AUTOMATION AND THE WESTCHESTER LIBRARY SYSTEM

Maurice J. Freedman
Director
Westchester Library System
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In very brief fashion, this will be a review of where the Westchester Library System has been, where it is, and where it is going in the area of library automation.

In the 1982 Annual Report of the Westchester Library System a description of WLS's bibliographic resources and the direction of their further automation were discussed. Let us begin with a status report as regards this earlier exposition.

The Westchester County Union Catalog

One of the most valuable bibliographic resources in the State of New York is the Westchester County Union Catalog which is located at and maintained by WLS. It contains on catalog cards the holdings of the 38 public libraries in the County up to 1978, and the holdings of 15 of the County's academic libraries. With a federal grant, approximately 200,000 of the 700,000 titles in the Westchester County union catalog were converted to machine readable form, that is, they were entered into the computer located at The New York Public Library as part of the New York regional automation network, MILCS.

OCLC, Bro-Dart and WESTCAT

Beginning in 1978, WLS has systematically entered into OCLC (the Online Computer Library Center; formerly the Ohio College Library Center) machine readable catalog records for all of the books processed by WLS for the member libraries and for the books acquired by them independently of WLS. Beginning in 1980, OCLC produced magnetic tapes of these catalog entries, and the
tapes were sent to Bro-Dart Inc. which produced WESTCAT, the Com-
puter-output-microfiche) catalog currently used in all of the
public libraries in the County.

Enter UTLAS Corp.

In 1983, WLS entered into an agreement-with UTLAS, an
international automated cataloging network. (UTLAS is formerly the
University of Toronto Library Automation System, is currently a for-
profit bibliographic utility serving libraries all over Canada, and is
expanding into the United States market.) Several objectives were
addressed by WLS's contract with UTLAS.

1. WLS for the first time since it began its automation program
will have all of its automated cataloging in a single
computer data base
The OCLC data, about 70,000 catalog records, were transferred
to UTLAS; the MILC records, about 200,000 public and academic
catalog records, will be entered into the UTLAS system by no
later than October 1st of this year; and lastly, the backlog
of catalog data for the books cataloged at the 38 public
libraries, about 20,000 titles and referred to as uniques,
were entered into the UTLAS data base this past spring. All
of this data, plus the current cataloging, will comprise a
WLS cataloging data base of between 300,000 and 325,000
titles by the end of the summer.

2. Assuming UTLAS meets its deadline to bring up its new
computer system on October 1st, WLS and the 38
The public libraries of Westchester County will have online access to all 300,000+ catalog records of all of the local holdings of the public libraries.

3. **WESTCAT** is currently being produced by UTLAS in a more timely and efficient manner than it was by Bro-Dart. The **WESTCAT** supplements are also more comprehensive than those produced by Bro-Dart because of UTLAS's superior system design.

The 1982 Annual Report of WLS called for the bringing together of WLS's disparate and overlapping data bases into a single system. Once the MILCS tapes are loaded into UTLAS—this is immanent—this goal set in 1982 will have been accomplished. WLS's membership in UTLAS has brought the additional benefits of online access to and maintenance of local catalog holdings, and improved quality of the catalog by virtue of UTLAS's authority control processes. Although not a necessary requirement in 1982 these factors contributed to the selection of UTLAS as the single cataloging utility for the Westchester Library System.

The retrospective conversion of the remaining union catalog cards, a 1982 goal, has not been accomplished, nor has there been any movement toward its achievement to date. The lack of success of WLS in acquiring funds for this purpose from the State or the County has provided us the benefit of additional time to reflect on and study the wisdom of such a course.

The publication of the MILCS data base in the form of a separate COM catalog awaits both the loading into UTLAS of the MILCS tapes, and a judgment as to the catalog's value and form.
This brief review of 1982 goals and subsequent achievement informs and establishes a basis for current plans and activities.

CURRENT EFFORTS

It is critical that WLS immediately begin the development of specific plans to accomplish three specific goals:

1. Determine whether it is necessary to convert the remaining cards in the union catalog into machine readable form, and then take appropriate action. This is a fundamental issue because of the tremendous amount of funds which such an effort would require. If the estimated number of cards needing conversion is 500,000, and if it costs about $1.00 per card to convert them, the enormity of the investment is obvious. But if it is determined that the bulk of these cards are either inaccurate or are records of academic-only holdings, retrospective conversion might prove to be indefensible. (Several academic libraries have already converted their retrospective catalogs, thus making any academic-only conversion by WLS repetitive and wasteful.) Further, a study of retrospective conversion strategies might show that it would be far more efficient to complete the conversion of member library holdings using a different strategem.

