Spring 1994

Access to Federal Documents: An Information Age Approach.

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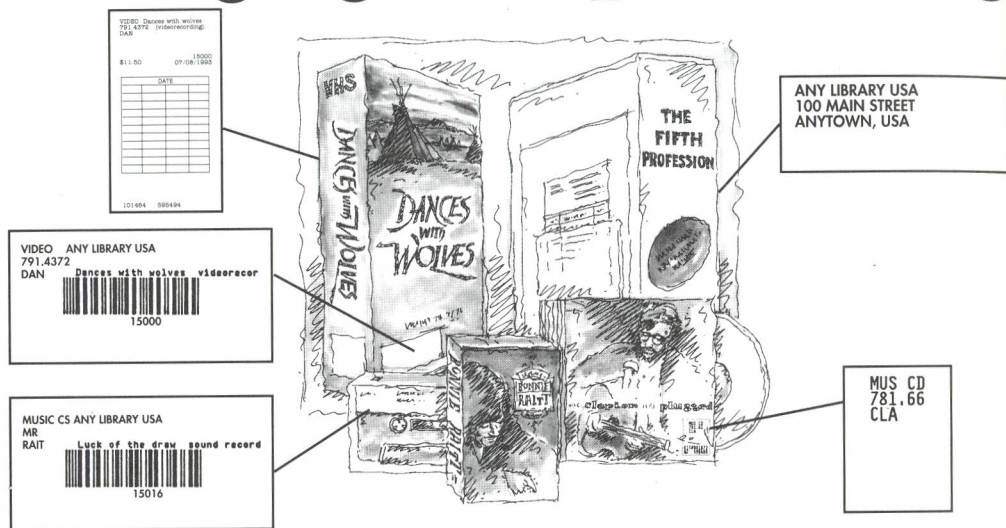
Recommended Citation

Halstead, K., Muckleroy, S., and Turnage, M. (1994). Access to Federal Documents: An Information Age Approach. Texas Library Journal, 70(1):19-22.

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Access to Federal Documents: An Information Age Approach

by Kayce Halstead, Sue Muckleroy, and Marthea Turnage

For many years, U.S. government documents have been a valuable but highly underutilized primary source of information in most libraries because they lacked easy access. Documents were not generally accessible through the library's catalog nor through other popular indexes. The *Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications* was the only complete index available before computers were introduced into libraries. However, with the widespread availability of computers in libraries and the virtual explosion of electronic products and information, there are now other choices.

Ralph W. Steen Library has been able to expand into the new and growing electronic information access resources through the last decade, affording our patrons, among other things, the opportunity to discover documents.

Ralph W. Steen Library at Stephen F. Austin State University was designated a depository for United States publications in 1965. The depository is "selective," choosing to receive approximately 50% of the publication classes made available from the Government Printing Office (GPO). In 1990, a proposal was submitted by the library's government documents librarian to provide access to all U.S. documents received since 1976 through the library's online public access catalog (OPAC) which runs on the NOTIS system. The idea was to make GPO records a part of the integrated database whereby the document titles would appear on the OPAC screen with other library materials. Even though loading government documents bibliographic records would consume a large quantity of disk space, the staff felt that the project would be worthwhile.

Loading Bibliographic Records

During the first brainstorming stages, the government documents librarian investigated ways machine-readable bibliographic records for documents could be made available online. Two options were investigated in detail: (a) create and update the records or (b) load records into the central database with unique document processing and location codes, subsequently allowing library cataloging staff and library patrons access to the document records. The advantages of the latter were quickly identified:

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(1) integrated with other library materials, the documents could be easily accessed and identified in the OPAC;

(2) cataloging staff could do original cataloging and/or transfer document records from OCLC;

(3) less training of documents staff in cataloging procedures would be needed:

(4) manual check-in of many items by documents staff would be unnecessary;

(5) there would be fewer NOTIS configuration changes and fewer problems for the in-house computer programmers, circulation staff, and catalogers.

Vendors

At the time, three vendors offered GPO tapes for loading—OCLC, Brodart, and Marcive. To achieve our goal, the government documents librarian investigated each vendor with the following criteria in mind:

(1) retrospective conversion of records—the availability and method by which the vendor would match the bibliographic records of the library's holdings from 1976 to date;

(2) current records—the method by which the vendor would continue to provide bibliographic records for newly received documents;

(3) "clean-up" project—how the vendor would handle the corrections and changes inherent in work with government documents records which includes authorities processing to compare name and subject; comparing uniform title headings against the current Library of Congress authority file; and removing duplicate records for

serials and multi-part monographs.

