

Database Dependency

by

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We defined the phenomenon of database dependency as the behavior of a library user to immediately select computerized information resources without considering (1) the appropriateness of the electronic resource to the immediate information need, (2) the quality and accuracy of the information found, and (3) the amount of time it may take to find the information in a database compared to finding a print resource in that library.

The librarians at the Talk Table agreed that patrons seem to accept whatever information they find in an electronic resource even if it takes longer to get the answer, the answer is incomplete, or if the information would have been more easily found in a print reference source. The academic librarians said that they have been seeing this behavior in their libraries for the last several years. The public librarians agreed that this behavior is increasing in their libraries as people are becoming more comfortable with computers.

We discussed key issues surrounding database dependency such as: the traditional professional issue of budget vs. access to information to be used in making materials purchasing decisions regarding electronic and print resources; staff time for training patrons in the use of materials; the librarian's difficulty in determining the user's information need in order to make appropriate referral to resources; and patrons' time and level of willingness to judge the various information resource options and to select the most appropriate tool to obtain quality information.

It was agreed that all librarians should address the "everything is on the Internet" attitude of their patrons by encouraging them to: think about their information seeking strategy; to analyze the quality of the information located; and to be critical users of information resources, both print and electronic. It was suggested that more libraries should have workshops on

how to decide when to use electronic resources as a step beyond the workshops some libraries offer on simply how to use computers. If libraries of all types move toward more instructional programs, we may help more people become life-long learners.

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