

Cyber Library - Boom or bust?

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The paperless office will get rid of all books; libraries need to automate or die; CD-ROM technology will negate the need for books - these are all bold statements being bandied around the world as fact, but as I hope I will show, the reality is very different...

In July 1996 I was hired to set up an internal Technical Library for the Motorola Australia Software Centre. I was told that the whole library was to be sited on the World Wide Web Intranet that Motorola already operates worldwide. I was shown a room with shelves and a disarranged collection of books, manuals, software and journals and was left to my own devices... I was told that various items were surplus around the building and that I should go and find them - so I tracked down a chair, a telephone, a bin and most importantly, a computer.

At about the three month mark, I was pleased to present a library which had a fully operational inter-library loans system, using the National Library's ABN Inter-Library Loan Subsystem; access to ABN, UnCover, the British Library's Document Delivery Service, the Internet and Motorola's internal Intranet.

A Technical Library Website was designed using the Netscape Editor function and the technical writer placed the site within the Motorola home page. Links were added and we were up and running. The Website consisted of a Contents Page which served as the link to various other pages. The contents page contains:

- What's New...details of the latest and greatest in the Library
- The IET system...the Technical Library's zappy online catalogue
- Graphical Location Guide...a graphical guide to what's where in the Library
- Fact Sheet...general information about availability and use of the Technical Library
- Virtual Reference Guide - with links to : Telephone Directories (USA and Australia); International Travel Network; Health Sites; Software Engineering Research Laboratories; Dictionaries on line; Libraries - local University Libraries and their Telnet addresses; Light Relief (Freebies on the Web; Comedy Page; Psychological Test and Dilbert)
- Bookshops of Note
- Technical Library Policy
- Electronic Journals

The Library Web-based catalogue was generated using a Microsoft Access database as the foundation. The tables created were then linked to an SQL Server and available via a link to the Library Website. The fields used were: Barcode; Title; Author; ISBN; Publisher; Place; Date Published; Format (Book, CD-ROM, Diskette); Copy Number; Subject; Borrowed by; Date Borrowed; DDC; Location (Technical Library, other sites); Classification (unclassified, confidential, etc.); On order?; Date ordered; Ordered from; Expected in.

The data in the catalogue table was complemented by another table listing Borrower Details (including: Employee ID; First Name; Last Name; Email Name; Work Phone).

The two tables linked to provide the user with access to what items were held, what format they were in, if an item was on order and when it was expected to arrive and whether it was on loan and to whom. The catalogue was available on every person's desk via the Motorola Internal Home Page and therefore on every type of machine - PC, Unix dumb terminal, Macintosh, etc.

The Library was set up as a 24-Hour service, with self-servicing being available outside normal working hours and therefore access to borrower details became imperative. The managers agreed that the library materials should be shared among the staff and that weekend access was needed. The answer was that when an item was searched on the library catalogue, it came complete with a hyper-link to the borrower's name, along with their telephone extension number. If the enquirer wished to contact the borrower, they could either telephone the person concerned (which is frowned upon due to the need for silent work areas for the programmers) or they could double-click on the person's name and an email form would appear on the screen, already marked for the borrower's attention and ready for a message to be typed.

Much to my surprise I found that the disciplined loans systems of the University Library had not been forgotten. My clientele were so diligent about their borrowing habits that they eagerly informed me when they had borrowed an item from another borrower. The borrowing record was altered and it continues to be a valid method of control. Another area which surprised me was when it came time to do the "overdues". The Library's clientele tend to borrow items on a project basis and therefore keep them for extended periods. They were quite happy to lend items to others for short times, but keep control of the items themselves. To facilitate some sense of control from the Library, I implemented a system of "Refresher Notices" to email to borrowers which were sent out approximately every two months and served as a valuable reminder to clients. The notice politely requested notification of whether the borrower required an extension on loans or was intending to return them. A list of their loans was included on the notice. Before I had so much as pressed the "Enter" key, clients were walking into the Library with profuse apologies for being so tardy. I have never experienced such a dedicated and honest group of clients! A big THANK YOU to all the hardworking University Library Staff who have trained these people so well!

As I had been warned by several managers, the emphasis was to be on a "paperless library" and I was to work my "magic" accordingly. I was sceptical about this

being possible but agreed to work according to that edict. Well, as time went on, more and more books surfaced. indeed, not only books, but technical manuals, conference proceedings, journals, training manuals, travel guides, reference manuals and newspapers! Our little room with a couple of books turned into a library almost overnight - it seems that the staff had been promised a Librarian and they were ready when I walked in the door. I set about cataloguing material - a process which ended up with an overwhelming array of items to be processed. It was a deluge and almost none of this material was available in an electronic format! It was certainly searchable via electronic means (using abstract databases) and that was the main thrust of the purchasing of online services. The World Wide Web has proved an invaluable search tool and never ceases to amaze me with the results gained. It is a true boon to the librarian who works in isolation and enables us to work much smarter, rather than harder.

So, despite the "paperless library" emphasis the Library has grown to a total of 450 books on loan, another 100 on the library shelves and numerous sets of printed manuals, conference papers, newspapers, journals, etc. To complement this array of material a software library has been created. A collection of CD-ROMs, diskettes and tapes has been identified which is being catalogued. Software is borrowed in a similar way to printed materials, and indeed, the CD-ROMs found in the backs of books have their own record and barcode, so that the CD-ROM can be lent separately. Quite often the book is lent with the CD-ROM and then the CD-ROM is further lent to another client, who requires only the software contained

Plans are under way to develop a "Knowledge Base" of all information in the organisation. The concept is to provide a search engine on the World Wide Web which accesses all types of information formats held: printed matter, software and email. The end user will be able to request information from one entry point on the Motorola Internal Home Page and be able to search the entire range of information kept within the organisation, from any terminal using hyperlinks. Various databases will be linked together on internal servers, holding filtered emails, indexed software and print material (current and archived). Each database will be organised according to the format of information held. The Library Catalogue, for example will provide an index to printed materials, including archived materials. Software (CD-ROM and Diskette) will also be indexed via the Library Catalogue with barcodes. Software from the projects is basically just computer code stored on the server. Groups of code which relate to each other are to be electronically tagged and searchable as a group.

Emails are sent around the organisation with a number of generic aliases. Specific aliases such as the "Technical List" are to be filtered from the general pool of email and grouped in one database which is full-text searchable. Privacy considerations have necessitated that only aliases be filtered for. Individuals place relevant information on lists such as "Technical" for general distribution as a normal process. The location and availability (security classification) of the resulting items will be provided with the search result.

Organisational documents are held on the Web and will be available for use by the requestor through hyperlinks. The need to keep print copies has been eliminated for a wide range of documents and more are being converted constantly as the use of electronic signatures becomes more accepted.

This is a mighty project, which will provide access to information from all corners of the organisation, eliminating the "left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing" syndrome. Project members will have access to the research and resulting computer code which is generated in other projects. VOB's (Virtual Object databases) are used to house this type of information and it will be full-text searchable via the Knowledge Base

In conclusion, even in this group of computer-literate and, indeed, addicted clientele, the printed word is heavily relied upon. I find this heartening. I have endeavoured to enhance that trait by providing excellent search capabilities for that information. That is where tools such as the World Wide Web, databases (both online and internal) and computers come to the fore. It has become a necessity to marry the two to provide the best service possible for my clientele.