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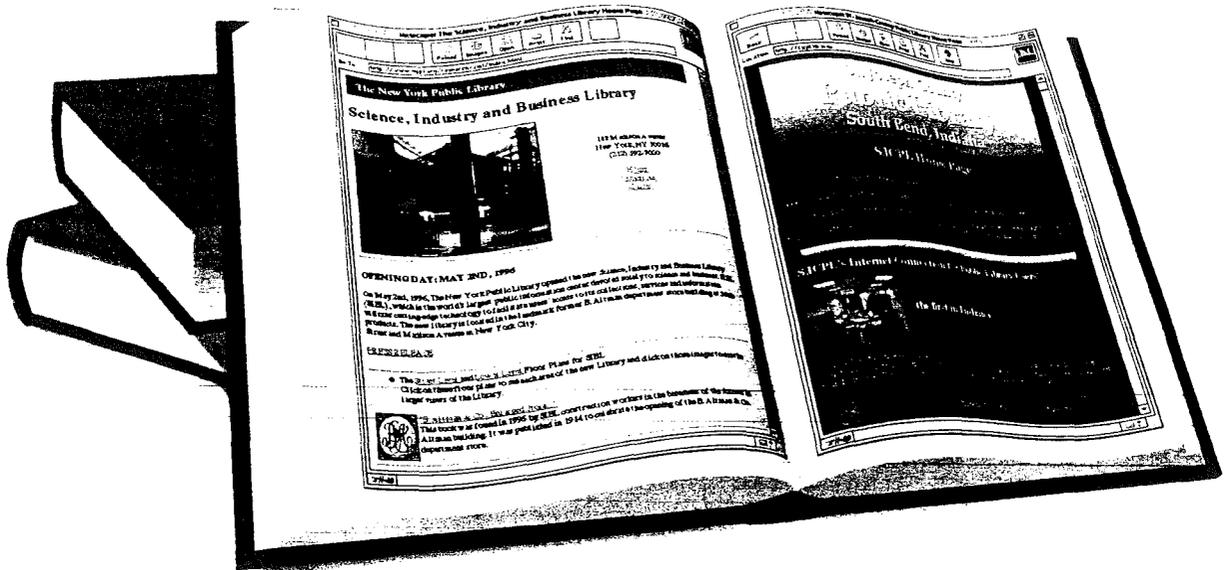
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WILL BOOKS SURVIVE IN TOMORROW'S LIBRARY?

By PAT NEWCOMBE
SPECIAL TO GOVERNMENT TECHNOLOGY



How far will libraries go as they turn increasingly to electronic information resources?

Picture a researcher somewhere in the United States entering the Chicago Public Library in cyberspace — via computer, modem and a telecommunication point of service — to utilize its information access tools. He connects to the library's home page, enters his query and waits for an expert system to process the request. A selection of materials appears almost immediately. He then downloads the relevant volumes and has completed his information search without ever physically entering a library.

The idea of the virtual library — a set of information resources made accessible over computer networks without restrictions of time and place, where users can simultaneously access the same information — has captured the imagination of millions of library users over the past several years.

In this virtual library, resources may have no physical counterpart. Holdings may consist of a synthesized collection of links to other sites — where actual data is stored — or of Web pages created as original work.

Technological change has always been a way of life for libraries. Librarians have embraced

information technology since the early 1960s, and are meeting the digital revolution head on, transforming library services. While the "virtual" library described above is still a utopian fantasy, the digital library of today — a physical library where bytes augment books — is a reality; one in which many holdings are found on electronic stacks. These holdings may be World Wide Web pages, CD-ROMs, or online services. By offering patrons remote access to these holdings, libraries serve a much larger audience.



DIGITAL HOLDINGS GROW

The promise that technology will revolutionize the library is not a new one. Even small public libraries are making some research tools available digitally. Palm-sized CD-ROMs contain books and encyclopedias that previously took up bookshelves of space. They make reference searches simpler and faster.

The American Library Association's (ALA) 1996 *Technology in Public Libraries Survey* found that 94 percent of public libraries, serving a population over 100,000, offer CD-ROM products for patron use inside the library. In addition, 28 percent of these libraries allow patrons remote access to CD-ROM reference tools, which they can download from home.

More importantly, public libraries are making some of

the most useful and frequently requested information, such as online catalogs, available electronically. In the 1996 ALA technology survey, 90 percent of public libraries said they offer online public access (OPAC) to their collections. Of these libraries, 74 percent offer modem access to their OPAC from locations outside the library.

Patrons simply dial in, type the name of a publication, author or subject, and within seconds determine the availability and location of materials. While this technology continues to provide access to many digital libraries, use of a Web browser is supplanting modem and Telnet access as the new standard for access. The Boston Public Library receives over 200 electronic queries per hour from users around the world via dial in, Telnet and the Web.

