

## Database Users Talk Back at Spring Meeting

The Spring, 1984 meeting of ASIDIC was held at the delightful Sheraton Sand Key Hotel in Clearwater, FL. In planning the meeting, the Program Committee decided that it would be timely to give large information users a chance to present their views, wishes, and comments on today's online products. They also encouraged presentation of new or innovative uses of databases. The program was a distinct success; the five speakers responded admirably. One striking feature of the program was the common theme running through each presentation; in spite of the diversity of the speakers' companies and information products, they all mentioned document delivery problems, the need for standards, and quality control of data. After the formal presentations, the meeting divided into small discussion groups following the traditional ASIDIC format, then reconvened to hear the conclusions reached by the groups. Program Chairman for the meeting was Harry Allcock of IFI/Plenum Data Corp.; he received a resounding vote of thanks from the attendees. A summary of the five speakers' presentations and the discussion group conclusions appears in this newsletter.

## Fall Meeting in Boston

The fall ASIDIC meeting will be held at the Boston Park Plaza Hotel from September 29 to October 1, 1985. Because of the success of the spring meeting, a continuation of the technical program is planned; users from other segments of the user community will report on their experiences with databases. The fall meeting will be a forum for searchers and information users to express problems and make suggestions for their solution to vendors, database producers, and others. The Program Committee is particularly anxious for a good turnout, and to entice attendees, Dan Wilde of NERAC, host for the meeting, has again reserved the New England Aquarium for the traditional clambake. Lobster-eating teams are now in the process of being formed! Mark your calendar now and plan to attend an interesting and exciting meeting at one of the best times of the year in Boston.

### **Committee Reports**

The Finance Committee, chaired by Scott Kostenbauder (IBM), now has two additional members: Walter Beverage (IBM) and Walter Finch (NTIS). During the coming months, the committee will be examining ways to encourage membership fees to be paid before June of each year. Some accounts have recently been moved to interest-bearing accounts. David Grossman (Marquis Who's Who) announced that ASIDIC now has 106 members, of which 68 are full members and 38 are associate members. There are eight new members since the last meeting; they are listed in this newsletter. The Program Committee announced that the Spring 1986 meeting will be held in Albuquerque, NM at La Posada de Albuquerque. Since elections will be held at the fall meeting in Boston, a nominating committee, composed of Rita Lerner (American Institute of Physics), Dan Wilde (NERAC), and David Grooms (Patent & Trademark Office) has been formed.

### **Book Review Editor**

In the last newsletter, I asked for a volunteer to edit a book review column for future newsletters. Helen Citron (Georgia Institute of Technology) kindly agreed to become the Book Review Editor. Helen's first column appears in this newsletter; anyone with suggestions should contact her at Price Gilbert Memorial Library, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, 30332, phone (404)-894-4501.

### **President's Column**

*by David Grooms*

Many of you missed our spring meeting in Clearwater. It was an excellent meeting. Our speakers, Don Hawkins of AT&T Bell Laboratories, Margaret Graham of Exxon Research & Engineering Co., Robert Gibson of General Motors Technical Center, Bob Lormand of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory library, and Ellen Shedlarz of McKinsey & Co. really did talk back to the database producers and online vendors! They raised some legitimate and critical questions that need answers. ASIDIC intends to pursue these issues at its fall meeting in Boston and then produce a paper stating the position of ASIDIC on these issues. If you want to be heard, I encourage you to be in Boston. Everyone I talked to really learned from the sessions. The speakers raised issues which have a great impact on all of us. Many thanks to Harry Allcock of IFI/Plenum for the excellent program he put together!

Attendance at meetings has been dwindling and the question why has been discussed in Executive Committee meetings. Many felt it was because travel budgets are being cut. The Executive Committee would like to find out as much as we can about this topic. Therefore, we will be conducting a simple survey to ask you a few questions that will help us in planning for future meetings.

Finally, elections are to be held at the fall meeting for President, two members-at-large, and an associate member. Please try to have your organization represented for this important function.

See you in Boston - September 29, 30, and October 1!

