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BY CAROL TENOPIR

Reference Services from OCLC

OCLC HAS long been an established presence in libraries for cataloging, interlibrary loan, and bibliographic verification. Its online union catalog is the world's largest database of library bibliographic information with over 15 million records. It is used by over 6000 libraries in the United States and 16 other countries. Recently, OCLC has begun to expand its reference services beyond use of the OCLC database. New products and services have been developed specifically for use in library's reference divisions.

OCLC LINK

OCLC LINK provides "intelligent gateway" access to several online vendors. At present, OCLC LINK users can access WILSON-LINE, VU/TEXT (Knight-Ridder's full-text newspaper system), or DIALOG using either the dedicated line OCLC Model 100, 105, or M300 workstations or almost any dial-up terminal. BRS access will be added in the near future.

The intelligence of the LINK gateway lies in its online database directory that helps users select appropriate databases before logging on to the online vendor. Users connect to the OCLC LINK computer and enter terms for their subject. LINK will provide a list of appropriate databases that are available on any of the supported hosts. According to Stephen Zinn, OCLC LINK product manager, the online directory "is somewhere between the printed database directories and [the host system's features such as] BRS CROSS that give the number of hits for each word." OCLC is developing its own thesaurus of subject terms that describe the subjects covered by each database on each of the host vendors.

Terms may be combined with Boolean operators.

The thesaurus for the database directory includes 1000 terms as of January 1987 to describe the approximately 30 newspaper databases on VU/TEXT and the over 20 WILSON-LINE databases. All of the DIALOG databases will be reflected in the database directory sometime "in the second quarter of 1987." When subject terms for these almost 300 databases are entered, the OCLC LINK directory thesaurus should contain several thousand terms.

And there's more

In addition to the online directory, OCLC LINK has "detail pages" about each database. These pages are updated whenever there is a change to a database—"almost continuously," according to Zinn. Dialog, for example, will send bluesheet changes or information about new databases to OCLC before that information even appears in Dialog's monthly newsletter. Information in the LINK detail pages includes description of each database, search features, and cost, and can be used instead of the short printed database descriptions sent by the vendors.

The other "intelligence" in OCLC's gateway is automatic log on and log off. After selecting a database, LINK will log you on to the appropriate host and database. Once you are connected to the chosen database, LINK returns control to you. There is no common command language so users must know the command language of the host system. LINK is a gateway for intermediaries who know how to search each host, not a gateway for novice end users. When you are finished searching, a user-definable escape sequence will initiate automatic log off.

Each library that uses OCLC LINK must establish its own accounts with all of the host systems it wishes to access or have an account with the appropriate regional OCLC network that includes access to the hosts. Users store their passwords in the LINK computer for automatic log

on, but billing will still come from each host or from the regional network. Telecommunications charges are billed by LINK, however, and are lower than the rates charged by the telecommunications networks such as Telenet or Tymnet.

Private spaces & electronic mail

Because users go through an OCLC central computer, LINK offers several other features that will enhance the search process. Each user has his own private file space on the LINK computer. This means, even if you are searching with a dumb terminal, you can download results into this work space. The downloaded search results can then be edited or reformatted to meet your users' needs. Search results can also be transferred to the LINK electronic mailbox for forwarding to any other LINK user. (According to OCLC, it is up to each user to follow copyright regulations. Database restrictions and copyright information are given on the database detail pages.)

Electronic messaging on LINK will allow a library to receive a forwarded search request from another library, do the search via LINK, download the results into the LINK work space, and then transfer the results to the requesting library's electronic mailbox. There is a mailbox directory so users can share information with each other. In addition, each account has a "notice board" (or electronic bulletin board), where groups of libraries can share information. Zinn envisions networks using their notice board to post information of interest to all network members (such as upcoming training sessions).

OCLC LINK has been available since November 1986, but has been actively publicized by OCLC only since February 1987. (It was previously known as OCLC UNISON service.) Training sessions by regional networks are going on now. Although prices vary somewhat depending on what network an OCLC library belongs to, LINK prices include several components. Prices given below are



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from OCLC Pacific Network and are typical. In addition to the \$5.50 per hour communications charge, there are small fees for: log on (40¢ per database accessed), storage (1¢ per half-screen of information stored overnight), and messages (75¢ per message sent). There is an account maintenance fee of \$50 per year per user ID.

OCLC LINK uses Canada's iNET gateway system software. The thesaurus and detail pages are created and maintained by OCLC, however.

