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Short Subjects: The AMC Format: A Guide to the Implementation Process
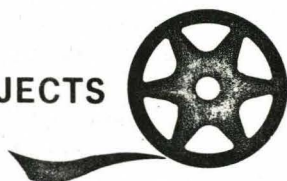
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SHORT SUBJECTS

FEATURES

The AMC Format: A Guide to the Implementation Process

William E. Brown, Jr. and
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Use of the USMARC Archives and Manuscripts Control (AMC) format and the automation process necessary for archival and manuscript repositories to utilize a computer information system designed to centralize the storage, manipulation, and retrieval of bibliographic and collection management data are new phenomena for many archivists. Information systems such as OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) and RLIN (Research Libraries Information System) provide an attractive opportunity for repositories which desire to participate in the use of AMC at the national level, while other systems are operational at the local, state, and regional levels. Great strides in archival awareness and

automation expertise have been made in recent years, and the archival profession now can better use the many benefits available in automated systems.[1]

The development and implementation of the MARC AMC Format is a major component of this automation literacy, and archivists should strive to make informed choices concerning the implementation of automated systems and the use of the AMC format. This article will briefly delineate the process recommended for the coordinated integration of an automated system and the AMC format in archival and manuscript repositories. The experience of the authors lies with RLIN, although many of the same principles and practices apply to other automated/manual applications of the AMC format. Repositories with no immediate or long-term plans to join or implement an automated system may still benefit from the planned implementation of the AMC format as outlined herein, because of the opportunities for standardization that it offers. This article, however, will focus on the implementation of the AMC format within an automated system.

Decisions regarding the use of any automated system and the AMC format should be based upon a clear understanding of the needs of the institution, the products desired from the system and the AMC format, the capabilities of the system in question, and the potential of the automated system to expand and adapt to the changing needs of the institution. The basic steps required to answer these points are applicable to all sizes and types of repositories and are necessary whether the system is to operate on the local, state, regional, or national level.

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1 For general information on implementation of the AMC format, see William J. Maher, "Administering Archival Automation: Development of In-House Systems," *American Archivist* 47 (Fall 1984): 405-17 and Nancy J. Sahli, "Implementation and Application of the AMC Format," *AA* 49 (Winter 1986): 9-20.

There are two major phases to consider in this dual process: planning and implementation. Each phase is a time-consuming, learning process which demands much of the archivist. The planning phase involves the following steps:

1. Background research
2. Review of basic documents on automation
3. Site visits and consultations
4. Analysis of workflow and information sources
5. Contract with utility
6. Design of workplan and workforms
7. Staff adjustments

Background research should consist of a general analysis of professional literature on the subject of automation. Appropriate starting points begin with an analysis of many works cited in archival and library journals and publications. Literature relating to business and office automation may also offer information at the introductory level.

The basic documents on automation produced by and for archivists is a rapidly increasing body of literature. Central publications include the *MARC Formats for Bibliographic Data* (MFBD). Prior review of other publications may be more beneficial than immediate immersion in those documents. The Society of American Archivists (SAA) publication, "Data Elements Dictionary," provides standard definitions for relevant terminology. In *Archives and Manuscripts: An Introduction to Automated Access*, Tom Hickerson supplies background information on the subject of automa-

tion and the handling of archival and manuscript materials. A glossary of terms, charts, and examples of workforms are included.[2]

There are three crucial works to consult and to acquire as ready reference sources to facilitate the implementation and use of the AMC format. "Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts, A Catalog Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries" by Steve Hensen provides the necessary definitions and structure to create bibliographic descriptions for archival and manuscript collections. Two more recent publications, both by the SAA, are *MARC for Archives and Manuscripts: The AMC Format* by Nancy Sahli and *MARC for Archives and Manuscripts: A Compendium of Practice* by Max Evans and Lisa Weber. These volumes are fine resources for understanding the technical array of alphanumeric identifiers, tags, subfield codes, and indicators which predominate within the US-MARC AMC format. The introduction to Sahli's work is particularly useful to those individuals searching for an overview to the implications of the AMC format and automation.[3]

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2 Society of American Archivists, National Information Systems Task Force, *Data Elements Used in Archives, Manuscripts, and Records Repository Information Systems: A Dictionary of Standard Terminology* (Chicago: SAA, 1984). Library of Congress, Automated Cataloging Division, MARC for *Bibliographic Databases* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1980). H. Thomas Hickerson, *Archives and Manuscripts: An Introduction to Automated Access* (Chicago: SAA, 1981).

