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A LIBRARIAN'S EXPERIENCE IN THE USE OF CDS/ISIS:

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Prepared by
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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA Office for the Caribbean

A Librarian's Experience in the Use of CDS/ISIS: a brief
description

by

Nancy St. John

It has been my good fortune to have been working at the Caribbean Development Bank Library, at the time when the Management of that Organisation took the decision to purchase a computer, so that the activities could be automated. The Computer Analyst, who was at that time at the Bank, came to me, to ask if any of the Library's files could be automated and if so did I know of any suitable programme for this purpose.

I suggested that he look into the possibility of obtaining the CDS/ISIS Programme from Unesco. I pointed out to him that I had understood that the only Computer on which the programme would run was an IBM. He said that this was the hardware that the Bank was looking at, and that this factor would surely influence the final decision.

He immediately contacted Unesco about the possibility of obtaining the programme for use at the Bank's Library, and received a positive response. A great deal of correspondence ensued and finally Unesco sent a Consultant to CDB to advise on the matter.

Suffice it is to say, that the IBM Computer was purchased and that due to the interest of Aubrey Garcia, our

Computer Analyst, plans proceeded smoothly for the installation of ISIS. Regrettably, as far as I was concerned, Aubrey resigned to take up a post at UWI, St. Augustine, and so was not there when this plan became a reality.

However, by this time, Clifford Willabus had joined the staff, and it was he who proceeded to Paris, to be trained in the use and installation of ISIS. He also returned full of enthusiasm and put his head together with those of the Library Staff, to identify the needs of that Department. I must state that at this time, fortunately for the Library, the other Departments were not yet ready to proceed with their activities, and so the Library was able to have the complete attention of Mr. Willabus. It would be remiss of me not to make public mention of how dedicated Clifford was to pursuing the solutions to the problems of information storage and retrieval as applied to documentation. Documentation was not his discipline, and he developed an interest to the extent that I feel that he has a natural flair that should make him an information specialist.

The exciting part of the ~~of the~~ automation of a Documentation Centre was now beginning. At this time, one of my colleagues in the Library World called me and gave me a clipping on automation that he had come across at a Meeting that he had just attended. I will share it with you and comment on it as I go on.

The article stated that there were six stages through which a Librarian goes during the computerisation of a library.

1. Euphoria
2. Growing doubts
3. Mass confusion
4. Hunt for the guilty
5. Dismissal of the innocent
6. Promotion of the uninvolved

My friend identified that I was in Stage 1 with all my enthusiasm and excitement at what was happening in the Library, and laughingly suggested that I take note of Stages 4 and 5. I must point out before you form the wrong conclusion, that I left the Bank when I reached Stage 2.

Seriously though, there were, and I would say that there still are, many challenges to face in the automation of a library. I would like to look at these individually.

THE INSTALLATION OF THE SYSTEM ITSELF.

The Programmer in the Computer Unit, must be totally committed and receptive to the needs of the Library and must be prepared to work with the Librarian. Both people must recognise their limitations with respect to their individual fields of endeavour and it is only by complete co-operation that their collective goal will be achieved.

This period is crucial to the success of the total venture. It is a period when many decisions need to be taken and carefully debated to ensure that they are both realistic and workable.

From the Librarian's point of view, it is necessary to decide what output is required, such as:

a) will it be possible to have access at all times for on-line searches?

b) if (a) is feasible, then is a card catalogue still necessary?

c) from what date shall the Library attempt to put its data on-line, or will the staff try to do retrospective cataloguing?

d) what back-up measures will be taken in the event of an extended loss of power so that data will not be lost?

e) will the library have a daily print-out?

f) will weekly cumulations be printed, or will monthly lists of acquisitions be adequate?

g) what arrangement of such lists will be decided on, ISIS no., with author, title and subject indexes, or any other arrangement considered suitable?

h) will the programme produce bibliographies on request?

i) how many access points will be available for searching?

j) should the loans system be automated?

k) should the acquisitions process i.e. ordering of books and documents be automated?

l) should the mailing list be put on computer?

m) should personnel records be put on computer as well?

n) should a periodicals holdings list be automated?

o) will it be possible to obtain a current awareness list of periodical articles separate from the normal list of new acquisitions?

These are some of the most obvious questions that will require decisions and obviously a great need for co-operation between the Programmer and Librarian. The Librarian is going to have to discuss the required format and assist the Programmer in the effort to produce what is needed. There is no point expecting the Programmer to understand our needs, as is there no point the Programmer expecting that the Librarian is going to understand all of the problems involved in fulfilling seemingly unreasonable requests as far as the Programmer is concerned. Librarians tend to be sticklers for details and arrangements that can seem very unnecessary to the uninitiated.

