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## Here's Looking At-Distance Learning

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## A Balmy Time for CD-ROM from page 27

taking an insider's tour of a meat-packing plant: you become the research equivalent of a vegetarian and are inclined to use only print thereafter).

We have been over this particular road so often you'd think we'd have learned the basic lay of the land by now: if it's not a good product delivered in a sensible, effective manner, don't buy it (or subscribe to it, another variation on electronic themes). As recently as the days of CD-ROM we saw different vendors making available different versions of standard files, and we picked and chose those that suited our users' needs best. Competition is the librarian's best friend, and that depends on us librarians demanding a better product.

One last word about interfaces: we all read reviews of printed books, costing \$50-100, saying this volume is poorly indexed or that title has no table of contents, and we don't buy those books. Shouldn't we be applying similar criteria when it comes to looking at online files costing hundreds or thousands of dollars?

### The On-Going Case for CD-ROM

There are a bevy of reasons why I think CD-ROM will continue to play a large part in reference collections for some time to come (at least 10 to 20 years, which is several lifetimes in an electronic context). One of the most compelling reasons has emerged over the past couple of years, as so many large, standard resources have transferred over to the Web. Small companies (one- or two-person, in some cases) are bringing out highly specialized products that would never have even been produced in the early years of electronic access. These titles fill a void in the reference marketplace, and they are creating a niche market that is a boon to serious and specialized researchers. The big library publishers may not in the past have focused on such highly specialized, narrowly focused topics because they do not have mass appeal, but there is yet money to be made in the "less-evident" areas of research. And if you look over the publishing lists of some of the big publishers, you will see an increasing shift into subject-specific topics.

Is it feasible to bring these files out on the Web? If you are a company that already has a vast Web presence, and can add these files to your menu of offerings, it certainly is. But it is also advisable to keep offering them in CD-ROM format, because many libraries would like to channel use of more specialized, long-term research files to CD-ROM workstations (think about it: would you want a researcher tying up a Web-access station for six hours in order to use a highly-specialized, narrowly-focused title? Or would you rather have that person working away at a CD-ROM workstation?). And if you are a company that specializes in producing targeted, niche-type

products, you may be best served still by producing your basic products on CD-ROM (and possibly offering Web-access through a Web aggregator).

### To Own or To Lease: CD-ROMs vs. Web Subscriptions

The ownership/subscription debate is still being waged in many libraries over electronic products, and is of especial significance for many reference products: depending upon your budget, it may be more rational and cost-effective to buy a CD-ROM encyclopedia than to subscribe to an online version (especially if your budget won't allow you to upgrade every title every year). In years of budget shortfalls, the purchased CD-ROM encyclopedia keeps on "giving," while the electronic file just goes away. CD-ROMs overall have hard, predictable, containable costs compared to some Web-based files (where you sign on for one price and six months later that price changes or the vendor pulls a major information component out of the file without notice).

### Keeping Up With the Equipment

Equipment issues influence the development of reference collections very strongly. Many librarians are interested in going to Web-based versions of some files because their CD-ROM drives and towers are full. To do so they must often acquire much faster, more powerful computers than they presently

have. Again, in yet another tight library budget era, few libraries can do complete makeovers of their installed hardware base, so the present computers—many of which have been purchased for CD-ROM use—may determine what gets used in which format.

There are both good and bad technological access and maintenance trade-offs between Web-based and CD-ROM products: Web products can be easier to access once a browser-based station is set up, but CD-ROM products give libraries more local control over accessing the data. I don't know about those of you reading this, but the Web files of certain producers have been fairly unreliable and challenging to access over recent months. This will eventually become less of a problem—one hopes—as Web use stabilizes. Til then, however, I keep CD-ROM backups handy for highly used resources.

### This Most Balmy Time

So I don't believe CD-ROMs are passé: they are yet a highly-efficient, cost-effective means of reference information delivery. To paraphrase *Sonnet 107* once more: in this most balmy time of working with multiple electronic reference formats, as "the wide world dream[s] on things to come," for me and many of my colleagues, CD-ROM continues to look fresh.

That Shakespeare: what a smart—and far-seeing—guy. 🍷



## Here's Looking At — Distance Learning

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**M**y definition for this term is: "That system for providing in-teractive instruction outside the traditional teacher/student classroom setting." Others express this differently. At a recent publishers' meeting, **Bonnie Lieberman**, Vice President at **John Wiley & Sons**, used this definition: "Any situation in which the teacher and student are separated."

Almost immediately one would ask: Where did this concept come from? Is it an effective educational tool? How long has this system been around? You will be surprised at the answers.

### Where did distance learning start?

Some say the roots lie in mail-order correspondence courses. The students work at their own pace, at the location they select and, using their preferred technology: satellite transmissions, television, computers, and

other electronic platforms. As technology has changed, so have the means for delivering instruction. I personally like to think Distance Learning got its biggest boost more than fifty years ago in Australia's "School of the Air."

