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## International Dateline-The Art of Acquiring CD-ROM Technology

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# International Dateline

## The Art of Acquiring CD-ROM Technology

by **Keith D. Renwick**, B.Lib. M.A. (Head of Technical Services & Administration, UMIST Library & Information Service, Manchester M60 1QD, UK)

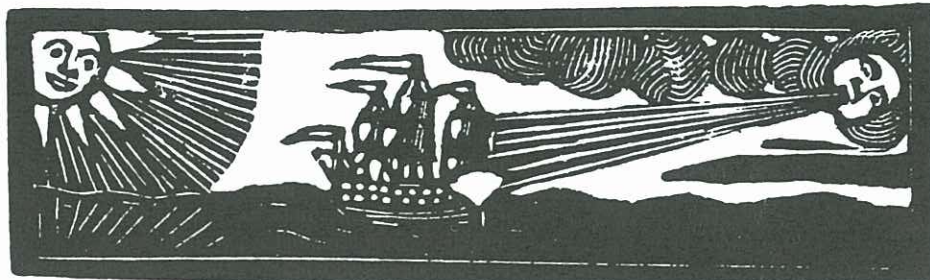
### Introduction

The introduction of the CD-ROM has had an effect of greater significance on information technology than any other single information dissemination medium so far developed. Its impact has not only been felt within libraries, for it has now become a standard technology in domestic use. The reasons for its relatively slow acceptance for use in the home has been primarily due to the (initial) high cost of CD-ROM drive units and a lack of a suitable program material. It is now becoming relatively uncommon to find a PC on the market without a CD-ROM drive as standard whilst material available in CD-ROM format is both diverse and relatively inexpensive. Libraries have been handling CD-ROM technology since 1989, but many of the problems faced by librarians have failed to find a resolution in the last six years. In addition, many aspects of information technology now considered commonplace in academic libraries have developed due to the widespread application of CD-ROM technology. In many instances, librarians have been surprised (and unprepared) for the enthusiastic response of users to the availability of CD-ROM databases.

The areas highlighted for discussion in this paper are: Selection and Acquisition Processes; Budgeting and Financial Control; Technical Support; Licensing and Networking; Automation and Management Information Systems. Most of the points discussed are based upon personal experiences or knowledge, primarily in the UK, although many may well be relevant to circumstances within academic libraries in the USA.

### Selection and Acquisition Processes

The process of selecting and acquiring library materials in a variety of formats, both print and non-print, has become established and standardised in academic libraries over a number of years. With the introduction of CD-ROM technology, the division between selection and acquisition became indistinct in many library situations due to the enhanced involvement of subject librarians in selecting materials for evaluation prior to purchase. In some cases this was done not by the subject librarian, but by the librarian responsible for CD-ROM installation and networking. It was no longer a case of the subject librarian selecting an item for purchase, originating an order and passing it through to the acquisitions department for processing. The CD-ROM or subject librarian would request the



relevant item on approval, usually from the publisher or distributor, evaluate it and make a purchasing decision without regard to the normal purchasing process or, more importantly, the financial regulations of the institution. As the CD-ROM materials concerned were initially confined to expensive secondary resources, the sums involved often totaled many thousands of pounds for individual titles.

The selection of suitable and relevant CD-ROM material has become less of a problem than in the past due to the increased amount of bibliographical guides now available, including *CD-ROM Buyers Guide* (Que), the *CD-ROM Directory* (tfl publishing) and *CD-ROMs in Print* (Meckler). In addition, CD-ROM catalogues are produced by many general library suppliers, periodical subscription agents (e.g. Swets) and publisher/distributors (Microinfo, Bowker-Saur and SilverPlatter). For many librarians, the ideal

situations for evaluating new CD-ROM material come from visits to roadshows and exhibitions, although pressures of work limit the opportunities for library staff to do this on a regular basis. There is also an increasing amount of advertising material or "blurbs" relating to CD-ROM titles, particularly pre-publication offers from suppliers specialising in reference material.

It is my opinion that acquisitions librarians with considerable knowledge and expertise in post will also have the necessary sound judgment to assess the economic and administrative advantages in using particular library suppliers for materials of different formats or origination. In the early days of CD-ROM technology, there appeared obvious advantages for libraries in purchasing material directly from publishers in order to receive items on approval, in the shortest possible time and with the necessary support. This is

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no longer the case as library and specialist CD-ROM suppliers offer (or should do so) full technical support as well as substantial discounts, particularly if libraries put all their CD-ROM acquisitions out to tender from a single supplier. There seem few references in the literature on the subject of tendering for CD-ROM supply, although this should be recommended practice for academic libraries with large numbers of titles. In the case of UMIST Library, the total value of CD-ROM titles amounts to approximately £45,000 (\$70,000) per annum, the majority of which are secondary information titles replacing printed indexing and abstracting resources. This figure does not include the increasing number of CD-ROMs supplied with monograph publications and CAL/Multimedia titles.

