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## The States of Online

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## The States of Online

STATE LIBRARY organizations generally gear their meetings to all types of librarians (although in some states there is a separate school library organization) and include a variety of topics on their programs. Judging from the number of sessions about online databases at state conferences these days, it is clear that, in the past decade, online has become a mainstream topic for all types of libraries.

At the Iowa State Library Association meeting this year I led sessions on the future of commercial online systems and scholarly journals. In the past several years at other state library association meetings I've discussed the human side of automation, CD-ROM vs. online, the evolution of online services, and myriad other topics. State organizations are particularly good at bringing together a variety of librarians to share ideas and for dealing with big-picture online issues such as licensing of general interest digital content and regional collaboration for access to specific resources.

A random surf of state library association conference programs for this year suggests concern about negotiating good deals for licensing online content. I located many programs on contracts and licensing, such as "Negotiating with Vendors: Getting the Most for Your Money!" at the Michigan Library Association; "Licensing Realities: Practical Advice on License Agreements" at the Illinois Library Association; and "The License Process: We Promised To Do What?" in North Carolina.

In addition to licensing, building consortia is a major topic. In states such as Iowa, Virginia, and Louisiana, 2000 conference programs brought attendees up-to-date on new databases in their statewide online systems. Others worked on developing state networks; librarians

in Nevada considered "Does Nevada Need a Digital Library Project?"

### Statewide licensing

When all types of libraries in a state join together, it can pay off in better license agreements, and libraries banded together can buy access to things that small libraries could never afford. Usually the state library association is not the legal consortial entity that negotiates and signs contracts, but state conferences are a good place to communicate, recruit new

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## Centralized statewide licenses offer advantages to both vendors and libraries

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participants, or discover what additional online resources should be licensed.

There are some downsides to large-scale licensing, however. By relinquishing negotiation to a consortium, sometimes a library relinquishes its power to choose the system or database and will end up with the lowest cost product rather than the best one. Database companies don't always win either. Since the general content business is so competitive, sometimes database aggregators may be too anxious for customers, offering prices too low to be profitable. Statewide licenses favor small libraries, in particular those that would not be able to purchase expensive online resources on their own. The cost savings will be less for large libraries, but the overall cost is usually less for all sizes of libraries, since the cost per user typically comes down the more users there are.

Regional consortia such as AMIGOS in the Southwest or SOLINET in the Southeast traditionally cut deals for their members. State libraries or other state agencies chartered especially to serve as library consortia commonly coordinate statewide electronic access agreements.

In Tennessee, the statewide consortia TENN-SHARE first envisioned the Tennessee Electronic Library (TEL), which is run by the Tennessee State Library & Archives. TENN-SHARE makes database deals for Tennessee libraries. Still, says Linda Phillips, chair of the Database Selection Committee for TEL (and head of collection development and management at the University of Tennessee Libraries), TEL and TENN-SHARE supplement, but do not replace, a regional consortium. According to Phillips, "There are so many products needed by libraries that our organization makes a point of not pursuing opportunities already available through the regional network. We have long lists of products not available regionally that we want to discuss with vendors."

### General guidelines

The International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) (originally the Consortium of Consortia) brings together approximately 150 library consortia from around the world. Although the majority of members are academic, many statewide, multitype consortia belong as well, including the new Library of California, Kentucky Virtual Library, Louisiana Library Network, Michigan Library Consortium, and TENN-SHARE. ICOLC brings together representatives of consortia to discuss issues they have in common and shows the growing power of library consortia that mainly serve as electronic database "buying clubs."

Of particular interest from ICOLC are several documents that provide assistance to any librarian involved in licensing electronic content and some responses to them from the library and publishing communities. "Guidelines for Statistical Measures of Usage of Web-Based Indexed, Abstracted, and Full Text Resources," "Guidelines for Technical Issues in Request for Proposal Requirements and Contract Negotiations," and a "Statement of Current Perspective and Preferred Practices for the Selection and Purchase of Electronic Information," along with descriptions of the organization, its members, and the



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services they offer can be found at [www.library.yale.edu/consortia](http://www.library.yale.edu/consortia).

Asked to comment on the role of state consortia, Clifford Lynch, executive director, Coalition for Networked Information (CNI), points out the following:

Any kind of consortium helps to provide negotiating leverage and economies of scale. State-based consortia seem to me to be particularly powerful in conjunction with state-based information access strategies that aim for very wide information access and bring in K-12 schools as well as colleges and universities, reach out broadly to citizens and adult learners, and build on the public library systems. Often the funding for this comes at least in part at the state level, so statewide licensing is a natural consequence.

