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Recommended Citation

Tenopir, Carol, "Collection Development" (1990). *School of Information Sciences -- Faculty Publications and Other Works*.

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ONLINE DATABASES

BY CAROL TENOPIR

Collection Development

PUBLICATIONS ON CD-ROM have become an important part of the collections in libraries of all types. A salesman recently tried to convince me that the access software was all that was important when selecting a CD-ROM; he told me "the content doesn't really matter all that much." As librarians we recognize that the content really *does* matter all that much and that decisions for purchasing CD-ROM are like decisions for any other expensive materials we add to the library collection. Evaluating the ease and power of access is important, but without valuable or appropriate content, the access methods are mere gimmicks.

A toolkit for collection development

A new book from Pemberton Press (publishers of *CD-ROM Professional* magazine) helps librarians with the important collection development evaluation task. *CD-ROM Collection Builder's Toolkit* by Paul T. Nicholls is a unique evaluation and buying guide to the most important CD-ROM publications for public, academic, and school library reference collections. It combines reviews, evaluation tips, database descriptions, and sources for further information to help you make immediate buying decisions.

The introductory chapters provide an overview of the CD-ROM marketplace and CD-ROM's role in libraries. Nicholls writes a regular column for *CD-ROM Professional* so he keeps on top of the situation. He reports that the number of CD-ROM titles available for purchase has grown from one in 1985 (BiblioFile) to an expected 1900 in 1991. At the same time, average prices have dropped somewhat and the variety of types and subjects has increased dramatically. A study by OCLC found that almost

three-quarters of its member libraries will have at least one CD-ROM by the end of this year and libraries worldwide are buying into CD-ROM.

In selecting 80 top products to review in depth, Nicholls relied on various published "top ten" lists, reports from libraries of the products they are actually purchasing for reference use, advice of experts, and favorable reviews in the literature. The products described in the *Toolkit* are all "readily available at this time from standard suppliers, have received some favorable attention in the review literature, and represent good value for the price."

A genuine buying guide

The heart of the toolkit is the product description section which includes price, hardware requirements, and ordering information. But this is a buying guide rather than a mere directory; the descriptions are not just facts or advertising blurbs from publishers.

Reviews from key CD-ROM and library journals are excerpted and footnoted. In the tradition of good software review sources, at the end of each description the qualitative information is summarized in a star-chart. Each CD is awarded from one to four stars on five selection criteria: installation, data quality, search power, ease of use, and "bottom line." (Since this is a selected group of products to begin with, none of the 80 fares too poorly in its bottom line stars.)

Extensive bibliographies include a relisting of the reviews for products included in the directory and selected articles on all aspects of CD-ROM hardware, software, applications, and trends. Though these bibliographies will go out of date, there is another section that describes the important journals, newsletters, and databases that review CD-ROM products so you can find more current articles.

Online Inc.'s excellent CommandCard search aids for SilverPlatter, Wilsondisc, DIALOG, UMI, and OCLC CD-ROM retrieval systems are reproduced in the toolkit. A comprehensive CD-ROM evaluation criteria list will help the serious buyer com-

pare and evaluate products. The many directories or catalogs devoted to CD-ROM sources are described and their coverage is compared in detail.

CD-ROM Collection Builder's Toolkit is available for \$29.95 from Online Inc., Dept. B90, 11 Tannery Lane, Weston, CT 06883; 800-248-8466. (In the 1990 Online Inc. catalog it is listed under the title *Top 80 CD-ROMs for Core Collection Building*.)

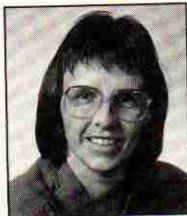
Directories

For factual, nonevaluative information on all CD-ROM products available you will need to purchase one (or more) of the CD-ROM directories. There are four key detailed directories available now that are dedicated to CD-ROM databases. For additional sources, see the *Toolkit*.

The Directory of Portable Databases is the Cuadra/Elsevier entry into the CD-ROM directory arena (1990. \$85/yr.). Cuadra's *Directory of Online Databases* has long been respected as an authoritative and up-to-date source. The semi-annual portable directory includes over 400 CD-ROM databases, in addition to those on diskette and magnetic tape.

The information is structured in the same way as the online directory. Each entry in the alphabetical product listing includes descriptive information, hardware and ordering information, and price. Subject indexes, vendor listings, and addresses of providers are included at the back. An interesting directory of "corresponding information sources" shows which products have print or online equivalents.

CD-ROMs in Print 1990, an International Guide is an annual directory now compiled by Norman Desmarais (Meckler. 1990. \$37.50). Updates are printed each month in Meckler's magazine *CD-ROM Librarian* beginning in May 1990. Over 600 products are in the 1990 directory with almost 40 more listed in the May supplement. Description, hardware, price, etc., are included for most, with indexes by publisher, data provider, distributor, type, software, and subject. Information is sketchy for some of the non-



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U.S. entries, but the worldwide focus in most welcome.