CD-ROM reference package

In January, OCLC announced the upcoming commercial availability of its first CD-ROM product. The Search CD450 package provides subsets of several subject-related databases on compact discs.

Search CD450 for Education is the first package (available in April). Five compact discs hold bibliographic citations and abstracts for the field of education. There are separate discs for current and archival portions of the two ERIC files. Each disc holds more than 100,000 records. The ERIC discs include:

1. ERIC from 1982-present. Both Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE) and Resources in Education (RIE) are included. A quarterly or annual subscription may be selected.
2. Current Index to Journals in Education (1969-1981).
3. Resources in Education (1977-1981).
4. Resources in Education (1967-1976).

Several firms now sell ERIC on disc (for example, SilverPlatter and Dialog); the unique product from OCLC is found on the fifth disc of the Search CD450 system. "Education Materials in Libraries" is a subset of the OCLC Online Union Catalog. Over 300,000 bibliographic records on education topics have been extracted from the OCLC database, including all types of materials. This subset is updated annually with a subscription.

The education discs can be purchased separately or in a package. Separately, the prices for OCLC members are \$300 for each of the five discs, including an annual subscription to ERIC. Nonmembers pay \$350 per disc. A quarterly subscription to ERIC costs \$600 for OCLC members or \$675 for nonmembers. (For a limited time, the quarterly ERIC is available for \$299 to members and \$349 to

others. If all databases are purchased, including quarterly updates to ERIC, the introductory price offers a savings of approximately \$300.)

Hardware required for Search CD450 is an IBM PC/XT or PC/AT or OCLC M300XT, with at least 512K RAM. A 10MB fixed-disc drive and a CD-ROM reader are also needed. OCLC can arrange purchase of a CD-ROM player or users can purchase all hardware on their own.

OCLC includes the search software on floppy disk with the price of the system. In general, search software for CD-ROM systems varies in its sophistication and capabilities, but the OCLC software seems as powerful as that on many of the major online systems. It allows Boolean AND, OR, and NOT in addition to word adjacency. Parentheses may be used to change the order of Boolean operations. Right truncation, range searching, limiting a search to specific fields, and the ability to browse the words in the index are all available. On output the system does something that most online search software does not: documents with the most occurrences of the search terms are displayed first. This displays first the records likely to be most relevant.

The software takes advantage of the special features of the IBM PC by making use of function keys for shortcut commands. Function keys are used to ask for help or more information on the databases, to display the term index or see a history of past queries, to view or print or save records, or to begin a new search session. One function key displays a word occurrence bar graph to show how many times search terms appear in each retrieved record.

Although the software has sophisticated features, it was designed for library end users. Function key options are displayed on the screen and "help" can provide guidance in how to search. The software makes use of windows, so that help messages or functions that require making choices (such as choosing a format for print or display) are displayed in a window overlaying the search screen. This way the search terms already entered and the other search functions remain on the screen, while the window displays the additional information.

According to Mary Marshall, OCLC's new services manager, the education package is "just the first of

many" intended CD-ROM reference packages. The other products will also feature several bibliographic databases on related subjects. They too will offer a combination of records from not-for-profit government databases with subsets extracted from the OCLC database. In the works are an agriculture package featuring AGRICOLA and a geological package featuring the USGS Library system.

Marshall sees these combination packages as offering a "unique niche [OCLC] can fill." She does not see OCLC offering commercial databases, but rather it will continue to concentrate on the government databases and the OCLC extraction products. The extraction program was first used to create the online OCLC database now available via the BRS system and will be used for many more products. Other CD subjects are under negotiation. Field trials of the OCLC CD products are conducted at Vanderbilt University through OCLC's Office of Research.

Future directions

OCLC LINK and Search CD450 are both now available for use, but do not connect to each other. In the future, users will be able to do their retrospective searches on the CD system and then complete their search on the more current online databases using LINK. This will provide a convenient connection to get the most up-to-date information via the online databases, while making the most cost-effective retrospective search.

OCLC maintains an active program of ongoing R&D of new products. One reference project that is likely to be under development for several more years is the Electronic Information Delivery Online System (EIDOS). This project will provide full-text access to books instead of just bibliographic citations. The EIDOS project is described fully in Robert M. Mason's column (*LJ*, November 1, 1986, p. 46-47).

With many reference products becoming available and more under study, OCLC is becoming a major force in library reference departments just as it now is in technical services departments.

For more information on any OCLC product, contact: OCLC Online Computer Library Center, 6565 Frantz Rd., Dublin, OH 43017-0702; 614-764-6000 or 800-848-5878.