Nearly 45 percent of the nation's public libraries reported an Internet connection of some type, according to a 1996 National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) survey. NCLIS anticipates that figure will grow to more than 60 percent by 1997. More public libraries are adding the Internet to their OPACs, and additionally providing gateways that patrons can access from home. Approximately 25 percent of public libraries provide modem access to the Internet from outside the library, according to the ALA survey.

SMALL LIBRARIES, BIG HOLDINGS

With the Internet, the smallest branch library becomes a huge centralized library, with no space problems. Smaller public libraries have small volume holdings, and with funds for new acquisitions tight, the Internet helps expand the size of a library without building new buildings.

Public libraries also are extending their reach beyond their own geographic boundaries by digitizing information and making it accessible via the Internet to a national and even global population. This is one of the greatest benefits of digital libraries. Library patrons no longer are limited to material available in their community libraries.

Some public libraries are wasting no time getting involved in this digitization revolution. Over 200 public libraries have home pages on the Web, where many package selections of the most useful and authoritative information sources, both from their own collections and around the globe.

ST. JOSEPH'S COUNTY, INDIANA

A good example of the offerings of a public library Web site is St. Joseph's County Public Library (SJ CPL) in South Bend, Ind., <<http://sjcpl.lib.in.us>>. St. Joe's was the first public library in the United States and the second in the world to put up a Web server.

The Web site provides access to the SJ CPL online catalog and the holdings of four area public libraries, as well as information on over 1,200 community organizations and services. There is an index to the Metro section of the local paper, an events calendar, Indiana state Legislature information, a subject guide to newspapers, magazines, and links to Web sites of interest which include hundreds of public libraries. Several leased databases are available for the use of registered patrons and users can also search the library's Information File Database for answers to reference questions collected by the library staff.

TEANECK, N.J.

Teaneck Public Library in Teaneck, N.J., offers a Web site with a link to an e-mail form to submit reference questions <<http://soho.ios.com/~teaneck/>>. It is not necessary to be a patron of Teaneck's library to get a response from the reference librarian. Many of their questions have been from people outside the immediate area.

"This service results in some interesting questions," said Michael McCue, the library's director. "All libraries hear from people time to time from far away with genealogy questions, but this service has opened it up to a wider range of queries." The Web site is about one-and-a-half years old and the response from the community has been favorable. Citizens like the idea of their community library on the Web; it's a form of municipal pride, according to McCue.

CREATING DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

Public libraries are also beginning to develop their own online digital collections, made available on the Internet. Many dedicate themselves to a particular subject matter. The Library of Congress has embarked upon a massive digitization program of American history. Called the National Digital Library program, the effort was launched in October 1994 to digitize and make electronically available over 5 million items from its collections by the year 2000.

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, part of the New York City Public Library system, is in the midst of a project to digitize a collection of writings by 19th century African-American women. Additionally, the center has already digitized 400 titles in the public domain — works by people of African descent — which they plan to mount on their Web site.

But are these efforts the beginning of a system to get everything online, or isolated efforts to preserve select holdings? As more and more information travels over electronic networks instead of paper format, some library-automation advocates foresee a future in which networked information systems deliver information digitally, eventually replacing the local library. They believe there will soon come a time when a person can summon virtually any information through a computer that could be located almost anywhere.

It is clear, however, that today's digital collections do not constitute this universal access to information that digital visionaries propose. There are significant obstacles, including the cost of scanning and digitizing vast numbers of publications in hundreds of languages over decades. Dispensing digital copies also creates legal problems from unchartered copyright and intellectual property issues. The speed by which electronic storage technologies are rendered obsolete by newer generations of technology is another nagging problem libraries must face.

Librarians like to point out that it makes no economic sense to go back and digitize books that are working perfectly well. In their book, *Future Libraries: Dreams, Madness and Reality*, Walt Crawford and Michael Gorman set the parameters for digital holdings: "Any print-on-paper product that is used primarily on a paragraph-by-paragraph (or smaller unit) basis and in which the currency of information is vital to its effectiveness is better electronically published." Such documents include ready reference works, such as dictionaries, directories, indexes, almanacs, and statistical compilations.

They go on to state that electronic publishing and dissemination will grow, probably at a great rate, and will displace print in the cases in which print is inferior — primarily compilations of data and short packages of information.

WILL LIBRARIES DISAPPEAR?

Keith Michael Fiels, director for the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, said the Internet, CD-ROM and information technology will not be the death of the public library and the public book collection. "Libraries are not going to go anywhere," he remarked. He does view the new Technological Age as forcing change upon library services everywhere, for the better.