**Book Reviews**  
*by Helen Citron*

**INFORMATION PAYOFF: THE TRANSFORMATION OF WORK IN THE ELECTRONIC AGE**, *Paul A. Strassman*, New York, The Free Press, c1985. 298p.

This book examines information technology from its demand-side perspective. It covers topics such as individual productivity enhancement; productivity measurement; worker attitudes; union acceptance; training of employees and managers; privacy, legal protection, and security; organizational design; employee motivation and the quality of service; organizational structure of firms operating in networks; pricing of information; preserving property rights to know-how; centralization vs. decentralization of management; how to justify investments in information technology; how to estimate the full costs of information networks; work at home; and what to do with workers who become unemployed because of an inability to deal with the new office environment.

Individual chapters deal with clearly observable clues to the future. We have behind us thirty years of experience with computers and with their effects on automating a large number of information-processing activities. Minicomputers, office terminals, word-processing equipment, and even personal computers have been installed in a sufficient number of organizations long enough so that we scarcely need to treat them as unknown influences. It is, therefore, reasonable to make projections for the period down to the end of this century. Technological progress can be reasonably expected to continue at current rates. Political forces will ultimately dictate the rate at which the benefits from information technologies will be realized.

This book takes a human perspective in dealing with the area of information technology. Training of staff, integrating electronic technology into jobs and changing the emphasis from efficiency to effectiveness are the topics which can be found in this title. This outstanding treatment should be required reading for managers of information industries.

**EXECUTIVES' GUIDE TO ONLINE INFORMATION SERVICES**, *Ryan E. Hoover*, White Plains, New York, Knowledge Industry Publications, c1984. 295p.

This well-organized book contains information for the executive about information services. It provides basic information on

data communications networks, specialized information services, applications with personal computers and future implications including videotex. Most of the standard information vendors of business data are covered.

The appendices include a concise glossary, sources of additional information, and a directory of information services. Even though this material will become outdated very quickly, the concepts that this book could convey to executives are valuable. The information process is well described and many examples appear for different information needs.

#### **News Releases**

- The Cranfield Conference will be held July 22-25, 1986 at the Cranfield Institute of Technology, Cranfield, England. It will again be sponsored by INSPEC; further details will be issued in the fall of 1985.
- A Congress for Librarians on downloading and uploading was held at St. John's University, Jamaica, NY, on February 18, 1985. The proceedings are currently in press and will be available soon from Pierian Press.
- Martha Williams, editor of the *Annual Review of Information Science & Technology*, has announced the chapter authors for volume 20 and has requested that anyone with useful material contact the appropriate author.

#### **New Members**

ASIDIC welcomes the following new members:

Digital Equipment Corporation  
12 Crosby Drive  
Bedford, MA 01730  
Ms. Pricilla Duffy

Washington Researchers, Ltd.  
2612 P St. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20007  
(202)-333-3489  
Ms. Leila K. Knight

Information Access Corporation  
11 Davis Drive  
Belmont, CA 94002  
(415)-591-2333  
Mr. Morris Goldstein

Library Information Specialists, Inc.  
1790-30th St., Suite 130  
Boulder, CO 80301  
(303)-444-1101  
Ms. Eileen G. Conway

Blount, Inc.  
4520 Executive Park Drive  
Montgomery, AL 36115  
(205)-272-8020  
Mr. David Day

Database Development  
Marine Plaza  
111 E. Wisconsin Ave.  
Milwaukee, WI 53202  
(414)-765-0203  
Mr. Joseph Bremner

National Rehabilitation Information  
Catholic University of America  
4407-8th St. N.E.  
Washington, DC 20017  
Ms. Susan Flower

ORI  
1375 Piccard Drive  
Rockville, MD 20850

Vu-Text Information Services, Inc.  
P.O. Box 8558  
Philadelphia, PA 19101  
(800)-258-8080  
Ms. Donna Willmann

#### **Reprints of Meeting Presentations**

Most ASIDIC papers are published in *Information Services & Use* (ISU), published by North-Holland. As an ASIDIC membership benefit, reprints of meeting presentations are sent to members free of charge. The ISU issue containing the papers from the Spring, 1984 meeting was distributed recently.

