NETWORKING: AN ESSENTIAL RESOURCE FOR THE SMALL AQUATIC LIBRARY

Merrill Manke
Library Services Coordinator
Monterey Bay Aquarium
Monterey, California 93940-1085 USA

ABSTRACT

Networking as a resource is not a new concept to libraries, especially small special libraries. To ensure responsive library services, librarians must actively seek out, if not create, networks that will enhance their own library resources. Just as each library is a unique resource, the combination of networks chosen and nurtured by its librarian can also be unique. This is an account of the varied networks chosen by the Monterey Bay Aquarium library and the resulting benefits these associations have brought to the library and its institution.

INTRODUCTION

A network can be as varied as a working lunch with a colleague or a formal, electronic system such as OCLC. Professional library organizations, such as the American Library Association (Young, 1983) and the Special Libraries Association (SLA, 1977) have developed definitions for the phenomenon. Regardless of the formal interpretations, the nature and significance that networks have ultimately depend on individual librarians and their actual participation in cooperative efforts. The networks chosen for each library should be tailored to the mission of the library and its parent institution with the ultimate goal of enhancing information resources. In this regard, a variety of opportunities exist for networking in a small aquarium library. The degree of formality, communication and time commitment vary with each network just as the benefits and financial obligations. However, each is unique and worthwhile pursuing to enhance available information resources.

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF ZOOLOGICAL PARKS AND AQUARIUMS

Interpersonal networking is the least formal approach to professional cooperation but can be a powerful technique for supplementing the resources of a small library. Regardless of library size, St. Clair advocates developing interpersonal networks as a means of pursuing excellence. Through connections "special librarians have the opportunity to make virtually every colleague a new link in a chain of

resources." (St.Clair, 1989). This has proven especially beneficial for our aquarium library because

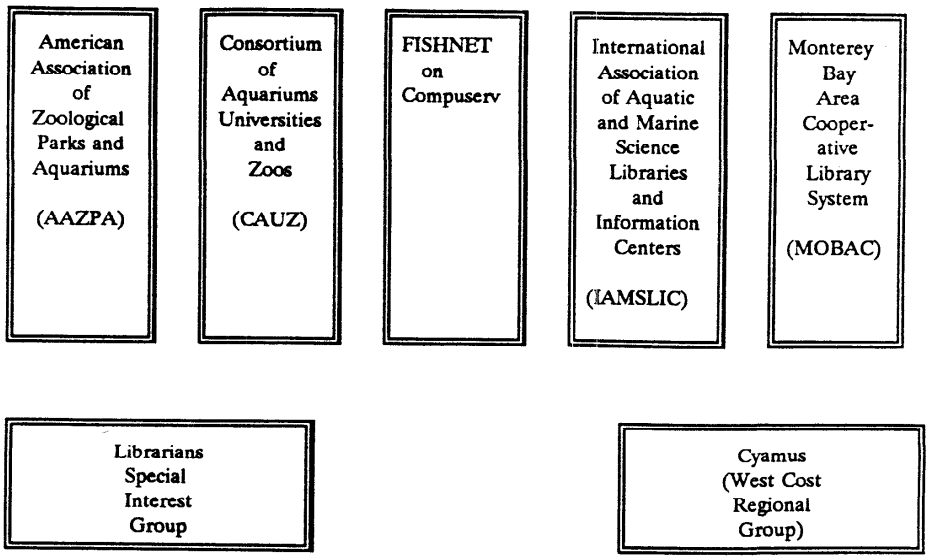


Figure 1: Some of the Networks that have proven beneficial to the Monterey Bay Aquarium Library.

operation of an aquarium encompasses far more than husbandry of aquatic animals. Topics as diverse as visitor behavior, exhibit design, marketing, publishing, graphic arts, and aquatic curriculum development make communication with colleagues in other aquariums a necessity. An aquarium library can actively promote interpersonal networking between institutions by participating in a number of aquarium-related organizations.

