COMPACT DISC DATABASES IN MARINE SCIENCE LIBRARIES:
A PANEL DISCUSSION

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in marine science information transfer. Carolyn P Winn, ed.
Proceedings of the 13th annual conference of International
Association of Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers
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of the Research Librarian, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution,
Woods Hole, Massachusetts, 1990. pp 39-43

The panel discussed their libraries' experience with compact
disc database(s). The panelists shared practical information
of benefit to the audience and other panelists. The panel
jointly addressed the questions numbered below. A specific
response for a panelist's library is noted by the initials of
the corresponding panelist.

1) What compact disc database(s) are in place and what was
     the purchase rationale?

All libraries have Cambridge Scientific's AQUATIC SCIENCES
AND FISHERIES ABSTRACTS (ASFA) disc(s). In addition to ASFA,
CW has Bowker's BOOKS IN PRINT PLUS (BIP) disc covering
695,000 titles listed in Bowker's in-print tools. In
addition to ASFA, TM has Cambridge Scientific's LIFE SCIENCES
COLLECTION (LIFE) disc corresponding to several abstracting
journals and sample discs for Silver Platter's MEDLINE,
OCLC's ERIC, University Microfilm's DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS,
and WILSONDISC.

Libraries listed several reasons for purchase of ASFA discs

including heavy usage of print and online versions (PM,JM),
positive user response during the 30-day trial period
(KH,PM,TM), and the interest of library administration in
subsidizing enduser searching (PB,MG). CW purchased the BIP
disc because the cost of the printed tools and the time spent
using the online version was within $100 of the cost of the
BIP disc.

2) How were subscription and equipment costs funded? Were
     subscriptions to printed versions dropped?

Initial disc and (in some cases) equipment funding were
provided by library funds (KH,CW), the Library Director's
reserve fund (PM), library budget allocation for online
services (JM), the Graduate Department (PB), or the supplies
budget (MG). Ongoing subscription costs are coming from
library funds (KH,CW,PM,PB), library budget allocation for
online services (JM), or the supplies budget (MG).

Libraries did not drop print subscriptions after getting
discs except for BOOKS IN PRINT PLUS (CW). The reasons given
included the continued heavy usage of the printed version
due to the one-person limitation of disc searching (PM), the
lack of public access within the library to the discs (JM),
and the uncertain future of compact disc technology and the
ASFA product (PB). Two libraries (MG,TM) had already dropped
subscriptions to print versions in unrelated actions.

JS commented that since ASFA is updated semiannually, the
printed and online versions offer greater currency.
Cambridge needs a critical mass of ASFA subscribers in order
to provide quarterly updates as originally planned.
Cambridge is now offering a 10% discount to new ASFA disc
subscribers for each subscription to a printed Cambridge
abstracting journal.

Several panelists reported that the discs are leased and not
purchased. Panelists commented that leasing is
disadvantageous for those libraries that distribute outdated
copies to sister libraries (CW), that the "lease" nature of
the purchase was not made clear at the time of purchase (PM),
that leasing is problematic for some institutions (TM), and
that leasing was not a problem since continuation is the
intent (PM). JM commented that lease cancellation requires
the return of the discs. Purchased information would have to
be returned which is a different situation than with print
subscriptions. JS commented that Cambridge's discs can now

be purchased for an additional charge.

Most panelists purchased microcomputers for the discs; some
panelists reported using existing microcomputers. Some
panelists purchased disc players outright (CW,TM); most are
lease-purchasing a disc player from Cambridge. MG utilized
special equipment-leasing funds within the institution.

MG and KH reported delays in receiving ASFA discs; MG
reported a delay in receiving the disc player. MG reported
extensive communication difficulties with Cambridge.

3) Equipment configuration and location?

Libraries reported a variety of equipment being used.
Libraries are using IBM XT or AT or compatible
microcomputers. Printers in usage include Epson
(KH,PM,JM,TM), NEC Spinwriter (CW), laser printer (MG), and
Hewlett Packard Thinkjet (PB). Monochrome and color monitors
are being used. Most libraries are using Philips disc
players; CW is using Hitachi for BIP disc. CW reported being
unable to run ASFA on a Hitachi player; JS commented that
ASFA has different software versions for Philips and Hitachi
players. An OCLC M300 microcomputer was being used by JM; it
lacked enough expansion slots to accommodate a disc player
card, a memory card, and a hard disc drive card. JS
commented that ASFA needs 512K memory.

Libraries had equipment located in public areas (KH,PM,PB)
and staff areas (CW,JM,MG). MG is planning local area
network access to the equipment located in a staff area.
Provisions for equipment security included nothing, location
in highly visible public area or controlled staff area, and
equipment placement within an enclosing cabinet/desk which
the staff closes when they leave the library (KH,PM).

The strategies reported for handling multidisc databases
included staff changing discs (TM), remote location of the
disc player with staff changing discs (PM,TM), and checkout
of the discs from the circulation desk with the public
changing discs (PB).

4) Usage of the discs?

Some libraries reported open access to anyone and some
reported restricted access. No library recharged searchers

for usage. Some queueing problems were reported
(KH,PM,TM,JM); CW and JM reported queueing problems because
the discs are accessible via a staff microcomputer.

5) Comments regarding search software and documentation?