### SPRING MEETING SUMMARY

#### Library Networking at AT&T: New Information Needs and Technologies in a Competitive Environment.

*Donald T. Hawkins, AT&T Bell Laboratories*

The historic deregulation and divestiture of AT&T occurred a little over a year ago. Deregulation brings sweeping changes to an organization, some of which are:

- ⊕ Performance variability increases--the weak get weaker, and the strong get stronger,
- ⊕ Price pressures increase,
- ⊕ Products are unbundled, service/product tradeoffs emerge,
- ⊕ Rapid cost cutting becomes necessary, and
- ⊕ Capital requirements increase, but access to capital becomes limited.

All the above impacts have been felt by AT&T and by the Library Network operated by AT&T Bell Laboratories. Cost constraints have been strong; some Library Network services have been discontinued, and others have been consolidated. Many services have been made usage-sensitive and are now charged back to their users. Staff time is also being charged to the user--a departure from the past.

Electronic technology helps control costs and improves productivity. The Library Network owns its own computer using the UNIX\* operating system. Functions performed by the UNIX system are circulation, an online catalog, downloading online search results, and so on. A new command, *library*, allows customers of the Library Network to send their orders directly to the unit filling the request, thus saving staff time.

In the area of online databases, the following examples drawn from the Dialog\* system are typical of needed improvements:

- ⊕ Addition of pricing information to database documentation,
- ⊕ Direct display of selected items without having to form a set first,
- ⊕ Ability to change the default display format for an entire session,

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\* UNIX is a trademark of AT&T Bell Laboratories.  
Dialog is a trademark of Dialog Information Services, Inc.

- ⊗ A labeled-field format for all databases, and
- ⊗ Full-word indexing of the Journal Name field to facilitate bibliometric studies.

Databases could be greatly improved by standardization of bibliographic data; extensive editing to unify citation styles must often be done in the compilation of bibliographies. Current information is of prime importance in a competitive environment; database producers should take all steps they can to speed the flow of information from the source to the database. In one case, the old-fashioned press clipping service was found to offer the most timely means of acquiring information. Full text databases are helpful in overcoming document delivery problems.

Marketing and promotion have assumed a greater importance in the new competitive arena; the Library Network has developed a new logo and has changed its name to reflect a move to a more business-oriented operation.

**Information Services as a Corporate Resource at Exxon.**  
*Margaret Graham, Exxon Research & Engineering Co.*

Information is used to transfer technology throughout the world-wide Exxon organization and is treated as a corporate resource. The Research and Engineering Information Services coordinates networking so that holdings are not duplicated. It employs 108 people and sends out over 600 documents per day. Most people do not think of information as a resource, and they will not wait for it; it must be sold to them. Exxon's online database use is over 2,500 connect hours a year, with all kinds of equipment--from HP terminals to IBM PC's. About 2.2 databases are accessed per search; results are often downloaded. Downloading is for repackaging purposes only; they do not keep the information in machine-readable form. All costs are charged back to the customer at \$70/hour for professional time and \$50/hour for clerical time (reference work is charged back only if the time to answer the request exceeds one hour). The Exxon information staff comprises subject specialists who evaluate search results before passing them to customers. They are paid the on the same scale as other technical personnel.

Exxon tried training end users to do their own searches, but found that users soon returned to the library after trying searching. However, their training made them better users, with a better understanding of the search process. Professionals must be involved in end user training; they must keep up with new databases and systems, and they will handle complex queries such as multi-database searches, etc.

In the area of needs, the following stand out:

- ⊕ Document delivery systems still leave much to be desired. It is often impossible to fill requests for the full text of documents in a timely fashion. Exxon relies heavily upon the Chemical Abstracts Service document delivery service.
- ⊕ Standards are needed in bibliographic data so that duplicate items can be identified and removed from search output.
- ⊕ Today's end user searching packages stop users from using the full power of online searching systems. Further development is needed, with end user involvement.
- ⊕ Quality control in databases continues to be needed. There is too much buck passing between producers and search service vendors.

