Digitization of the Library

Report on the "Birds of a Feather" Session at LISA-II

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1 Introduction

The discussion session was a very lively one and the recorder asks to be excused for any errors and/or omissions in the notes that follow. Last names are dropped when the speaker has been previously named.

The session opened with a brief presentation, by the moderator, on the concept of digitization of the library and the problems and questions that the movement towards digitization provokes.

In general, we can see an evolution of library concepts from the Traditional Library towards the Digital Library:

– **The Traditional Library** provides access to some small fraction of the available material, pre-selected and available only to local users
– **The Automated Library** offers similar services and media as the Traditional Library, but tasks are accomplished in more efficient ways which might include a local online catalog as well as other local databases, CD-ROMs etc. The format of documents can be printed or electronic. Services are still available only to local users who depend on the opening hours of the library.
– **The Electronic Library** can be described as a networked Automated Library. The library catalog and other databases can be accessed by users anywhere, any time. Although some of the library items are entirely electronic, the Electronic Library typically still offers online access to references to documents, rather than to full text.

– **The Digital Library** provides users anywhere and any time with direct access to the full texts/contents of all available material.

The problems arising from this evolution comprise the following:

– Additional workload on librarians
– Lack of knowledge
– Cost of electronic version, as well as printed version
– Cost of hardware
– Decision-taking (who has to take decisions?)
– Archiving
– Role of librarians

We will have to discuss what the new role of librarians might look like. Will we become hunters of electronic documents? Or rather Internet navigators? Do we have to act as information highway police officers, censors, network coordinators? Or will we become...extinct?

We can't ignore the arising problems, but how can we handle them? Shall we improve the collaboration among colleagues and how can we do so? How can we educate ourselves?

2 Discussion

The discussion then took place, more or less as follows.

Sarah Stevens-Rayburn: I have always claimed that I am a system independent, non-database-specific information retriever. In other words, effective information retrieval should not depend on the format or media involved.

Helen Knudson: We should make sure we educate astronomers and administrators that the library is valuable and worth funding

Uta: Time is a problem as well as funding.

Robyn Shobbrook: We have to be better time managers – set priorities.

Ingrid Howard: May I ask – how many of us are solo librarians without assistant?
(About 1/4 of the participants raised their hands.)

Peter Hingley: Librarians should aspire to be scholarly, know the subject, know the literature, know the contents of their own collections, especially historical material.

Jane Holmquist: There is scholarly content in both print and electronic databases. As far as education goes, I gave some tutorials – I had to learn in order to do that. We can share such information with others.

George Wilkins: At University of Exeter the librarian gives lectures on WWW.

Uta: Who told you [the group] how to use the Internet?

Kathleen Robertson: The PAM listserv is helpful.

Uta: What tasks can be gotten rid of?

Ellen Bouton: Distributing reprints.

Sarah: We have finally given up checking in preprints and rely on the database.

Brenda Corbin: Stop keeping statistics.

Marlene Cummins: But statistics can be useful to justify funding.

Sarah: You can use sampling, rather than constant counting.

Uta: WWW systems will provide statistics of use. How many of you offer electronic services?

(Many have an online catalogue.)

William Sherwood: Local use of catalogue is preferred to conserve bandwidth. One can also check on "help" users to find problems and people who need help.

Robyn: Educating end users is a new role for us.

Uta: Is the term "digitized library" frightening?

Helen: Only when it goes down or gets clogged with use in the late afternoon – so it is better to use it in the morning. Users are more impatient because of technology and there is a false expectation that staff can be reduced.

Peter: Certainly email senders expect quicker responses.

Uta: Some projects appear to aim to replace the librarian.

Helen: But really, astronomers do not want to do it themselves.

Jeanette Regan: Everybody is affected by new technologies – librarians should be the leaders.

Brenda: Not everything should be on WWW only, for example, the IAU conferences and the journals. People love to browse in libraries, they need a place, a space. And even though it is also electronic, I won't get rid of my catalogue on cards.

Uta: I agree – there always will be books.

Gernot Burkhardt: At my institution the equipment is not in the library – people search in their own offices. The library is made of books.

Pete Banholzer: I did some presentations of electronic initiatives – the Internet tutorials were wildly successful. But, astronomers want to continue to come to the library.

Uta: We should be proactive rather than reactive. How can we help each other?

Helen: There was a good example on PAMNET lately where people were asking each other about equipment purchases. That's a way we can share experiences.

(A discussion of the PAMNET and Astrolib followed, including their respective advantages and disadvantages. See notes following discussion for an explanation of these two Internet services.)

