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Panel: Library Automation - Its Impact on Our Daily Working Lives

Impact of Automation in the Cataloguing Department at York University

C.A.L.L. PANEL - LIBRARY AUTOMATION - ITS IMPACT ON OUR DAILY WORK LIVES.

May, 1981
By Judy Ginsberg

For purposes of this discussion, automation means the use of the UTLAS CATSS (Cataloguing Support System) service, but the definition could be broadened to include use of any available on-line bibliographic service such as DOBIS, OCLC RLIN etc. With slight variations, the areas of the Cat. Dept affected remain substantially the same in any case. These areas are Bibliographic Searching, Cataloguing, Authority Work, Card Processing and Filing. Within these areas there are often both positive as well as negative aspects of impact. Let us take a look at these specific areas in detail.

For all the automated procedures mentioned, the standard hardware includes a terminal with a screen and a printer attachment for hard copy.

Bibliographic Searching

I have only very positive things to say about the way automation has affected this particular area. Searching, by its very nature can be, when done manually, a most time consuming, error prone, tedious task. Standard source tools such as NUC, Canadiana, BNB etc. are always consulted, several different approaches are usually warrented and after all that, the record, particularly if it is for a current item, is often not located. The use of an on-line data base such as the one offered by UTLAS allows access to the regular LC, NLC source files plus other source files like UK Marc, speeds the searching process considerably, lowers the error rate, and, as well, allows the searcher to locate

copy which may have been added to the data base by a contributing library such as the University of Alberta Library. Searching can be accomplished through the use of multiple access points such as ISBN, LC card number, and title (precise) as well as Author, Subject, Series (browsable). If a "hit" or "hits" are discovered, the searcher chooses which record to review, checks to see if it is indeed the correct copy and can take a print-out of the copy right then and there. Copy located in this way changes the status of the book from one which requires original cataloguing to one which needs only semi-original or copy cataloguing. At York, we have found that our "hit rate" for current items runs around 60-70% and for older material around 50-60%. The savings in time and money is obvious.

Cataloguing

There are fewer positive things to say about this area. In an automated cataloguing system each item of the bibliographic record must be coded into machine readable form before it can be accepted into the data base. Coding sheets are used instead of "P" slips. The coding format must be learned, of course, and this can take quite a bit of time depending on the attitude of the staff involved. There is also _more_ to code than what shows up on a standard catalogue card. Besides the variable fields for the usual entries, main or added, and descriptive copy, there are what are termed control fields for information which does not show up on the catalogue cards but which is included in the data base record and is indexed for possible future retrieval.

Information like language, jurisdiction of contents, and whether or not the item is a government publication, is coded in these control fields of which there are potentially 98. Of course, a library can choose to ignore these control fields, and, in fact, most libraries ignore a good many and also, many don't apply to all items, but in order to make best use of the automated system, certain information should be coded, depending on the perceived future needs of each particular library.

The nature of the coding is of two types-derived or original.

Derived

Coding can be derived from a print-out of the correct or related record, or even derived from a record on-line without the use of a print-out. Coding is said to be derived when a record already in the data base is used as a source of copy and is modified to fit the needs of the library doing the deriving. The modified record becomes that library's record and is added to the data base. The record derived from, goes back into the data base completely untouched.

Original

Coding is said to be original when there is no copy in the data base which can be derived. Even coding using an LC proof slip as a copy source is original coding if a copy of that record is not in the data base. Original coding is a much slower process than derived coding, and is therefore to be avoided whenever possible.

I hope you can see that the main reason I am relatively negative about the automation of the actual cataloguing process is because of the amount of extra work and time it takes to learn the coding format, code the material, and add all the extra data to the bibliographic information. The whole benefit, of course, is in the fact that the library is adding information to a large national data base which can be shared, or can make tapes of its records available to libraries on different systems.