The CD-ROM Directory: 1990 is the fourth edition of this large (over 800 CDs) international directory edited by Joanne Mitchell and Julia Harrison (TFPL Pub., dist. by Omnigraphics, Inc., Penobscot Bldg., Detroit, MI 48226. \$80). It includes the same indexes and basic factual information as the Cuadra and Meckler directories in brief form, but the TFPL directory includes more information on the companies that produce or distribute CD-ROM products and CD-ROM drives. In addition, it has a bibliography of books and journals that cover CD-ROM and a list of conferences and exhibitions worldwide.

A fourth edition of *Optical Publishing Directory* by Richard Bowers is promised in 1990 by Learned Information. The previous three editions (3d ed., 1988) made a valuable contribution to the CD-ROM purchaser because they included information only on products that could actually be purchased. All of the other directories have some "vaporware" based on promises from publishers or distributors. The 1988 edition included detailed information on 200 products and an extremely helpful glossary.

CD-ROM manifesto

As they face evaluating CD-ROM products for purchase, some librarians are finding they are uncomfortable with the choices available to them. The Corporate Librarians Group of New York presented their draft "CD-ROM Manifesto" at the National Online Meeting in New York this May. If you agree, disagree, or have suggested changes, please contact Stephanie Heacox, Online Services Librarian, Sullivan & Cromwell, 125 Broad St., New York, NY 10004; 212-558-3787; FAX 212-558-3588.

DRAFT

As the range and number of CD-ROM products available to organizations and information specialists expands, customers are offered an increasing number of choices between those products. Despite this increasing abundance, users have found an appalling lack of products which meet their basic requirements. Further, there is a great deal of dissatisfaction among CD-ROM customers with the lack of response from

the industry to their needs and demands.

The following are issues relating to the design, production, marketing, and support of CD-ROM products upon which it is generally agreed that progress must be made.

STANDARDS

All CD-ROM disk products and readers should conform to an industry standard for hardware which will allow for access to any CD-ROM disk by any CD-ROM

drive. Such a standard has been implemented as ISO 9660.

The industry should develop a standard for software which provides access to CD-ROM products via a common interface, so that users are not required to learn new search protocols for each new product.

CD-ROM software should work in harmony with other major software products (such as Microsoft Windows), so as not to require sacrifice by the user of previously established menu structures and interfaces. Close attention should be paid to

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limiting the amount of memory required to operate a CD-ROM system.

INTERFACES

The interface standard referred to above should incorporate as much flexibility in searching a product as possible, allowing for a broad range of access points (fields) and an equally wide variety of reporting structures. Users should be able to save and reuse both reporting structures and searches.

Interfaces should be intuitive, requiring little if any formal instruction, and should provide clear, situation-specific help screens. All specialized or function key commands should be indicated on-screen, rather than by templates.

If a CD-ROM product corresponds to an existing online product, efforts should be made to provide an alternative means of access to the CD-ROM which mimics the search system of the online product, thus allowing current online users to move smoothly between the two.

In situations where an online product exists that is more timely than its CD-ROM version, a seamless interface should be provided which will update the CD-ROM by logging transparently into the online service and updating a retrieval set with records (current or historical) which are not included on the CD-ROM.

A means should be provided whereby records of usage may be kept (and project codes or descriptions assigned) to individual searches, for the purposes of attributing charges and recovering them from third parties. Ideally, a report function should be incorporated which will allow a user to establish a rate at which to bill back CD-ROM usage, and will print out invoices calculated at that rate.

NETWORKING

All CD-ROM products should include networking capability, and standards should be developed which accommodate a wide variety of networking hardware and software.

Reasonable pricing schemes should be provided to customers, which take into consideration varying levels of usage among a broad range of organizational end users.

Attention should be focused on development of an economical CD-ROM "jukebox" product which will allow for centralized access to a large number of CD-ROM products, and will provide security at that centralized location. This jukebox should not simply consist of an individual reader or head for each individual CD-ROM, but should provide a limited number of heads for a large number of CD-ROMs, and a means to select and read those discs which limit degradation of response time to the end user.

SALES AND SUPPORT

Sales representatives for CD-ROM prod-

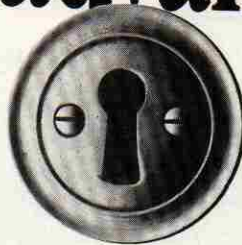
ucts should, wherever possible, have extensive background in information science and technology, so that they may both adequately respond to customers' questions and needs, and provide their superiors with accurate and productive feedback from their customers. Persons who market products in which they have no background are a source of constant frustration to customers and do not advance the interest of the producer.

Likewise, support staff for a CD-ROM product must be well versed, not only to the product itself, but in the technological

issues which impact on the product. Support services should be available on as continual a basis as possible, with allowance made for emergency situations outside of normal business hours.

It is to the benefit of CD-ROM producers to address these concerns, and to recognize that guidelines such as these will be increasingly used by information specialists and end users to assist them in assessing CD-ROM acquisitions.

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