A warning is indicated here, the Librarian must realise that the Computer, fantastic tool though it is, will only produce what is put into it, and decisions must be taken with this in mind. What therefore, does the Librarian really need when he or she elects to 'go computer?' The

basic desire is, I consider, the provision of a better service for users. This being made feasible by the possibility of retrieving information far more quickly and far more exhaustively by a computer than by manual processes.

However, to achieve this goal, effective training of staff must be implemented, so that the best possible use is made of automation. An inadequately trained person will defeat the whole objective of the exercise, and only produce the before mentioned stage of 'confusion,' thus making the chance of stages 4, 5, and 6 a reality.

WHAT WAS DECIDED AT CDB

In the initial stages, it was decided to proceed only with putting our data on line. Acting on advice from one who had gone through the automation process, a date was chosen as a cut-off point from manual cataloguing. It was also decided that no retrospective cataloguing would be attempted at that time, since one would forever be trying to catch up with oneself. There was one exception to this however, and that was the Documents of the CDB. These have all been included in the data base, and I think the reasons are too obvious for mention. To make this as straightforward as possible, a special staff member was assigned to this task, so that she would not become confused.

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The next step was to create a Periodicals Holdings List which would provide additional information on the source from which a periodical was obtained, the price and the date of renewal of subscription.

In addition to these two activities, it was agreed that a Mailing List should be put on the Computer, which would then produce labels for postage. This was compiled for all the mailing activities of the Bank. It was so created that the Library could retrieve the addresses relevant to us, the TEU/TIS could do the same, as could the Bank's Document Officer, etc

WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE FIRST YEAR

All seemed to be going very well as far as we were concerned, but really none of us were fully aware of the true power of the system. To all of us it was like a great adventure, we discovered something new every day, but we were doing things the complicated way, not realising what we could really do.

After about six months, Unesco sent down a Consultant to see how well we were doing and to install a new edition of ISIS. In fact CDB Library was the first library, apart from the Unesco Headquarters Library to receive this system.

Michael Sherwood was very familiar with the ISIS system since he had installed it in Thailand at the Asian Institute of Technology.

Together, he and Clifford Willabus sorted out the installation of this new edition, and Michael gave the Library a good session in using it successfully. From here on, we were on our way, and with Clifford's unstinting support after Michael had left, we started inputting data at a pretty rapid rate.

We were getting daily print outs which we were able to check, and receiving a monthly acquisition list. The Computer Unit was printing multiple copies for us, which we were able to distribute internally and also to a selected list of interested institutions externally.

Soon after, we decided to index current periodicals having articles on or about the Caribbean Region, so that we could offer a Current Awareness Service to our Staff. I might add that this Service was well received and much appreciated.

WHAT ABOUT PROBLEMS?

Yes, there were problems. We discovered that the degree of checking could not be too thorough, as errors crept in, both in the typing and in the completion of the Bibliographic Record Card. The computer is so precise, that punctuation marks and spaces could create confusion in the filing of the records. A simple example of what happened: take an author's name, Smith, E. G. typed Smith, E.G. and the computer would never put the two together. This

happened quite a bit, because we had two data input operators and one used the first style and the other the second. Confusion!

When this was discovered by checking the author file, a great many corrections had to be made. Similarly, we had our problems with the descriptor file. In addition, because everyone was unfamiliar with the new methodology, the cataloguers frequently left out fields that needed to be completed

MY PERSONAL CONCLUSIONS

I enjoyed working with a computer, I appreciated what I found the capabilities of CDS/ISIS to be. Now that I have left the Bank, I must admit that I miss the computer a great deal. It was fascinating, challenging and sometime frustrating. However, it is the way to go, and I realised that we were undoubtedly able to offer a much better service to our users. We could supply bibliographies, virtually on demand, and I am sure that all librarians will agree that that is ^a tremendous advantage to have. Much more is still to be done and since I left, I believe that the Issue system is in the process of being computerised.

CDS/ISIS is available from Unesco, it is an extremely powerful tool for information storage and retrieval. It is worth your while to find out more about it from Unesco and if possible to obtain it for use in your library or

documentation centre, It is to be hoped that a version of
ISIS suitable for the Microcomputer will soon be available
to us, and then the whole Information World will have been
revolutionized.

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