One UK organisation that has produced a guide for tendering of library materials is the **National Acquisitions Group** (now in its 10th Anniversary year). The publication *Tendering for Library Supply: A Practical Guide* was produced in 1995 by a NAG Working Party led by **Jim Vickery** of the **British Library**. Although produced as a guide for the procurement of all library materials, it is felt that some updating is required in order to encompass the specific requirements of CD-ROM and Serials tendering and this is presently under consideration by the Group. The *Guide* includes both printed and electronic (3.5" disk) versions of a model document which is a great timesaver and "aide-memoire" when producing a tender specification.

My own experience to date in acquiring CD-ROM titles has been to use the services of one of our library (book) suppliers that established a specialist CD-ROM department. This has the advantage for librarians of being able to visit the supplier in order to evaluate material prior to purchase, although many of the titles required by a university specialising in scientific and technological subjects (such as our own) are not generally available from stock. This particular supplier had a member of staff dedicated and trained in the area of CD-ROM acquisition, although purchase orders for relatively obscure material, particularly of titles from the USA, were not always obtained within a reasonable timescale. In the near future it is intended that UMIST will request tenders from a selective number of

suppliers, both specialist and non-specialist in CD-ROM supply.

### **Budgeting and Financial Control**

As previously discussed, the problem of CD-ROM material originating directly from the subject or CD-ROM systems librarian may result in a lack of budgeting and financial control. The absence of any order and commitment (or even in some cases an expenditure figure) can result in serious misbudgeting, particularly if the item can run as high as £5,000 (\$7,750) plus networking charge (50%) plus Value Added Tax (17.5%). In other circumstances, CD-ROMs may be supplied to a subject librarian without any form of acknowledgment or receipt, to be followed at a later date by an invoice which is passed directly to the accounts department. Additional problems of confusion and administrative procedures are caused by the necessity to instigate a search for details of the charged item.

Most library budgeting is carried out using the fundcode information contained within the library housekeeping system; therefore the absence of an official order results in commitments which are not up-to-date. Final responsibility for the budget relating to sec-

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*"Technical support for customers is now seen by CD-ROM suppliers (both general and specialist) as an integral part of their services ..."*

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ondary sources lies with the University Librarian who may not be aware of a commitment to assess or purchase a particular CD-ROM product. Of most concern, particular to the institutional auditors and financial managers, is the fact that the absence of a financial commitment not only compromises the Library administrative and financial procedures, but is also a breach of institutional regulations. UMIST regulations require three quotations for orders in excess of £2,000 (\$3,000), except in special circumstances, such as unique materials or sole suppliers) although UMIST Library is fortunate in that orders originating from the library housekeeping system bypass the official ordering procedure.

A related budgeting problem is the increasing amount of library recurrent funding required to support CD-ROM services and networking. Not only do the majority of CD-ROM versions of bibliographical and reference material cost more than the print equivalent, but substantial sums are now required for the provision and maintenance of hardware support for these resources. This will continue to increase and have a detrimental effect on the book and periodical allocations in years to come. Linked to this, of course, is the rapid development of electronic journals, but that's another story!

### **Technical Support**

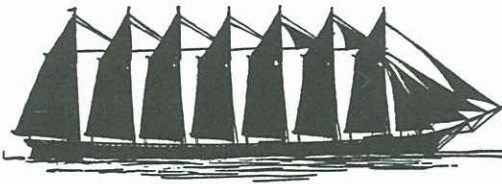
The early days of CD-ROM technology, particularly those involving the implementation of library and institution-wide networks, necessitated considerable interaction between the CD-ROM systems librarian and the technical support staff of the publisher/distributor. This was complicated further by the lack of standardised protocols, although this was, to a large degree, resolved by 1992 into the two interchangeable standards of **High Sierra** and **ISO 9660**. UMIST was fortunate to have a CD-ROM systems librarian who had extensive computer experience and self-taught skills in CD-ROM installation and networking. Additional support was also available from similar expertise at the nearby **University of Manchester**, with whom a joint network was established, (UMIST was a faculty of the University of Manchester until 1994) and from within the shared computing service of the two institutions.

Notwithstanding the availability of on-campus expertise, there was a necessity for regular and direct communication between librarians and CD-ROM distributors in order to overcome problems of networking and software installation. In some cases, communication between the parties resulted in the CD-ROM librarian informing the distributor of solutions to technical problems. In the pioneering days of CD-ROM technology, it appeared logical for communication to be established directly between library and publisher/distributor. Technical support for customers is now seen by CD-ROM suppliers (both general and specialist) as an integral part of their services, although the necessity for such support has been considerably reduced for experienced users such as ourselves. For new users of CD-ROM systems, it should be possible for general library suppliers to provide a basic level of support, with back-up from the publisher/distributor, if required. The important element in this service is ensuring the customer is aware of the levels of support and whom to contact in the event of problems. Speed of response is nearly always an essential feature of those requiring support for CD-ROM systems in academic library services.