3 Steven L. Hensen, *Archives, Personal Papers and Manuscripts: A Cataloging Manual for Personal Papers and Manuscripts* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1983). Max J. Evans and Lisa B. Weber, *MARC for Archives and Manuscripts: A Compendium of Practice* (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1985). Nancy J. Sahli, *MARC for Archives and Manuscripts: the AMC Format* (Chicago: SAA, 1985).

There are several thesauri and reference works developed by archivists and librarians in order to standardize the use of access terms. Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, second edition (AACR2), for the determination of personal and corporate names, the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) for topical subjects, and several form and genre lists including *Form Terms for Archives and Manuscripts Control* compiled by Tom Hickerson and Elaine Engst at Cornell University are all highly useful.[4]

Armed with this information, an archivist can then consult with fellow professionals and visit as many operations as is practical in order to explore the direct ramifications of automation and the implementation of the AMC format on the workplace. It is useful to contact archivists using similar bibliographic utilities, in order to evaluate and consider the current applications of equipment and software in the field and to acquire examples of records, products, and workforms.

The archivist should examine planning documents and user aides and question users regarding problems, unforeseen costs, and difficulties in technical and personal adaptation to the automation process. The changes created by the automation process and the degree to which the individual operation has utilized the potential of the system should also be identified. Plans for similar workflow and systems analysis of current operations can then be made. The workshops currently sponsored by the SAA and generally held in conjunction with regional archival association meetings provide an excellent opportunity to explore these issues with fellow professionals.

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4 *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*, 2d. ed. (Chicago: American Library Association, 1978). Library of Congress, Subject Cataloging Division, *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, 10th ed. (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1985). H. Thomas Hickerson and Elaine Engst, comps., *Form Terms for Archival and Manuscript Control* (Stanford, CA: The Research Library Group, Inc., 1985).

The analysis of workflow is likely to be the most time-consuming, interesting, and profitable part of the planning process. This is true in both small operations (one to five people), where all tasks may be shared, and in larger operations, where individuals are often assigned specific responsibilities. In either case, it is vital to document the flow of work throughout the institution and the corresponding record-keeping process. The automation process will neither eliminate nor lessen any burdens of work or record keeping unless the documentation process is fully explored. It is unlikely that all such problems will be solved with this analysis, but the widest possible exploration of activities will help to create support for the system and realistic expectations of its capabilities.

The analysis of administrative files, finding aids, catalog tools, records management schedules, reference forms, and other local documents and information sources will provide the basis for determining the types of information (date elements) to be maintained in AMC records. Similarly, consideration of the products desired from the system--catalog cards and/or online records, printed guides, collection management reports, statistical documents, and other information will help determine system requirements. At this time an analysis of the costs and requirements of a retrospective project to incorporate all or a definite percentage of the institution's holdings will also help determine the scope of the conversion process.

The analysis of workflow may require the assistance of in-house systems experts. If no local help is available, the possibility of utilizing an outside consultant is worth consideration. The long-term advantages of proper planning frequently support the expenditure of resources at this time. Based upon such information gathering, investigation, and study, the appropriate choice for an automated system should not be difficult. Other factors such as financial resources, time constraints, and institutional commitments may impinge upon the freedom of choice. The ability to justify and

communicate effectively the rationale for the preferred system can often influence the administrative decision-making process.