ASFA: The panel differed in their opinion of the search
software and the vendor-supplied documentation.

KH commented that the software was good, that it needed
better word adjacency possibilities, and that there was a
format bug. The documentation is adequate for the
experienced searcher but could be clearer for the novice
searcher eg explanation of fields and descriptors.

CW commented that the software was not easy to use and that
the documentation was inadequate, being written for the
MEDLINE database.

PM commented that the software was flexible and had good
searching capabilities; it is not user-friendly but at least
is not hostile. Its usage is not intuitively obvious but it
is usable after a brief introduction. Documentation is
adequate but too long; users will not read more than two
pages.

JM commented that the documentation is inadequate and poorly
organized and that the menu-driven search software could be
improved.

PB commented that the software is generally good. A manual
was developed because vendor documentation was deemed
inadequate. Introductory screens were designed to display
information prior to entering the search software; these
screens state what the discs cover and that the software has
two search modes. The searcher may also access instructional
screens. Context-sensitive or fragmented online help needs
to be developed; currently the searcher is forced to refer to
a long search manual either online or in paper wherein is
buried the small bit of information that the searcher needs.
Unfortunately the searcher must exit the search software in
order to change from one ASFA disc to another; the search
session is suspended while the software reloads.

MG commented that the software was very good especially in
its dual mode design for inexperienced and experienced
searchers. The documentation was very good and not too long

compared to the usual computer documentation. Unfortunately the ASFA classification numbers on disc are undocumented. MG reported that a chapter author can be searched but cannot be displayed as part of the citation; instead, the book editor is displayed.

TM commented that author searching was problematic and that ASFA records can have editorial quality problems. Compact disc search software needs to be standardized (eg standardized screen designs, search protocols and formats) even if it is at the expense of software development.

JS commented that the new version (2.0d) of the search software corrected some of the problems (author searching and format) noted by some panelists who do not appear to have the new version. PB commented that author searching did change with the new version; MG commented that the new version still does not display chapter authors. JS reviewed the new features of the new version (2.0d) of the search software.

BOOKS IN PRINT PLUS: CW commented that the software is excellent and easy to use. It is menu-driven but it moves quickly. The documentation is adequate for most searching needs.

6) Comments regarding update frequency?

PB commented that ASFA recently changed its update schedule from quarterly to semiannual. Most panelists expressed a desire for quarterly updates. JS commented that currency could be addressed in the future by the development of floppy disc updates or linkage of the disc system to the online version.

7) Comments regarding user education?

Libraries publicized ASFA by various means: school newsletter (KH,PM,PB), electronic newsletter (JM,MG), library newsletter (PB), and mailings to academics (PM) and students (PB). Some libraries offered formal user instruction (PM,TM) or introductory demonstrations (MG,TM). Some libraries had developed handouts or manuals (PM,PB). Some libraries display the ASFA Thesaurus (KH,PM,PB) and geographic codes (PM,PB) next to the equipment.

8) Comments regarding evaluation & staffing?

KH reported that ASFA users were very satisfied. User
assistance does impact daily workload; however the users
become accustomed to searching and the demand lessens for
staff time. No impact on online searching or interlibrary
loan requests was seen. Library users usually want items
quickly and thus do not submit interlibrary loan requests for
ASFA items that are not locally owned.

CW reported that BOOKS IN PRINT PLUS has made a definite
impact. Acquisitions time is saved. Records are downloaded
into a DBASE 3 file and incorporated into the acquisitions
process. Review lists can be created for scientists and
reading-level-specific reading lists can be created for the
public information office.

PM reported that ASFA discs are beneficial from users'
perspective; they are easier to use than printed indexes and
free compared to the online version. ASFA discs generated
positive feelings for the library. Mediated search activity
has increased but the increase may not be related to ASFA
discs. Oftentimes followup online searches in other
databases are executed after the user has searched ASFA. The
online version of ASFA is still searched for library users
who want the library to execute searches for them. After the
startup period, ASFA discs are not making a significant
impact on daily staff workload or interlibrary loan.

JM reported that the online version of ASFA is still
accessed by the library. The online version's pre-1982
coverage is of interest to some library users and it is
convenient to search the complete span of years in one step
while online. JM anticipates an increase in interlibrary
loan requests because library users are content to wait for
delivery of items requested. Users are pleased with ASFA
discs and appreciative of the library's effort in expanding
service.

PB reported that user response has been positive. A time log
is being recorded for each search session in order to analyze
usage. ASFA discs have been helpful for responding to
information requests from correspondence. There has been no
change in online searching patterns. ASFA was rarely
searched before the ASFA discs arrived; discipline-specific
databases were usually searched and that continues to be the
pattern. Cambridge is receiving revenue that it did not
previously receive from online searching. ASFA discs have

impacted staff workload but the effort is worth it for the
benefit gained. Minimal impact has been noted on
interlibrary loan requests; the interlibrary loan staff
benefit when requesters include an ASFA printout with their
requests.

MG reported that ASFA discs are a convenient preparation
before going online. User response has been positive.

TM reported that compact disc technology is an important
component of the library's plan for development. TM
commented that studies have shown that there is a high level
of user satisfaction with online searching regardless of the
quality of the searches. Librarians have a responsibility to
educate users and ensure quality searching.

JS commented that developing countries do not have access to
online systems and response has been positive to ASFA discs.
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