I can recall documentaries, perhaps from National Geographic, showing elementary school children in the Outback, online with the instructor and other students, via short-wave radio. The mere fact of children keeping in touch with their teachers who were thousands of miles away made an indelible mark in my memory. No classroom, no hall passes, no school buses, no school bells—just instruction—interactive instruction! On the other hand, there was no chance to run in the schoolyard at recess or the opportunity to socialize each day with your classmates in and around the school building.

*continued on page 29*

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#### Here's Looking At from page 28

Today Australia boasts Distance Learning in higher education with more than 400,000 students enrolled in programs from the colleges in that country's "Advanced Education" and "Technical and Further Education" programs.

#### Where is distance learning being implemented now?

More than twenty countries today sponsor distance learning institutions and have been involved as far back as 1951 in South Africa, 1969 in Britain's **Open University**, 1974 at **Everyman's University** in Israel, and 1983 at **Japan's University of the Air**. The Beat goes on and modifications and improvements are being made each day.

As recently as 1998 Britain created a newer program, termed **HERON (Higher Education Resources on Demand)** which is based on prior initiatives from several programs in Scotland, Wales, and in Great Britain. This is a three-year project, limited to the British Isles, but already considering expansion to North America. The aims of HERON are: • To improve quality of learning through widening access to course materials • To remove blockages in copyright clearance • To determine appropriate fees and conditions for electronic access to course materials • To of-

fer opportunities for UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to market their own learning resources.

In addition to those already mentioned, have many other countries involved in Distance Learning. They are: Spain, The Netherlands, Pakistan, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Korea, India, Taiwan, Portugal, Hong Kong, and New Zealand.

#### How are these programs financed?

Many of the initial institutional projects were not-for-profit, but **HERON** in the U.K. and other experiments here in the United States have a definite commercial aspect to them. Especially here in the States, university after university has taken the initiative and, supported, by groups such as the **Ford Foundation**, are trying hard to fill the need for outside-the-classroom-instruction. In 1956 both **Penn State University** and **Chicago's Citywide College** initiated distance learning programs. Both private and public colleges and universities have joined the rush to improve education. Here are just some examples: the University of Nebraska, the University of North Carolina, Michigan State, Case Western Reserve, American University, Iowa State and many others have become active players.

Let's take a look at the for-profit initiatives. One enterprising group, **The European**

**Case Clearing House (ECCH)**, originally in the UK, but now operating in the US at **Babson University**, Wellesley, MA, has created another tool, providing case study materials to one and all, at a price. **ECCH** is a not-for-profit organization adding a new twist, the use of the Internet in its COLIS Program (Case Searching by Internet).

#### What has been the impact on traditional education?

What about accreditation? **Jones International University** is an Internet-based school but unlike others, is fully accredited with 37 communication courses and charges \$4,000 per student per year. (Jones had a total of 32 students as of April, 1999.) There are nine employees at Jones International University in its Englewood, Colorado, headquarters. What will this scheme do to the much higher costs of traditional education?

How about this? **Regents College**, no address, simply an 800 number, proclaims it is America's First Virtual University where "You don't attend Regents College. Regents College attends to you." Then there is **Liberty University** proclaiming over twenty-five thousand men and women from all walks of life, who have furthered their education through the Liberty University Distance Learning Program. Again, no address, only a

*continued on page 34*

**Bolman Interview**  
from page 32

**PB:** IDEAL (International Digital Electronic Access Library) is the content platform we use. At the moment it is mainly populated with journal articles, but, as indicated above, we will be adding reference works, other books, databases, and the like. The business model for access to the journals on IDEAL is known as APPEAL (Academic Press Print and Electronic Access License). The underlying thought in designing the APPEAL scheme has been that we want to let our customers take advantage of the unique (cost) characteristics associated with electronic production and dissemination while, at the same time, preserving our level of profitability. While the costs of creating the "database," setting up the infrastructure, servers etc. and of linking are much higher than some people (including librarians!) seem to imagine, they are largely fixed in the sense that the extra costs associated with giving more users access are, within broad limits, very small. In addition, it is possible to tailor access to our material, something that is, of course, impossible with the print product. This allows us to give, in an institutional setting, virtually free access to all our digital journal material, once our fixed costs are covered. As a result, we lifted the restricted access to single journals, which is a practice integral to the print subscription model. In an APPEAL consortium license, all bona fide staff and all students of the constituent institutions are "authorized users" and have unlimited and unfettered access to every article in every journal on the system (for the years licensed). Because we wanted to preserve our profitability (see above), the pricing was originally based on the collective print subscription holdings of a consortium. This is now evolving. In future, pricing is likely to be based on a measure of the size of institutions (e.g., the number of

research staff, teaching staff, students), the usage patterns (views, downloads), the span of an institution's research interests, and possibly the number of papers published on a yearly basis by research staff at the consortium's institutions. The latter would reflect the economic pressure that the scientists' need to publish puts on the "edifice" of primary science publishing. The same principle underlies the idea of author submission or page charges, a notion that gained currency again in the discussion about E-biomed.