Ellen: PAMNET has many irrelevant messages so we decided to continue Astrolib.

Jane: PAMNET has automatic distribution of messages – it is a great help in locating citations.

Helen: PAMNET has a broader scope which is still useful – e.g. the equipment issue.

Brenda: Astrolib serves an important function – it is targetted.

Uta: Let's discuss for a moment the European group of astronomy librarians, EGAL. Is there any interest in this group?

Marlene [Canada :] I wanted to belong!

Peter: Well, you are part of the "Commonwealth", as it were.

Sarah [U.S.A. :] Then you should take the colonies back! Astronomy librarianship has no national boundaries.

Ingrid: Some European librarians met at lunch today to discuss the future of the EGAL Bulletin. The feeling seems to be that producing a printed bulletin requires too much time for editing, copying and shipping, On the other hand, yet another list is redundant – PAMNET and ASTROLIB are enough. We will explore the question a bit further before deciding anything definite.

Jeanette: There is an unofficial group in Australia.

Uta: Is that sufficient?

Marlene: We need a LISA III!

(Lots of agreement from the group.)

(Some unresolved discussion about possible locations.)

Peter: To avoid too much of a burden on individuals, we could have distinct sections organized by different people.

(On that note the meeting was adjourned.)

3 PAMnet

PAMnet is an electronic discussion group for the members of the Physics, Astronomy, and Mathematics Divsion (PAM) of the Special Libraries Association. The list is open to non-PAM division members as well.

The owner of the list is Joanne Goode (goodejm@muohio.edu). The list is not moderated. All messages to PAMnet are now being archived.

The purpose of PAMnet is to provide a forum for the discussion of library and information resource issues relevant to the fields of physics, astronomy and mathematics. PAMnet may be used to seek help with reference questions. PAMnet may also be used to seek help in obtaining materials, but only when those materials are not available through a library's normal ILL or document

delivery suppliers or in cases when timing is critical.

No commercial products or services may be advertised on the list, but the list may be used to discuss commercial library materials, resources and equipment.

PAMnet does not replace the PAM Division newsletter. Subscription to PAMnet does not make the subscriber a member of the PAM division. Subscription to the PAM newsletter is available to non-PAM Divison members for a nominal fee.

Some useful commands follow.

- **To post** messages to PAMnet, send your posting as mail to sla-pam@listserver.lib.muohio.edu

Note: All of the commands below must be sent to listserver@listserver.lib.muohio.edu (not to the list)

- **To sign off** PAMnet, send mail to listserver@listserver.lib.muohio.edu and, as the only line in your mail, put "unsubscribe sla-pam"
- **To automatically receive a copy of your own posting** as the only line in your mail, put "set sla-pam mail ack"
- **To suspend** your mail from PAMnet, as the only line in your mail, put "set sla-pam mail postpone"
- **To "undo"** the postpone command, as the only line in your mail, put "set sla-pam mail ack" (or use the "noack" option if you don't want copies of your postings)
- **For additional information**, as the only word in your mail, put "help".

4   Astrolib: An E-Mail Distribution for Astronomy Librarians

Astrolib is an e-mail distribution for astronomy librarians whose purpose is to share relevant information widely and rapidly. Astrolib was born out of the desire expressed at IAU Colloquium 110 (Library and Information Services in Astronomy, 1988) to continue the valuable exchange of information begun there, and has been fostered by the increasing and widespread availability of e-mail. Librarians have been immensely enthusiastic about Astrolib, speaking regularly about the value of the messages and the more general value of networking and sharing information.

Astrolib messages vary widely in content, including:

- Publication and procurement information for difficult to find and noncommercial items (both print and non-print)

- Information on publication problems or defective journal issues Duplicate items offered to other libraries
- Reports from conference attendees
- Reports on ongoing projects, e.g. the IAU Thesaurus
- Questions about technical library matters, e.g. cataloging of CR-ROMs or use of a particular software program
- Information on resource sharing
- Requests for help in tracking or obtaining obscure information and/or references
- General information, e.g. personnel changes, awards to, or publications by librarians

Ellen Bouton, at National Radio Astronomy Observatory, is manager/moderator for the Astrolib distribution. She receives and redistributes all messages, editing them and combining them as necessary or convenient. Information about librarians' e-mail addresses is regularly and actively solicited by the manager and by other librarians.

Currently there are over 120 people from 23 countries receiving Astrolib messages. Further information may be had by contacting Ellen Bouton, library@nrao.edu.