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I am Cataloger—Hear Me Roar

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When I was first asked to write an article on cataloging and automation, I questioned whether this was to be researched or an opinion piece. I was invited to write my passion—and so I shall. And my passion is cataloging and automation together! I see no dichotomy between them. Cataloging is a craft, an art, and a science. Automation does not destroy that craft, that art, that science; in fact, automation can allow us to create much better records, share the workload, and produce better databases and OPACS. What on earth am I talking about? I'll get to that shortly. First, however, I wish to discuss the topic of automation in libraries, as it is often perceived.

I have heard library staff say that automation has caused nothing but trouble for us and our catalogs, for we import incomplete or just plain bad bibliographic records into our local systems. Most recently, I read an article decrying the addition of vendor records to the OCLC and RLIN databases. Those who decry these additions cite detriments to the staff, to the local OPAC, and to patron expectations. I say wait! Automation need not produce such an outcome! When a library decides to join a bibliographic utility, it must devote some time to developing a system for the efficient use of that utility's services; the library will probably revamp its cataloging procedures. It is necessary to create a small committee to study the bibliographic records the library takes from the utility. The committee must decide what criteria define an acceptable record and create a list of libraries whose records meet those criteria. Once that process is complete, those records can be imported into the local system with little or no checking. The materials with records that do not meet the criteria can be cataloged by a higher-level paraprofessional staff and brought up to standard. Finally, those materials with either no copy or copy so bad that it is almost useless are given to the original cataloging staff—paraprofessionals and librarians—for

cataloging. This system does presume a system of well-defined roles and job descriptions, but it works—and it works well. When fully implemented this, or a like system, takes full advantage of automation but not to the detriment of staff, the local OPAC, or patron expectations.

It is clear that I love cataloging and technology and I make no apology. When writing an opinion piece, one writes from personal experience; I've been a library technician engaged in the rapid cataloging process and a copy cataloger engaged in upgrading records and bringing them to AACR2 standard. I am now a paraprofessional, original cataloger, and my love of cataloging and automation has not diminished; it grows stronger by the day.


The University of Washington is an OCLC library, and OCLC's new system, Connexion™, is everything that a cataloger could want. Connexion™ offers us the ability to create bibliographic records that can be manipulated whenever the library deems necessary. It offers the ability to take a MARC record for a Web site and display it in Dublin Core. The Dublin Core can then be copied and inserted into the Web site itself, thereby enhancing a searcher's ability to find it. This gives the best of both the MARC and Dublin Core worlds, and provides a much-needed service to library patrons. When creating the bibliographic record, one can use Connexion's™ best features to their fullest advantage. Connexion™ has a system to link the headings in the record to the authority file records. Once that link is made, the headings will be updated automatically whenever they change in the authority file. If one's library subscribes to OCLC's bibliographic notification service, it will receive a new bibliographic record for the local OPAC. If the library subscribes to an authority service, it is likely that there will be notice of the change and perhaps a corrected authority record in an update provided by the vendor. The change will most certainly be caught



whenever the library sends a record containing the heading to the vendor for an authority wash.

Because the University is an OCLC library, I have no real sense of what features RLG offers as cataloging tools. However, after wandering through the RLG Web site, I see that technological changes are on the horizon there; the information given concerning changes to its cataloging service and the outsourcing available to RLG libraries, signals improved cataloging ability and streamlined processing. I have no doubt that RLG participants will find the most efficient ways to use their new tools to their institutions' best advantage.

I would like to end this discussion with one final thought. Automation in itself is not the holy grail of libraries—the prize to be sought at all costs. It will never replace catalogers—someone, somewhere has to create those bibliographic records that populate OCLC, RLIN, and other

databases. Used properly automation is a tool—a practical way of responding to cataloging needs, to patron needs and expectations, and to the circumstances that mold our library world. I believe that with it we can create databases that will be correct now and in the future. Yes, it will take an investment of time and patience; but if each of us does a little, we render moot the argument that automation leads to the degradation of the catalog, and those who follow us will never have to worry that the records they import into those catalogs of the future will be incomplete or just plain bad. But then again, I am cataloger—hear me roar! 

References

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