**ATG:** *It seems to us that the way the pricing for IDEAL is structured it encourages libraries to keep their paper subscriptions, or at least, does not offer significant savings to libraries that drop their print subscriptions. Your reaction?*

**PB:** Our model actually permits and encourages libraries to manage their print collections separately from e-access. An academic library could cancel some of its print (generally in the second year of a license) and come out with a lesser total cost. In a consortium, one library could be designated to maintain a printed archive. At the same time, the Deeply Discounted Print Prices that are available for licensed institutions (75% off) are encouraging other cost centers in the institutions to maintain print subscriptions, which, when all is said and done, have their continuing utility and charm. We do not subscribe to the notion that the tight library budgets must be seen in isolation. They should be seen in the context of research spending. And they must be seen in the context of proper and comprehensive access to research findings. If one sees the APPEAL price in comparison to print subscription prices as an amount paid per article available, then it becomes immediately clear what the benefits of the APPEAL license are. Our starting point is giving more access for the money, taking away restrictions, not savings on already restricted access to research information.

**ATG:** *Archiving is a big concern for librarians. What are your plans for archiving the electronic journals in IDEAL? Do you plan on going back farther than 1993?*

**PB:** Archiving is a concern and a question with which the whole science community and publishing community still wrestle. There are no easy solutions. We are studying the implications and economic viability of making older material available electronically, and are working on this with organizations such as JSTOR, OCLC, the British Library, and others. We do plan to go further back than 1993 if we see a "market demand" or a "citation demand" for it.

Let me explain the latter notion first. If it is true that the electronic version of the "scientific edifice" mentioned earlier is going to consist of, among other things, interlinked articles, new links will continually be established between new articles and the ones in the archive. To make that work, the archival articles will need to be in a "linkable to/fro" state. The responsibility for building this "interlinked edifice" lies with the collective publishers. (Academic Press is actively involved in setting up such a cooperative system.): it is a crucial added value in the "electronic era." It follows logically (I think), that publishers will also be responsible for creating and maintaining their articles in such a linkable state. If this principle is accepted, it immediately provides a convenient selection criterion for converting paper archives: first convert those articles for which there is this "citation demand," so as to bring them in this up-to-date electronic "linkable state." Similarly, an added selection criterion exists when one wants to get involved in electronic document delivery ("market demand"). Needless to say, this looks like a much more effective and economical procedure than converting journal print archives on a year by year basis. 🌱

**Here's Looking At**  
from page 29

URL. **Phoenix University** (of San Francisco) falls into the same category of for-profit, no campus institutions interested in making money in higher education.

Today we also have the first distance learning law school in the nation... **Concord University School of Law**. Concord runs the risk of never being accredited by the **American Bar Association** since it does not meet the ABA guidelines of requiring schools to have physical libraries. Still, Concord is trying to become respectable. *The Boston Globe* reports Concord named **Harvard Law Professor, Arthur R. Miller**, to the board of faculty advisors.

Another twist to distance learning has been created by **Berry Fowler**, founder of **Sylvan Learning Centers**. Mr. Fowler offers tutor-

ing from teachers' homes at a cost of \$18 to \$22 per hour. The program is termed "A Thousand Points of Knowledge." Retired teachers and other professional will act as the tutors. (Mr. Fowler sold Sylvan Learning Centers in 1985 and is now competing with those same Learning Centers.)

Sylvan itself has launched its own network of private, for-profit colleges overseas and has recruited a former director of the United States Information Agency to run the network.

**What can we learn from this?**

First, there is money to be made in higher education. Second, traditional publicly-run schools have to be innovative in order to compete. Third, teachers will be in demand but have to polish their skills, be innovative, and technologically literate. Fourth, accreditation guidelines will be under pressure to change for this new medium. Fifth, public institutions

will benefit from enlisting assistance for new program initiatives. Sixth, multi-million dollar contracts will be awarded to develop professional accreditation/examination systems. Seventh, foreign governments will be experimenting to expand their educational offerings.

**What will be next?**

Future articles on distance learning will address publishers' reactions to this concept. Are students benefiting? Is distance learning cost-effective? What is the effect on teachers' unions? How are professional librarians affected? Does copyright affect distance learning?

Put your own two cents into this discussion. Send comments to [efennessy@att.net](mailto:efennessy@att.net). 🌱

*See the On the Street — this issue — p.65 — for more on this topic.*

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