While 373 libraries in Massachusetts are circulating 50 million books per year, according to Fiels, the reference desk in the future library will be stocked with digital technologies. In fact, some information, such as government publications, may only be available electronically in the future.

The majority of public libraries are endeavoring to expand and enhance their existing services with electronic sources that complement print-on-paper resources. Because the Net's information changes and grows so quickly, digital libraries seem to concentrate on current awareness and information-on-demand services.

"The further back in time you go, the less likely you are to find digitized coverage," remarked Jennifer Krueger, head of Information Services at New York City's Science, Industry and Business Library (SIBL). SIBL is one of the most technologically advanced libraries in the United States and is widely viewed as a prototype for the Digital Age.

"One of the things we've watched as we've seen the Internet grow and as more people use it, is that the organization or the individuals who put up information on the Internet have different ideas about their role as archivists," said Krueger. "Some information on the Internet is wonderful for the most recent information. If you're looking for information put out a year ago, they may have taken it off their Web site. So just because things appear on the Web in electronic format doesn't mean that if there is an equivalent paper version, that it is not just as important."

Fiels agrees. "The Internet and digital collections are a good supplement to, not a replacement for, the traditional library," he said. Even at SIBL — replete with sophisticated technology — books will remain a force. SIBL has 1.25 million books in closed stacks and 60,000 volumes on open research shelves. Kristen McDonough, director of SIBL, said, "The New York Public Library as an institution is very committed to the book and puts a tremendous emphasis on its preservation."

Peter Young, executive director of NCLIS, pointed out that "the use of print material increases with Internet access." They are complementary technologies. The World Wide Web can provide a service to users remotely, yet at the same

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SOLUTION SUMMARY

PROBLEM/SITUATION: Libraries and their patrons want access to electronic forms of information.

SOLUTION: Technologies, from CD-ROM to the Internet, make it possible to expand the holdings of libraries — large and small.

JURISDICTION: New York City; Teaneck, N.J.; South Bend, Ind.



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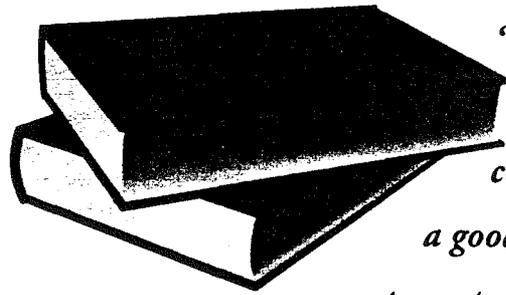
time draw them into the library to utilize local resources.

For example, Krueger reported that SIBL puts up a lot of user guides on its home page <<http://www.nypl.org/research/sibl/index.html>>. "We have a guide on how to find company information, which walks people through the standard steps," she said. "If there are appropriate Internet resources, the

links are there. If you are at home and decide you really need our SEC filings for a company, we have a hotlink to those electronic versions that are available over the Internet. But we also give referrals to print resources that are here and to databases that are here."

DIGITAL LIBRARIES AREN'T CHEAP

The cost of converting printed material to electronic format is astronomical. To create a full-text digital



*"The Internet
and digital
collections are
a good supplement
to, not a replacement
for, the traditional
library."*

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library from a collection of 150,000 books would cost \$327.6 million or \$2,185 per book, according to an ALA Library Technology Report published in 1995.

So far, digital library projects seldom address the cost issue. Most are funded by external sources, such as educational foundations or corporate sponsors, rather than by library operating budgets, so they are at least partially protected from justifying the full cost of digitizing information in print.

Library leaders doubt that all printed material will ever be converted to digital form, and as Krueger explained, "For many things there just will never be the overwhelming economic demand for it."

In *Future Libraries*, Crawford and Gorman argue that computers in libraries will always have limits. "The facts are that books work and they work better than any alternative for sustained reading. Today and for the foreseeable future, no electronic medium can begin to compare with ink on paper for readability, even if we discount the aesthetic pleasure of the book or the magazine itself as a factor. Only the most fervid futurists and some fellow-traveling librarians still speak of electronic books as imminent and inevitable replacements for printed books."

Library leaders foresee the library of the future providing a complementary combination of both digital and book collections. "All print media will never be in digital form, but the function of libraries will be to provide the integration of this print media into the multimedia communications that are now so rapidly proliferating around our country and the world," said Young. The complexity of technology change will call for library professionals who are just as comfortable navigating a cyberspace of electronic information resources as working with traditional resources. Libraries in the future must maintain a balance between the extremes of the digital library and the low-tech library of the past.

Michael Fiels' words of caution put it best: "Be ready to start running two libraries."

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