Exxon does not process any databases in-house; they work exclusively with vendors to obtain the needed information. Their heaviest used database is Chemical Abstracts; when CAS ONLINE became available, most of their usage migrated to that system because the abstracts were available online.

The transition from information in paper form to electronic continues, and with it the merger of the computing and information businesses. Electronic delivery of the full text of documents is useful, but abstracts and controlled vocabularies will continue to be important. Databases will continue to grow, and end users will want direct access to them; therefore, the information professional must be ready to meet this challenge. Exxon will take advantage of all available technologies; they are not usually the first in a field, but they aim to be a fast number two. The challenges for the future will be the management of rapidly changing information technologies, larger databases with more costs, continuing demand for end user access, and a growing recognition of the value of corporate information resources.

#### **Information Services Within General Motors Corporation.**

*Robert Gibson, General Motors Corp.*

GM has no corporate-wide library system; its research laboratory library, started in 1919, serves 1,500 customers (600 professionals) today. There are two branch libraries. The collection has about 30,000 volumes, 1,400 journal subscriptions, and 40,000 volumes of bound journals. Library staff numbers 26, of which 12 are professionals. Automation is coming slowly, with an online catalog and an in-house database based on IBM's STAIRS search package.

GM employees tend to work on one project for a long time, so they do not need as many searches as individuals in other organizations. Eight of the library staff members do searches; three support staff do online verification and ordering. They

have access to seven major online systems and do 550 searches/year. The heaviest used databases are Medline, Chemical Abstracts, NTIS, Compendex, and INSPEC. Most searches are for initial research on a project; not many are quick reference. Promotional campaigns for online searching are not conducted; customers learn about the service through brochures and word of mouth. Subject and author searches are charged back to the customer. The searchers prefer to have the customer present at the time of the search. They do not download any results because of the extra time needed to produce a finished product. The main user frustration is duplicate citations.

GM's wish list includes the following:

- ⊕ Higher baud rates.
- ⊕ Faster delivery of results, (such as electronic overnight delivery of offline prints).
- ⊕ Online access to the "grey literature" (university research papers, company reports, local government publications, etc.)
- ⊕ Handbooks online (*Metals Handbook*, AIP handbooks, and so on).
- ⊕ Ability to combine output from several databases, sort it, and purge duplicates.
- ⊕ Improved document delivery. Indication of the source of the item in the citation would be helpful; producers should consider entering the document delivery business.
- ⊕ Uniform invoicing by all vendors to make checking bills easier. Electronic invoicing would also be helpful.

GM is investigating end user searching, but only a few customers want it. Most of them come back to the library after they realize the complexity of the search process and how long it can take.

#### **Online Searching at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory.**

*Robert Lormand*, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) employs 8,000, one-third of whom are library customers. Their library system supports 10 branches and has 51 employees (17 professionals); the collection has 60,000 books, 255,000 technical reports in hard copy, and 1/2 million microfiche. The library budget is about \$2 million, with \$200,000 allocated for online searching. A major problem is the need for secrecy clearances for all employees. A clearance can take as long as a year to obtain, so it is difficult to replace people.

The LLNL library has its own dedicated PDP 11/70; their computer center's general purpose CDC 7600 mainframe houses large in-house databases. An online catalog running under the BRS software is expected to be available by the summer of 1985. They access 32 online vendors; most of the usage is on Dialog, BRS, NLM, and ORBIT. About 700 searches/month are done, plus an additional 500 SDI's. Searchers specialize and practice on the systems they are responsible for. Their services are charged back to customers at \$34.75/hour. The in-house databases must be accessed from private, hard-wired terminals; because of security considerations, there is no dialup access, and the system is shut down every night.

Downloading is not done because people would rather have their information quickly rather than in a beautiful form. Many users simply cut up the output and paste it on to library request forms to submit requests for the full text of documents. About 200 end users have passwords to do their own searching; having a password has become a status symbol. The library monitors password usage and takes back those that are not used. Many end users return to the library after trying their own searching and realizing that it is work and must be done frequently to do it well.