In North America, the primary organization for zoo and aquarium professionals is the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums (AAZPA) (Boyd, 1990). AAZPA membership consists of institutions, societies, related organizations, and personnel from almost all the major professionally operated zoos and aquariums in the United States and Canada. Institutional members must be accredited and abide by the AAZPA Code of Professional Ethics to maintain their status. Currently there are 155 institutions accredited by the AAZPA. The objectives of the organization include improvements in zoo and aquarium public education, conservation, scientific research, and captive animal management. Approximately 3,700 individuals are currently members of AAZPA and their interests are as varied as the types of jobs performed by zoo and aquarium employees, ranging from marketing to

propagation of endangered species. Those having similar interests and areas of expertise commonly share ideas and experiences, ultimately benefiting many member institutions.

The AAZPA Librarians Special Interest Group was formed in 1978 to increase communication and cooperation between zoo and aquarium libraries and information centers. Membership now includes more than 80 individuals on three continents. In order to promote networking, membership is not limited to AAZPA membership or geographically to North America. The group primarily communicates through an informal newsletter (AAZPA, 1982) as well as during meetings at AAZPA conferences. It provides support to its small member libraries by generating guidelines (AAZPA, 1986), bibliographies (Kenyon, 1991), and directories (Kenyon, 1990) relevant to zoos and aquariums, and advises new institutions on how to set up and manage a library/information center. Because zoo and aquarium libraries tend to be small, understaffed and poorly funded, these services and contacts can be a tremendous morale-booster for the solo librarian trying to tackle what seems like an insurmountable task--creating a viable and valuable information resource with little institutional support. This group exemplifies how interpersonal networking with an informal group can result in improved library services regardless of the size of the library.

CONSORTIUM OF AQUARIUMS, UNIVERSITIES AND ZOOS

The Consortium of Aquariums, Universities, and Zoos (CAUZ) was created in 1985 to increase communication between animal researchers in zoos, aquariums and universities. Approximately 300 organizations are currently represented by over 600 members in CAUZ. Membership has grown beyond North America and now has a representative coordinator in Europe. This group is an example of a formalized interpersonal network because it is a human database. The intent is to facilitate communication between researchers and specialists who have similar interests. The database, which includes names, addresses, animal specialties and project interests, can be accessed electronically through Bitnet but a paper directory is published annually as well. By making it easier to locate colleagues with similar interests, CAUZ helps members to communicate and learn from each other, avoiding duplication of effort and reducing costs. For an aquarium this can be particularly helpful in researching the exhibit potential of a new species or for getting advice on the care of a wild animal brought in for emergency care. The benefits of this interpersonal networking were well summarized by Annette Berkovits of the New York Zoological Park: "With ever shrinking funding, cultural and educational institutions such as zoos, aquariums, and universities should be looking for creative ways in which to maximize scarce resources. One practical way to accomplish this goal is to pool available information and use it as a wellspring of ideas. Since our collective audiences share many characteristics, we can learn from each other's successes and failures in improving our own programs. We can also benefit from access to specialists who might otherwise be available only as high-priced consultants. We can support each others' efforts, and in general, enrich our

professional lives." (Hardy & Hughes, 1992).

FISHNET

Aquarium employees can also communicate electronically on FISHNET (Benn, 1986; Anon, 1990), the Aquaria/Fish Forum service on CompuServe. It allows both professional and vocational aquarists the opportunity to exchange information about aquarium animals. The AquaForum section, which is aimed at hobbyists, includes message boards for idea exchange as well as libraries of full-text articles on freshwater and marine aquarium keeping, disease control, and aquarium products. The AquaData section of FISHNET provides information for professional aquarists. Unlike the informal AquaForum, the information stored in AquaData is more research oriented and must meet established criteria for acceptance into the database. In addition to the full-text articles, the section on drugs can be useful for aquarists trying to treat animals affected by disease. The message boards also allow aquarists and aquaculturists to exchange ideas on topics of interest and to solve problems they may be having with specific animals. Many aquarists are unfamiliar with electronic communications and the aquarium library may need to act as a facilitator, encouraging aquarist participation in this system by initiating information searches and by leaving bulletin board messages for them.