2. Determine the general costs of an online circulation and online catalog system; demonstrate the benefits (i.e. both cost and service benefits) to be gained by such a system; and propose alternate funding strategies.
An in-depth study will be required to develop all of the essential data required here. Some detailed estimates of the costs of such online systems will be required for any kind of rational planning. Of equal importance is a methodology for the determination of individual library cost savings and benefits. Since local funds will undoubtedly be required, the value of automation to the library and the community it serves must be demonstrated. Lastly the development of funding strategies that address the complexity and magnitude of financing and maintaining an online circulation and catalog system for WLS and its member libraries is an obvious necessity.

3. Determine the requirements for the purchase and implementation of an online circulation and online catalog system for WLS and its 38 member libraries.

A rigorous set of requirements and specifications must be developed which address all of the functions and needs of a large and complex public library system which serves 38 independent and autonomous public libraries. The need for precision, prescience, and infallibility cannot be overstated here. Nor can the impossibility of success in achieving the system specified deter one from making the attempt.

ACTION STEPS

It has been generally agreed that automation for the Westchester Library System and its member libraries should proceed along these lines. The WLS administration has made the automation program its highest priority, and is proceeding with the following action steps toward the achievement of the aforementioned goals:
GRANT REQUEST TO STATE LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT: WLS is preparing a request for LSCA funds to support an automation consultant for one year. The consultant will do a study of the union catalog cards not in the computer at this time, to determine how many there are; how accurate they are (i.e. do the member libraries actually hold the books indicated by these cards?); and what the cost would be to get them entered into the computer should it be deemed worth the time and cost.

The consultant will be continued in the position by the use of other appropriate funds after the first year grant from the State expires. (That is, if the State indeed does grant WLS these funds, an assumption with obvious risks.) It will be the consultant's immediate responsibility to do the studies indicated and develop the necessary specifications for the procurement of an online circulation and cataloging system.

INCREASED REQUEST FOR FUNDING FROM WESTCHESTER COUNTY: An increase in the County's appropriation to WLS will be sought which will help underwrite the automation program for the public libraries of Westchester County.

A NATIONAL SEARCH FOR AN AUTOMATION CONSULTANT FOR WLS: A national search for an automation consultant for WLS will be undertaken subject to the approval of the WLS Board of Trustees and the Public Library Directors' Association of Westchester County (PLDA). There must also be at least some indication that funding will be available to support this position.
A PILOT PROJECT WITH MOUNT VERNON AND WHITE PLAINS PUBLIC LIBRARIES: A pilot project will be begun this summer which will put the Mount Vernon and White Plains Public Libraries online to UTLAS. These two libraries will use dial-up facilities to add and delete their holdings from WLS records already on the UTLAS data base, and eventually to enter their "uniques" into UTLAS.

PLANNING FOR ALL MEMBER LIBRARIES' ACCESS TO UTLAS: Subject to the results of the pilot project and the availability of funds, the other 36 libraries will be given dial-up access to UTLAS and the training which will permit their full use of the system for search purposes, as well as the addition and deletion of their individual holdings from WLS catalog records.

INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS: Meetings, such as the one held in Scarsdale, June 12th, will acquaint trustees and staff with issues and problems effecting library automation in Westchester County, and in general.

WHERE WE ARE GOING

It is essential that all of the public libraries of Westchester County move toward online circulation and cataloging in a coherent and planned way. A sketch of such a strategy has been offered via these brief comments.

For those libraries which find it necessary or desirable to proceed with automation in advance of a County-wide plan for development and implementation—only one library at this point—it is strongly urged that they work most closely with WLS to ensure that communication cooperation and linkage between the different systems be maximized.
It is WLS's deepest wish and commitment to see the automation of all of its members onto a single system so far as professionally and practically feasible. This will permit and further stimulate the kind of cooperation and sharing that already have made the Westchester Library System and its members a model for interlibrary activity in the State. And of co-equal importance, it will also promote the kinds of service benefits, cost savings and improved staff utilization that are realizable only through the prudent and successful use of modern technology.