Australia: \$5

Fast Track (Australia): \$15

Overseas: \$40

Judith Lloyd

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