### **Licensing and Copyright**

In addition to the development of systems in libraries for the networking of CD-ROM (and databases loaded onto the hard disks of file servers), another new concept to be addressed by libraries has been that of leasing information resources as opposed to outright purchase previously considered the norm in library acquisitions. Leased databases, such as bibliographical and abstracting databases, cease to belong to the user library upon can-

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cellation of the subscription, thereby resulting in large gaps in library collections. This is a situation which neither can, nor should, continue in the longer term. The considerably higher prices charged for these databases above those of the printed versions are completely unjustifiable, except in so far as being related to what the market will bear in a monopoly situation. At the very least, libraries should have the right to purchase the material outright at reasonable cost without the need to face a crippling and uncertain long-term financial commitment.

Library acquisition processes have, in many cases, been slow to adapt to the requirements of CD-ROM publishers to ensure that licenses and copyright limitations are adhered to within the user library. UMIST is a member of a library consortium in Manchester (CALIM) which has a large (by UK standards)

student population in excess of 50,000 students. One of the specific objectives of this Consortium has been to negotiate access of all students and staff to member libraries, in some cases limited to reference facilities only. The extensive demands of users within the home institutions and the licensing conditions of publishers have resulted in access to CD-ROM networks being limited and protected by usernames to those of users within each institution.

On the matter of copyright (and this is applicable to all forms of information) it is probably true to say that most librarians abide by copyright requirements and restrictions to the best of their ability, but the very nature of libraries, their diversity of users and remote access required to access information resources, has meant that enforcing copyright limitations has become virtually impossible without compromising the "raison d'être" of the organisation. For example, a multi-CD-ROM resource presently located on a stand-alone system in UMIST Library has a copyright restriction that all copies made from the database will be destroyed within thirty days of the date of copying. If any person can provide me with the means to enforce such a restriction without an undue administrative burden, I shall be grateful to hear from them. If such copyright conditions cannot be enforced, there seems little to be gained by including them within the terms of the license.

**Automation and Management Information Systems**

Library automation has become, in recent years, more relevant to the needs of libraries, but still lags some way behind the developing trends in information technology. Most of my recent experience has been with **Talis**, a system developed in the UK by BLCMP

(formerly Birmingham Libraries Cooperative Mechanisation Project). **Talis** is a Unix-based client/server "open" relational database which has been at the forefront of a number of developments in the UK, such as EDI and a Web version of the OPAC. Although such developments are useful and highly desirable, most library systems continue to operate some way behind libraries in satisfying requirements in the areas of acquisitions, cataloguing and accounting systems, particularly relating to the provision of management information. Companies developing library systems need to ensure that their systems are able to adapt to customer needs in new and developing technologies, incorporating data fields for format, user specifications, licensing terms and networking requirements. **Talis** does not lie entirely with library system pro-

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*"[Leased databases provide] a situation which neither can, nor should, continue in the longer term."*

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viders for my experience leads me to conclude that librarians are often very poor at adapting library processes in the light of changing trends in technologies and systems. All too often they wish to preserve the library's custom and practice at all costs, expecting system providers to incorporate the customer's every need into the automation system. I have attempted to adapt relevant UMIST library processes and mode of operation as far as possible, although not entirely successfully in every instance.

Last, but by no means least, are the deficiencies in management information within library systems. In my view these are, at the very least, considerably inferior to the automated systems of other professions. Library systems should provide library staff with con-

tinuously-updated information and statistics relating to expenditure and commitment by supplier, format, fundcode and faculty, performance monitoring of suppliers of materials and services and statistical data relating to the circulation and use of stock. In all but a few of these categories, I would consider the majority of library systems suppliers to be deficient or subject to inordinately complicated database queries. In the UK this is an area of considerable importance and urgency, particularly in view of diminishing and diverging library budgets.

**Conclusion**

In my experience, UK academic libraries have adapted well to the technical and user problems associated with implementing CD-

ROM systems and networks.

Areas of concern within the administrative organisation have been related to ensuring library systems and processes are able to adapt to the requirements of

new technological information systems as they develop. It will become increasingly important for library systems to provide real-time categories of financial, managerial and statistical data to ensure that libraries are not only efficiently administered, but can plan and forecast the future.

One particular area which I have not highlighted in this paper, but which I feel is of the utmost importance, is the need for the organisational structures of academic libraries to adapt to and reflect change as the electronic revolution gathers pace. It will be necessary for all library staff to become expert in new technologies; therefore they should develop roles of equitable importance in its integration within the organisational framework of the library and parent institution. 🐼

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