Assuming the decision is made to participate with an automated network such as RLIN or OCLC, the following steps also precede implementation. Negotiations with the utility selected involve the ordering of equipment (terminals, printers, sound enclosures, suitable furniture), the signing of purchase and/or rental contracts, and the completion of the many financial and technical details required to install and operate a functional system. Other local requirements may include the allocation of space for equipment and personnel, the installation of electrical and phone lines, and the acquisition of training and reference documents which support use of the system and the AMC format.

Final preparation for use of the system will require documentation of work routines, which should flow readily from systems analysis work. The use of flowcharts is often an effective method of illustrating this process and supports the elimination of unnecessary or redundant steps. It is also possible to consider the design and content of AMC workforms for entering bibliographic and collection management data. Utilities provide an array of examples and may also have samples of products available from the system.

In devising workplans and workforms it is essential to involve current staff. The cooperation, support, and expertise of staff is a prerequisite to success. In the course of preparation it may also be necessary to alter the staff configuration to accomodate the system and the new workflow. There may be new or different responsibilities for current and new staff members. Individuals involved with the planning and development of a system are generally more receptive and responsive to automation (and the necessary learning process). The compilation of in-house manuals and user guides (in addition to system supplied

ones) will facilitate the learning process, encourage the use of the system, and document the local practices and procedures in operation.

At this point, the planning and evaluation process is complete, the hardware is in place and operational, and the system is ready for use. The second phase, implementation, involves the following steps:

1.   Train staff

2.   Verify information

3.   Perform data entry work

4.   Order products

5.   Review, evaluate, and analyze system

The process of training staff is begun in the planning phase and formalized here. A review of instructional manuals and guides, a full discussion of the features and capabilities of the system, and an analysis of examples, both those prepared in advance and those created during training, should precede the full-scale hands on exposure to the automated system. This training period will allow for experimentation with the input process, permit the exploration of searching strategies, and help foster a curiosity for the potential uses of the system. The practicality of record modification, the immediacy of accession-level control, and the variety of reference and research products available--if demonstrated and understood--will help staff accept any changes in descriptive practices, reference service, and collection development activity. The same process of training will be necessary to understand and utilize the MARC AMC format.

The capacity of an automated system to reach multiple users in remote locations places a high demand upon the accuracy of records (even higher than the demand that archivists place upon records). The preparation of biblio-graphic records from existing data, such as finding aids or

catalog cards, may require the confirmation of information one more time. Recognition that the information provided is available to unseen researchers in numerous locations, researchers who are not privy to the local "interpretation" of what is stated on descriptive tools, should be recognized. Here lies the significance of the use of standard terminology. The Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), for example, allows for consistency of access to records within the same repository, within the same database, and within the same automated system. The utility of subject guides, both for individual repositories and for multi-institutional projects, is then increased.

The actual input of data is best performed by those who are trained in the data entry process and who possess the necessary skills. It is useful for those involved with the system to understand data entry procedures, but efficient and accurate data entry is best left to support staff. The editing of records does require the expertise of one familiar with the technical requirements of the system and the descriptive and cataloging standards of the appropriate authority (AACR2). The archivist should allocate time to spend here.

Feedback will be important to the short and long-term success of this process. The ability to adapt procedures and practices to meet the needs of staff and researchers and the concurrent need for staff and researchers to recognize the technical requirements of the automated system is truly a symbiotic relationship. Understanding and investigating the changing nature of archival work in such an environment is a challenging role for the archivist. The potential of automated systems is only beginning to become a reality. How this potential develops and the degree to which it is utilized is a responsibility all archivists share.

Proper utilization of the AMC format lays the foundation for the effective accumulation and exchange of information regarding archival collections. Systematic, inte-

grated use of automated systems extends this foundation throughout the profession and its clientele. To ensure progress in the archivist's professional mission to preserve, promote, and provide access to the historical record, development and adaptation of administrative, technical, and managerial skills must continue. Modern information systems will, to a large degree, determine the future path and function of the archival profession.

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