Authority Work

We, at York, have found that the use of an automated catalogue support system has caused an enormous impact on our authority control process. UTLAS's new authorities capability allows libraries to link their headings in bibliographic records to authority records for these headings if none already exist. Headings so linked to authority records are automatically changed if a change is made to the authority record. The changes to the heading show up in the data base and on an UTLAS generated COM with each subsequent update. Libraries, such as the York Law Library, which are still receiving catalogue cards cannot take full advantage of this linking procedure which is precisely the reason why York is not using UTLAS's full authority facility. Libraries can, however, use the terminal to search for authority records in much the same way they search for catalogue copy. The use then, of an automated system affects authority work in that it allows for linking, and it allows for easy searching for authorities in the data base. But most of all, it affects authority work by virtue of the fact that it is an automated system shared by others and as such, exerts an enormous amount of pressure on libraries to conform to the standard. At York we are finding that the amount and extent of authority work done has increased by approximately 50-60%.

Inputting & Filing (Card Processing)

Once the cataloguing and the coding are complete, the record must be input into the data base to become part of it. Inputting takes in the old areas of card processing and the typing of added entries. Instead of typing catalogue cards an individual inputs the coded information into the data base. Derived coding takes considerably less time to input than original coding because there is less to be done on the whole. However, some complicated derived coding can present problems at times. Some sample statistics based on York's experience are - 20 derived records per hour and 10 original records per hour as compared to approximately 10 catalogue records (master cards) typed per hour (this figure does not include time spent typing added entries on completed card sets).

Cards are ordered automatically once the record is filed in the data base, and the record is also automatically taped. Cards arrive in filing sequence usually every week and a half to two weeks. All added entries are included - a tremendous time-saver.

I hope I have been able to give you a rough idea, in the time allotted to me, of the impact of automation on specific areas within a Cataloguing Department. I would like, in the time remaining, to make some general statements.

It is York's experience that -

1. The use of a CATSS service will not save the library money unless the Cataloguing Department is overstaffed to begin with. It will, however, change the speed with which certain items previously requiring original cataloguing and which now have copy, can be processed, and it should allow the Department to process more titles within a given amount of time.

2. Initiating the use of an automated system such as the UTLAS CATSS service into a Cataloguing Department, or any other Department, along with its attendant hardware and strange terminology, has the potential of making a tremendously negative psychological impact on the staff, especially if the system is seen as a threat to jobs. Staff will have to be retrained and helped to feel that the system is there as an aid. We, at York, have found that keeping the staff informed and having regular discussions centering around the use of the systems and the problems encountered are most beneficial.

3. For this point, I can only speak about UTLAS, but I have a feeling that what I am about to say applies to most automated systems. The problem is that the system is not always up and running. This has an enormous impact on work-flow and morale in that staff cannot always accomplish what they should be able to when they should be able to. According to some statistics worked up at York, over a two-month period between January and February, 1981, we lost approximately 30% of computer time due to system problems. This does not take into consideration the time lost due to fragmented working schedules and slow system response time, etc. The statistics quoted earlier for inputting, could be more like 25 derived per hour and 15 original per hour, if the system was responding quickly.

I wanted you to be aware of some of these facts in the hope that they will allow you to proceed with open eyes.

Wider Implications of Automated Systems on Cataloguing

Wider implications involve the emergence of large data bases shared by many libraries and used, in cataloguing terms, for searching and cataloguing. These large data bases could eventually be programmed to communicate amongst themselves, thus giving libraries access to an even greater number of bibliographic records.

Expense is a problem at the moment, but we will probably be seeing more and more libraries moving to fiche and, eventually, to on-line catalogues as disillusionment with fiche catalogues grows.

The concept of main or added entry will eventually disappear, to be replaced by the concept of access points.

Authority control implications are vast and exciting as this area has a lot to gain from automated procedures. The linking mechanism I mentioned earlier is a big time-saving factor here, and one which bodes well for cataloguers and catalogues suffering from too many rule changes. Unfortunately, libraries still on a card system can not take full advantage of this facility at the moment.

As more and more copy becomes available through the use of on-line data bases, I think we may well see fewer jobs for professional librarian cataloguers...Cataloguing Departments which previously needed perhaps two or three professional librarians, might soon be able to get by with only one because of the decrease in the amount of original cataloguing necessary.

I have mentioned only some of the wider implications, and very briefly at that. One final implication which I would like to add, is one which may not be quite so obvious to those of you who have little or no experience in coping with problems generated by the use of an automated system, and that is, that libraries are being subtly or, in some cases not so subtly pushed and coerced through promises, new rules etc., into using these systems perhaps before the systems are quite ready to respond to the demands placed on them. It pays to tread carefully.

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