Lynch agrees that state library associations are generally involved "mainly as advocates for statewide access programs, rather than directly in negotiations." State libraries are more likely to play a central role in "coordinating state initiatives."

### Advantages of statewide licenses

Statewide licensing deals can be a good deal for individual participating libraries, as they can bring online resources to small school or rural public libraries that could not afford individual access nor license negotiations. Such licenses bring advantages to the vendors as well, by providing a single uniform contract, bragging rights to a state's business, and, often, additional business. Lynch reminded me that because vendors don't wish to "cannibalize" their other business, the price for a statewide deal "can be quite high" in the aggregate.

Vince Price, VP of marketing for ProQuest (UMI/Bell & Howell), explains how statewide licenses can keep prices down for individual libraries:

When we have to sell institution by institution, we have higher selling costs, customer service costs, training costs, etc. Thus, our pricing has a floor, the minimum we can charge due to the fixed costs to serve an institution. Well-managed consortia allow us to invest in satisfying the needs of the consortia, and thus the fixed costs when spread across

the whole group are much lower per institution. This lets us allow the price floor to fall to a lower level.

Sam Brooks, senior VP of sales and marketing for EBSCO Information Services, sees "both positive and negative aspects" of statewide consortia. On the positive side, the cost of databases per library is drastically reduced, and small libraries gain new access. However, Brooks warns that "in several cases, funding from the legislature has been too limited, therefore restricting committees from purchasing the best available products. Unfortunately, in those cases, libraries in such states have been forced to access inferior or less stable products—missing many important full-text sources."

My own state, Tennessee, is a case in point. TEL's Phillips tells me that in the first year of the project (1999–2000), the state contributed 25 percent of the funding, but in its second year, TEL is totally dependent on LSTA money.

### General interest databases

Statewide networks with licensing agreements are becoming more com-

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monplace, especially for general interest databases. ProQuest's Price says that "consortia represent a fairly small part of our overall business and tend to be concentrated in the general reference category." Such "statewide, multitype consortia deals tend toward broadly used, less-specialized databases. The general database category is a very competitive business and can result in severe price pressure. Whether a given vendor

gains or loses revenue depends on its installed base in a given state."

TENN-SHARE has a Collection Development Committee; Phillips explains that it "polls members on their database needs and then works with vendors to determine pricing for members and to sponsor trial access to databases." Databases offered through TEL are mostly general periodical databases from Gale Group, but the committee has "identified full-text

newspaper, literature, science, and history databases as high priorities...when additional funding is available."

