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One of the dilemmas I have faced in providing information to the faculty and students of the E. Claiborne Robins School of Business at the University of Richmond is the lack of subject approach to the annual and special proceedings of conferences. These conference papers often contain information on topics right at the cutting edge of knowledge in a field. My frustration level at having to thumb through the contents pages of proceedings compilations came to a pinnacle when the "Management Contents" online database (Lockheed Dialog File "!75"- Bibliographic Retrieval Services "Mgmt") dropped coverage of the proceedings of the American and Southern Marketing Associations conferences. There were printed classified indexes of the Educators and Practitioners annual meetings compiled by Robert L. King for the periods 1955-1971. In addition, there was also a classified subject index for 1975-1979 for both series. The practicioner's series was dropped in 1979, though the Educator's series continues and there are a number of special interest regular conferences whose papers are published by the American Marketing Association. The Southern Marketing Association does produce a classified subject index regularly every so many years.

In addition there are other groups that regularly publish conference papers in the field: The Association for Consumer Research, The Academy of Marketing Science, The American Council on Consumer Interests, The American Academy of Advertising, the World Marketing Congress, and I'm sure there are others. We receive all of these mentioned, and I have often leafed through the contents attempting to locate research on a given topic. In addition, I often use DIALOG, BRS, CompuServe, or Dow Jones online information services so I considered construction of a database as a solution.

An online index whereby one can mix and match terms or at least access the proceedings appeared the best alternative. With the addition of an IBM-XT along with the dBASE II software package the project became a possibility. However, the time and effort involved in the construction and maintenance of such a tool should be carefully considered in making such decisions. I will go through some of the considerations in the next few moments both generically, and specifically, as to marketing proceedings.

There are several considerations in setting up a database. First, is anyone else doing anything that would work as a substitute? Second, should you consider an online database or manual file? Third, what hardware and software will be required to run it, and finally, designing and completing the database? Several advantages of an online rather than a manual file were evident in this instance. One year of the AMA "Educator's Proceedings" contains approximately one hundred papers and the Southern Marketing Association conference about the same number. This number appears to be consistent throughout my sample of proceedings. So, it looks like approximately six or seven hundred items annually, with increments for each past year

considered, so I feel this would have to be considered a reasonably
significant database. Information Access who purchased
"Management Contents" has dropped the American and Southern
Marketing Association Proceedings from the "Management Contents"
base, and they recently agreed to allow me to both use their
format and the records that had been created in the past.

The updates to these proceedings are regular, coming out
annually. The growth is consistent and while currency in this
instance is desirable, a time delay would not create a terrible
problem since the backfile of the base would be available.
Multiple access points would be necessary as author, title,
abstract, and descriptor access is desirable.

The required system capabilities appear to cover current
needs and uses, and as I mentioned above annual increments
from conferences appearing at various periods during the year
would allow for reasonable maintenance. As far as future
growth is concerned the file could be broken into segments by
date to allow quicker access to the latest information.

The implementation of the database is the next concern.
The size, indices and type are of primary concern. The
design for the database must be carefully worked out and an
exact editorial policy followed for file and record design. A
set of approved subject headings should be maintained perhaps
both online and manually. The format for data input has to be
carefully considered to include enough information to allow for
the desired output but not too much as to be burdensome to those
entering the data. In the present case, since the structure is
basically being borrowed from an existing database and existing
records will be imported into dBASE III some decisions as far as
structure are made. However, the fields for the AMA and SMA
entries differ slightly. The Management Contents database was always
reasonable in the number of subject headings used. The
proceedings in the most part contain abstracts for each item that
can be adapted, and the subject headings assigned will have to be
selected individually in any case. A manual for data input
should be maintained and followed. While the initial structure
is fixed, the importance of each item as to whether it be
searchable or not, can be determined in decisions of what output
will be provided. There should be a method of quality control
before entering the new input into the total database. Perhaps
a separate file for a time of the new data would solve this.

The design of the database in the present instance was
mandated by the decision to accept a format because of the
convenience of several years data already available.
However, to assist someone constructing a base from scratch or
modifying existing materials there are several editorial
decisions to consider.

The most important consideration is the identification of
the users, and secondly what are they using the file for,
which leads to the scope of the file. That is, what is

included and not included and how is the integrity of the project protected, as well as a purging and retention policy.

The type of file, e.g.: 1. full text, 2. bibliographic, 3. product directory, 4. correspondence, 5. numeric, 6. geographic, 7. litigation, etc., should be carefully evaluated as once a decision is implemented it is difficult to modify. Some considerations in your design requirements are to plan for the future, keep consistent standards and as mentioned before, anticipate your users.

You need to represent the source material in such a way that it is as accessible as possible and that retrieval of the full items is easily accomplished. Separate elements of data need to be placed into different fields. Data entry needs to be considered.

Then you need to set up your indexes. The use of words in the various fields needs to be tied to the accession numbers of the specific articles.

As I mentioned I have just received clear permission to use the postings and format from the Management Contents database and that plus the enhancement of our IBM-XT's hard disk from 10 to 30 megabutes has opened the way for this project. The file I have begun uses some of the items from the existing database. I have taken items from both the American and Southern Marketing Associations proceedings and input differences has caused some problems. Perhaps since the Southern is indexed every couple of years I might drop it, or modify the format, although this is a problem as far as down-loading from the existing data is concerned.

The preparation of the test database has begun. I just wish to be certain that the format started with is the best one before I attempt downloading or massive data entry. The elements of the file will be manipulated extensively to search for potential problems that may inhibit successful later implementation.

There are commercial software packages that are available. "Finder" and "Zy Index" are two of which I have read and "Compulog" was referred by a colleague as an assistant to dBASE. However, at this point we will proceed with what we are doing. I wish I was farther along in the process but the enhancements, permissions, and everyday operations have all taken their toll.

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