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF AQUATIC AND MARINE SCIENCE LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTERS

The International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers (IAMSLIC) (IAMSLIC, 1992) was founded in 1975 in order to facilitate the exchange of ideas and discussion of professional issues among aquatic and marine library and information specialists. The membership has grown to over 230 members in 34 countries and the international scope provides professional contacts in areas having widely-divergent aquatic environments. This connection can be a tremendous asset to an aquarium developing exhibits of marine life from all over the world. Access to distant information resources can not only help the exhibit staff in deciding on the feasibility of exhibiting an animal but can also be used by aquarists in the captive management of animals in distress.

One of the greatest assets of IAMSLIC is professional development. The often informal interchange of ideas and information facilitates current awareness of products and services that can greatly enhance information resources in a small library. In panel discussion sessions as well as in formal presentations, IAMSLIC members have the opportunity to learn about new computer services and innovative software applications directly applicable to aquatic and marine libraries. Participants readily offer opinions based on firsthand experience with the systems and are supportive in helping smaller, developing libraries to acquire valuable information resources. With ever-changing electronic technologies and dwindling budgets, the opportunity to keep pace with

developments is of great value. The small aquatic library may not be able to immediately afford the new technologies but awareness allows for future planning.

IAMSLIC also has regional groups and the West Coast of North America group, Cyamus, has been a great source for interpersonal networking for our particular library. The group prefers to remain informal but is very cohesive and creative. Efforts have been made to pilot an electronic periodicals holdings list of the libraries in the group. The larger libraries are already on large electronic utilities but access to the smaller ones has been limited. The project will not only provide centralized access to all Cyamus holdings but will facilitate access to the smaller libraries. The idea for this effort evolved, in part, because the smaller libraries do not want to be "parasitic" and would gladly borrow from each other rather than go to a larger net-lender. The regional group has supported this idea, recognizing that small libraries are valuable as unique resources and can benefit the whole network. In the end, all Cyamus members should benefit from the improved access and communication.

MONTEREY BAY AREA COOPERATIVE LIBRARY SYSTEM

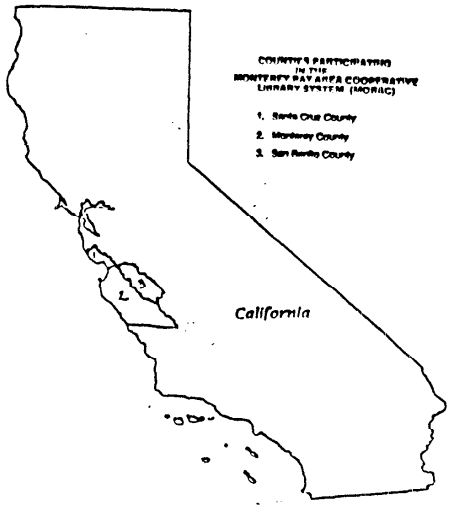
With increasing budget cuts as well as staff and services costs, even the largest libraries are having to cut back on resources and to look for ways to supplement dwindling funds. Cooperation with other libraries is a logical step toward reducing costs and has been an essential strategy for survival in small libraries for years. As pointed out by Segal, "The 'access vs. acquisition' model, now a major issue in academic libraries, was successfully faced by many smaller special libraries years ago." (Segal, 1989) In addition, increasing acceptance of multitype networks has enabled small special libraries to participate as equals with large university and public libraries. Rather than being viewed as simply resource-draining, small libraries are being recognized for the unique resources they can bring to a cooperative. This evolution of library networking made it possible for the Monterey Bay Aquarium library to join the multitype Monterey Bay Area Cooperative Library System (MOBAC).