The following enhancements to online databases and systems would be helpful:

- ⊕ More timely information. LLNL spends considerable time searching through tables of contents of journals. The ideal delay time before material gets into an online database would be a few hours.
- ⊕ Standardization of contracts and greater flexibility in applying terms and conditions. The LLNL management requires a standard contract be used, but vendors insist on their own. Because of these difficulties, it takes three months to obtain renewals for online systems. The introduction of new subscription plans, etc. has caused many problems.

#### **Information Services in a Business Environment.**

*Ellen Shedlarz, McKinsey & Co., Inc.*

McKinsey is a management consulting firm dealing with top levels of management. Its information services department employs 22 full time and 25 part time people, of whom 13 are professionals. Three people are devoted to quick reference service (which aims to provide answers in less than two hours). Six information specialists have MLS degrees and subject specialties; all the specialists are trained on all databases and vendors.

McKinsey's information needs are dictated by their clients; they are very dependent on online databases. They are nearly totally automated; the library accounts for 72% of the traffic through

their electronic mail system. They subscribe to 14 online retrieval systems; all searches are charged back to the requesters, including staff time. Since they do trend studies extending over 10 years or more, they are not as concerned as others with the currency of information. Their heaviest used on-line system is Dialog (68%), followed by Nexis (19%); heavily used databases include ABI/INFORM, The Computer Database, Dun's, Electronic Yellow Pages, and Magazine Index. Each searcher spends an average of two to three hours a day online. End user searching is not used; it was tried, but they found that people did not want to do it because they often work from their clients' offices.

Major problems encountered with online services include:

- ⊗ Difficulties with billing and accounting procedures. Searcher-assignable accounting codes for internal use would be helpful.
- ⊗ Low level of vendor participation in MLS degree programs. McKinsey finds that new library school graduates are not skilled in online searching.
- ⊗ Little emphasis on international coverage in business databases.
- ⊗ Lack of document delivery support in some files. Data Courier was mentioned as offering a good service; McKinsey searchers often do not search some databases because they do not offer document delivery backup.
- ⊗ The amount of paper that searchers must keep up with, such as newsletters, system documentation, etc.
- ⊗ Inconsistent customer support on vendors' toll-free lines.

McKinsey's future plans include the introduction of PC's for searching, further end user training, transmission of search results on floppy disks, and evaluation of front end software packages.

### **Discussion**

Attendees were divided into discussion groups, each led by a speaker. Six questions were posed to the groups; a summary of their responses follows.

#### **Is standardization between online vendors needed or necessary?**

Standardization of commands for routine operations (logon, logoff, etc.) is needed and desirable. All the speakers called for standardization of bibliographic data elements to aid in

reformatting output, etc, which would probably aid the move to standardization of commands. Smaller database producers might have financial difficulties in adapting to or converting to standards. However, commands are part of a vendor's software, so most vendors would probably resist standardization. The marketplace is the final determination of the need for standards, but it would be difficult to get agreement between vendors because each has a vested interest in its own software.

**Would the ability to cross-file search between online vendors be helpful?**

Most felt that it would be extremely helpful but not commercially viable at the present. A front-end package might provide such a capability.

**Are there problems between intermediary searchers and end users?**

There may be a problem with lack of trust of intermediaries by end users. Intermediaries can render a valuable function in training and local support; many scientists do not want to do their own searching. It is still too early to know the impact of front-end searching software; most of today's packages need more development. End users may not know whether they have done a good search or not.

**What is the impact of optical disks on in-house micros?**

There are large implications for database producers; optical disks may open new methods of distribution for large bibliographic databases. Pricing will be difficult to determine. A major advantage of optical disks will be to overcome the document delivery problem mentioned by all the speakers.

**If users desire major changes to databases, should they be asked to pay higher rates for access to the database?**

It is natural to improve systems and to increase prices to cover costs. But not all users may need the changes; therefore some will be unwilling to pay. As always, the market will determine whether prices can be increased.

**Should online vendors consider canceling databases that get little or no use?**

This is an economic decision. What does it cost to maintain the database in spite of low usage? Will the users be willing to subsidize the maintenance costs? Will the vendor? Is there an obligation to keep archival data online once it is made available?

#### **Acknowledgement**

I thank Betty Unruh of Dialog Information Services for again making her notes available to me.