HONOR TRUST AND ECONOMICS
IN THE CD-ROM MARKETPLACE

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ABSTRACT

If we are to “break down the barriers to the free flow of marine science information,” publishers, vendors and users must form a partnership based on trust. The necessity for developing an honor system is discussed in the context of the CD-ROM market. How publishers of these products handle multiuser access, the technology involved, and most importantly the pricing and licensing issues are the challenges to be solved.

The following remarks are more of a comment on the state of CD-ROM products than a learned review of the literature. The MBL/WHOI library has ten different CD-ROM products, and I have been negotiating with a number of publishers on various levels for the past two years. The following represents some of my observations.

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Librarians seem to have taken to CD-ROM products with great enthusiasm for all the obvious reasons that make this technology so attractive. Marine science libraries, in many cases one person libraries, have integrated this technology into their daily routine. However, whether you are a single person library or a member of a major university library the major issues surrounding CD technology are pricing, quality, coverage, compatibility, licensing and leasing. The most controversial and loathsome to librarians are the last two licensing and leasing. The publisher’s prerequisite requiring libraries to pay thousands of dollars for a product that they will not own or keep if canceled is completely alien to most librarians. All of the information that is being published on CD is usually available in another form -on-line database or in print, and requires on agreement. So why are there all these agreements required by publishers for the information on CD-ROM products? It seems that the publishers want to control access to the information and have this great fear that the original information will be manipulated electronically, republished and offered commercially without compensation to the copyright holder. These are the same concerns for on-line and in print publication so why are they so paranoid?
As soon as the initial issues of budgeting, evaluating and implementing a CD-ROM are decided and the plunge is taken to purchase the product, the next major issue becomes multiple access to the information. Individual user stations in a library soon end up with a queue of frustrated users. One quickly sees how inconvenient it becomes as more and more patrons try to use it. If you have any kind of network infrastructure, users will immediately ask for dial-in and network access to the information on the CD. At present, no CD-ROM vendor is dealing effectively with the issue of networking, and libraries are reluctant to take the necessary initiatives, nor do most of them have the expertise. Some vendors are offering local area network capabilities for their CD, but this is also very restrictive. The licensing agreements become an important part of the decision making process when thinking about a CD-ROM purchase.

At the university of Houston, they have managed to put 17 databases on a LAN for 10 workstations. On the PACS-L Bulletin Board, Tom Wilson describes the amount of equipment:

The IBM Token-Ring network uses Novell Advanced Netware 2.15 as its networking operating system. Two 80386-based Meridian CD Net 314 CD-ROM servers provide access to 10 CD-ROM drives each. A 20 MHz, 20386-based Club American 320 computer is used as the Netware server. The workstations area is a mix of 10 MHz-80286-based CompuAD D computers, as well as 16 MHz 80386SX-based Club American computers. The Saber Land administrations Pack is used to provide menus, usage logging, and metering (limiting the number of simultaneous users) on a particular database. Above Disc is used to provide access to additional memory on LAN workstations. Eight workstations are available for public use in the Electronic Publication Center— one is used for ready reference at the information desk, and one is used for system administration purposes. The CD-ROM databases on the network are: ABI/Inform OnDisc, Art Index, Biological and Agricultural Index, Business Dateline, Compact Disclosure, Compendex Plus, Computer Library, ElectroMap, World Atlas, General Science Index, Humanities Index, Microsoft Bookshelf, OnDisc Eric, Periodical Abstracts OnDisc, PsycLIT, Social Sciences Index, Sociofile, and SuperMap.

I believe this was funded by a Department of Education Grant for close to $100K. This is an unbelievable amount of equipment and money for access to 17 databases by only ten people at a time! Testing the technology to see if it will work on networks is one thing, but this kind of investment for most libraries is out of the question.

If you have to offer on CD various abstracts and indices like Bio Abstracts, Index Medicus, Aquatic and Fisheries Science Abstracts, etc., you have to realize
that the cost of a single database is often greater than the cost of this product in print form and usually tied to the purchase of both. There are also associated requirements and costs for networking, hardware, infrastructure development, training, computing and data processing. The use of licensing and leasing agreements are on the rise and all are as different as the products they represent. The only way that publishers and libraries are going to move forward on this issue is to work together instead of the confrontational posture that has been in evidence in the past few years. Obviously, there is a need for more cooperation between the two as well as the establishment of a code of ethics. I have heard librarians state that they will link x number of CD databases and broadcast them over the network which will enable four or five colleges access. These statements give rise to the “panic of publishers” and their attitude of restrictiveness towards the use of CD’s. Only by a cooperative effort will we be able to work out the financial models that both information providers and libraries can live with.

On the technical side the libraries would like to see some kind of standard search software and retrieval engines. However, just as important would be some kind of standard licensing arrangements that do not require a Philadelphia lawyer to interpret and have some leeway for “fair use” at the college and university level. Other issues that are out there in the CD-ROM arena and need addressing are:

1) how much data can be downloaded and reused and for what purposes,
2) do networking arrangements not authorized by contract or site license violate fair use.
3) to what extent are the licenses drafted according to the law of one state valid in libraries in other states?

It is time for the publishers and librarians to get together and work out the solution to these issues. It is not the job of librarians to put publishers out of business but rather they should help safeguard the interests of this industry by applying similar rules and warnings that they have for copyrighted print material. Publishers, on the other hand, must realize that there is only so much money in library budgets, price according to what is fair, and not control access. Only when this trust has been established will the publishers become less restrictive in their demands on the “use and access” of this new media.