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ONLINE DATABASES

E-Resources in Tough Times

By Carol Tenopir

FOR THE SECOND YEAR IN A ROW, respondents to the annual *LJ* Database Marketplace Survey (*LJ* 5/15/04, p. 38–49) see poor library budgets as “the major issue or trend to impact database and information product availability and distribution to libraries next year.” Companies that market electronic products to libraries worry that budget woes will make new products a hard sell and place old products under renewed scrutiny.

Librarians must get the most for their money and look to technology for new solutions. Several respondents think poor budgets mean more reliance on online databases and electronic full texts with less purchase of print. Companies that produce both media are likely to continue as long as there is a market for both, but they are gearing up for the time when electronic journals and e-reference materials predominate.

Indexes as portals

A bad economy may lead libraries to maximize the use of their own collections, according to Bob Murphy, OCLC senior public relations specialist, “especially...for high-quality abstracting and indexing databases.” Others predict that economic difficulties will lead libraries to focus more on what they can get outside their library walls for the lowest possible cost. The most important trends are “finding and linking to full text, whatever the source, and integration of library holdings with commercial indexing and abstracting,” said Constance Crump, manager, public relations, ProQuest.

These views reemphasize the key role of indexes, with linked journal articles as an add-on. The index then becomes a portal to journals and journal articles, which may be held in a variety of locations. It isn’t just wishful thinking on the part of companies that make their living selling indexes—indexes help users identify relevant information within the millions of possibilities.

Software that does more than link

Indexing companies are also looking beyond indexes and abstracts that merely point to or link to full articles. “Instead of concentrating on large, unrefined sets of answers (information sets), information producers will strive to apply technology to provide more targeted solutions—for example, through data mining, analysis, and visualization,” stated Eric Shively, public relations group leader, Chemical Abstracts Service.

Meghan Nering, R.R. Bowker’s marketing assistant, also envisions new developments in database software as “database and information products for libraries...continue to evolve, becoming more enhanced with features and functionality that will distinguish them from e-commerce and public access online

sibilities, [along] with advances in imaging and process software that have dramatically reduced the cost of digitization.”

Federated searching

Federated database searching is another way to increase the functionality and use of electronic resources. “Meta-searching and other means of unifying search across heterogeneous products and platforms” is the most significant trend for the coming year, according to John Lewis Needham, online product development editor, CQ Press. Alex Machado, senior marketing manager, Elsevier (ScienceDirect), foresees two related trends: “[T]he continued advancement of federated searching and associated technologies [and] the progression toward an integrated, digital library environment.”

More sophisticated tools to analyze and use information may lead to more varied types of content

search tools.” The inclusion of online searching in Microsoft Office 2003 is just one way to mix user tools with content.

More sophisticated tools to analyze and use information may lead to more varied types of content. “As technology evolves, more capabilities will become possible,” Nering said. “More types of information, data, and formats will be cataloged and disseminated, including visual data—art, architecture, and historic documents—and multimedia data—speeches, performances, and conferences—as the limitations of computer memory are erased.”

Adding vast archives of historical materials may be part of this trend, including an “increase in the digitization of primary source information in 2004,” predicts Kim Ward Gabbert, manager, corporate communications, Thomson Corporation. “This acceleration is being fueled by customers’ demand for fast access to searchable primary source materials that will uncover new research and teaching pos-

Federated searching and expanded types of content will lead to better integrated information systems within libraries. When this happens, “library patrons will more readily use electronic resources when they can easily retrieve results with one- or two-click searching and can link from resource to resource, whether it’s full text, an abstract, or a pointer to an offline resource,” said Ellen McCullough, marketing director, xrefer.

Integration is a tall order because it requires not only content compatibility (including indexes, articles, books, multimedia) but software that searches across formats and massive amounts of information. Other issues, including privacy and copyright, are no doubt important, but today’s hot topics revolve around better use of integrated information sources.

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