Procedures

Retrospective Records. In late 1990, Marcive was selected as the appropriate vendor to provide us with document bibliographic records which would be loaded into our NOTIS system. The procedure for the retrospective conversion was simply to delete the unwanted document item numbers from the diskettes sent by the vendor. The library could also make qualifications on the records by using the Superintendent of Documents numbering stems (SuDoc stem) and/or date ranges on the diskettes. The vendor converted the edited diskettes into a computer profile of the library's document holdings which was then used in retrospective and ongoing record extraction. The vendor's processing profile required the creation of a "949" field in the MARC record. The field contained a default location labeled "doc," and the call number. The custom tape load program input this information so it would display in the OPAC even though the bibliographic records were unlinked. In NOTIS, an unlinked record does not have an item attached and thus, does not include information such as circulation status. The unlinked record displays the message in the OPAC to "check shelf." Later, the retrospective load of 127,103 records would be linked either when the items were returned from circulating "on the fly" (items having circulated even though they have not been entered in the OPAC) or as time permitted.

Current Records. Processing newly received documents has gone through an evolutionary change at Steen Library. Initially the documents staff were responsible for all of the processing, from checking-in and creating unlinked item records to linking the bibliographic

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records. Between 800 and 1,000 paper documents are added to the collection each month with a time lag of 2 to 5 months for receipt of bibliographic records. Unlinked (temporary) item records are only accessible by SuDoc number or optical character recognition (OCR) number, and after a year, it became apparent that the process needed to be revised. There were too many of these inaccessible item records added to the database, and the documents staff lacked the time to permanently link the items.

In Jan 1993, the processing of documents was split between the documents staff and the cataloging staff. Now, the documents staff are responsible for receiving, stamping and call number labeling all documents. Microfiche and serials continue to be entirely processed by the documents staff. Monographic items are sent to cataloging where short bibliographic records (instead of temporary records) and item records are entered into NOTIS making the documents accessible in the OPAC by author, title, series, and call number. The items are then routed for shelving.

Items having circulated "on the fly" are returned to cataloging. If the bibliographic records have been loaded, Items will be linked. If not, a short record will be created.

Marcive uses the same computer profile of the library's document holdings to extract current document records and to generate a monthly tape. This tape is loaded directly into NOTIS and printouts of tape loads are used to maintain quality control. Since records for various types of materials are on the tapes, it is necessary to make changes on certain records to show different locations of the materials in the documents department. For example, a default in the tape load program sets the location of all materials

as "Doc," so changes must be made to show specific locations for microfiche and maps. Bibliographic records for documents in microfiche or for maps are not assigned OCR numbers or linked to circulation information; in place of circulation data, the notation "Check shelf" displays in the OPAC. Using methods specific to NOTIS, short records are relinked to full MARC records from Marcive. The short records are either reused or deleted. As we work through the printouts, various problems mentioned above are resolved. Action dates and notes added to the NOTIS records alert the cataloging staff when either the full bibliographic record has not been received or a full bibliographic record has not been linked.

Personnel and Cost

Presently the documents assistant and two student assistants spend about 40 hours processing incoming documents and maintaining a shelf list for serials and microfiche. A full time library assistant also works in the cataloging department exclusively cataloging documents.

The Marcive charges include startup, profiling fees and fees for conversion of 127,103 bibliographic records. GPO retrospective conversion costs for Ralph W. Steen Library were $6,430.15. The annual basic service is $1,800.

Results

The project was clearly a success. Circulation statistics for documents increased nearly 500% and continue to rise. Patrons are requesting more information at the reference desk about document items they have found on the OPAC. Because the university and public library share the OPAC database, document records are available to all city and county library patrons automatically. Dial-up access into the university OPAC is available so that Steen Library's government documents can be found by anyone with a computer and a modem or through an Internet host (Telnet SFANOTIS.SFASU.EDU). This expansion of electronic access to library materials has created a new approach for patrons seeking access to the "wealth of information" found in government documents. ☆