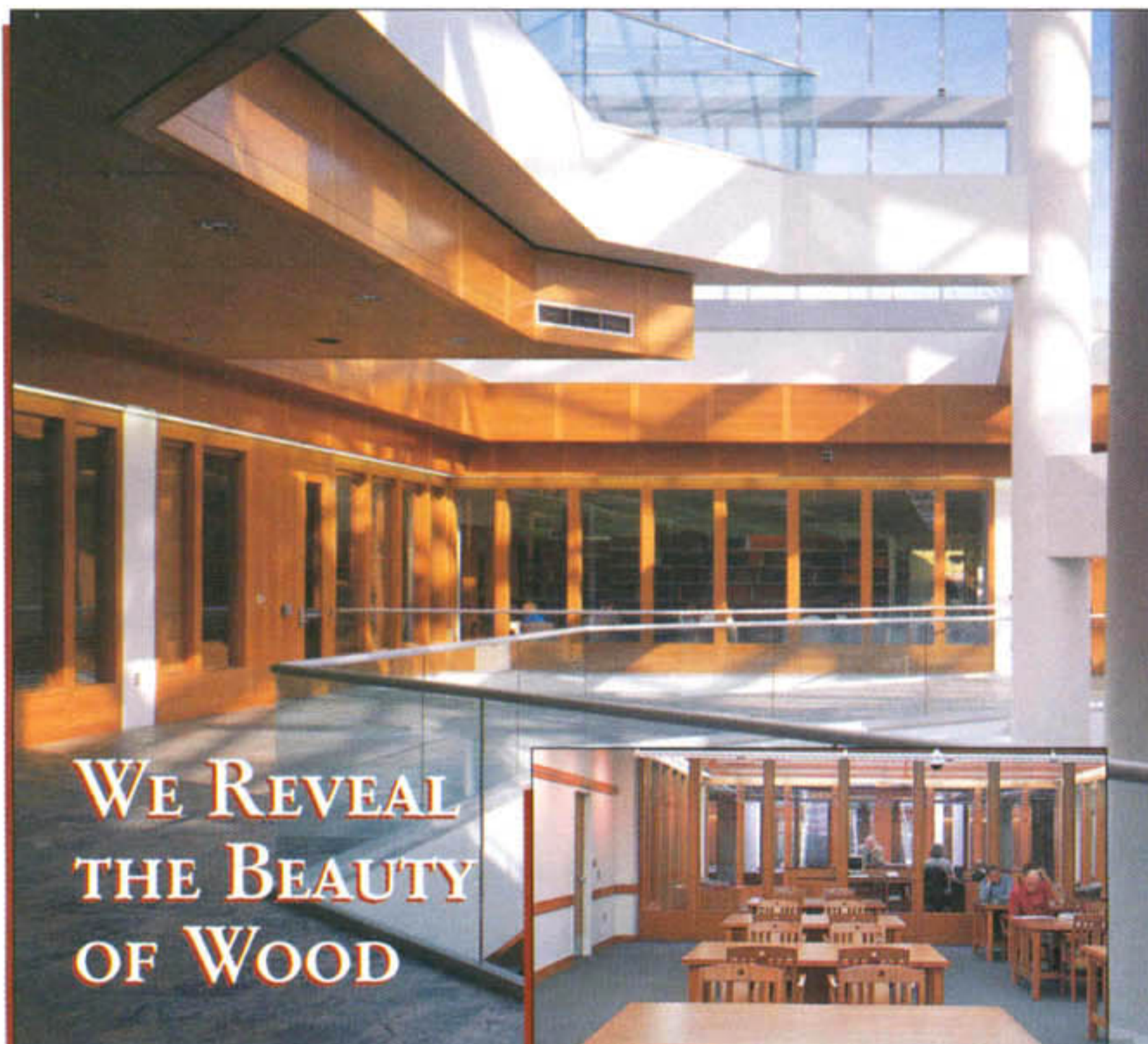
Four companies (EBSCO, ProQuest, Gale Group, and OCLC) dominate the highly competitive market of statewide licensing of general bibliographic and full-text information. EBSCO Publishing makes its EBSCOhost and/or NoveList databases available to over 30 statewide multitype library organizations, including Alabama Virtual Library, Georgia (GALILEO), Indiana (INCOLSA), North Carolina (NC LIVE), Oregon State Library, and Wisconsin (BadgerLINK).

Gale Group's InfoTrac, SearchBank, or GaleNet databases are licensed to the states of Minnesota, Tennessee, Michigan, and others. ProQuest licenses its databases to multitype statewide consortia in Washington, North Carolina, and Wisconsin (with lots more statewide licenses that are limited to specific types of libraries, i.e., just academic or just public libraries). OCLC FirstSearch is available in Michigan, Georgia, and New York, among others.

Most statewide networks don't limit themselves to a single vendor or just to general interest databases, although the focus may often be on resources that have the widest general appeal. The AccessMichigan system run by the Library of Michigan licenses databases from OCLC FirstSearch, Gale Group InfoTrac, and SIRS Discoverer. TexShare in Texas offers databases from ProQuest, Gale Group (GaleNet and InfoTrac), Ovid, Infonautics, and netLibrary (e-books), among others, and plans to expand offerings in 2001. Florida licenses databases from a variety of vendors, including Gale Group, RLG's Eureka, Cambridge Scientific Abstracts, Bowker, Lexis-Nexis, ISI, and OCLC FirstSearch.

### Sharing ideas

Statewide networks share a common goal of providing electronic resources to a substantial portion of the population through their local libraries. Centralized statewide licenses offer advantages to both vendors and libraries. Centralized negotiating takes some of the burden off individual libraries to strike the best deal. It is the state libraries and separate statewide consortia that provide these services, but state library organizations—especially at their conferences—provide a forum for facilitating the work of consortia, sharing new ideas, and getting the word out.



Architect: FFKR Architects

The expansion of the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University includes both architectural woodwork and library furniture by Fetzers' Inc. Over 1,600 pieces of natural cherry furniture were manufactured including tables, chairs, stools, benches, computer carrels, and opac stands. Ten reference and information desks were also produced for this fine project.

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