MOBAC was formed in 1969 as a public library cooperative for Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties in California. By 1985 it grew to include academic and special libraries as equal members into the organization. MOBAC now encompasses San Benito County as well and is composed of public (nine), academic (eight), government (three), medical (one) and museum (one) libraries.

Not all library cooperatives have welcomed inclusion of multitype libraries into their systems and some special librarians have been reluctant to commit to cooperative arrangements (Kidder, 1982; Paskoff, 1989; Ladner, 1989). Some public librarians feared loss of state and federal funding, or having their resources overburdened by requests from special libraries. At the same time, some special librarians worried about time and funding obligations and whether their own resources would be adversely affected. Fortunately, MOBAC focused on the potential for strengthening resources, not draining them, and worked out by-laws and fees that could accommodate libraries

with widely-divergent resources and funding. Public and non-public libraries were given equal voting power on the MOBAC Administrative Council (except for budget issues related to the California Library Services Act) and representatives from any library could participate in the myriad of committees supporting MOBAC services. Consequently, all participating libraries were encouraged to participate on a variety of levels.

This acceptance of all members as valuable, contributory participants set the tone for a truly cooperative effort which continues to grow in strength. Atkinson probably summed it up best in his advocacy of multitype cooperation: "It is not necessary for the outcomes, products, and uses of networks to be the results of an equal system, but rather that the network be valuable to each of its participants." (Atkinson, 1987). The benefits considered most valuable by each MOBAC library may differ but each recognizes the importance of MOBAC's cooperative efforts. This has allowed large and small libraries to work together for the benefit of the group.



The Monterey Bay Aquarium's involvement in the MOBAC network has brought numerous benefits that would not have been feasible for a solitary special library. Access to interlibrary loans arranged by a MOBAC staff member well-versed in OCLC has certainly had a great impact in terms of saving aquarium staff time. The courier service facilitates transportation of those loans as well. Our staff has also benefitted from staff development workshops (e.g., cataloging standards, book repair, reference materials review) that we could not have held on our own and we have had many opportunities to exchange ideas with staff from other libraries. Both experiences have been valuable in combatting the professional isolationism sometimes felt in libraries that are small departments within a large institution. In addition, MOBAC reference support has given us access to library networks throughout California in order to track down difficult reference requests. Finally, on a broader scale, our membership in MOBAC has given us a stronger voice on issues affecting libraries in

general. The phenomenon of "strength in numbers" gives MOBAC far more potential to influence political decisions made about libraries on state and county levels.

Involvement in a formal cooperative system has required both financial and staff obligations but the cost has been well worth it. Our membership fee offsets the costs of processing difficult interlibrary loans and saves us the prohibitive expense of joining OCLC. Probably the greatest impact on our staff time has been adherence to MARC cataloging standards. Molholt has pointed out that "successful cooperation is closely related to adherence to standards. In the electronic environment that is doubly true." (Molholt, 1989). Part of our obligation to MOBAC is to submit Level K MARC records for use in the MOBAC CD-ROM catalog (Sertic & Mann, 1989). This has required more cataloging preparation time and certainly more staff initiative to learn and keep up with MARC rules but the end result has been well worth the effort. The obvious benefit has been the capability of searching most of the library collections in our tri-county area. An added bonus has been the ability to search our own holdings. As CD-ROM readers become more prevalent throughout our aquarium, we will be able to make disks available in other departments, allowing staff to search our library collection from a variety of locations. In a small library dial-up access to the catalog is usually not financially feasible. The CD-ROM product will provide a useful alternative that is financially within reach.

CONCLUSION

A small aquarium library can participate as an equal, contributing member in a variety of networks. It is important for the librarian to look beyond the isolation of being in a small department within a large institution and to analyze options for increasing access to information resources. Taking the step to participate in a network, whether it is formal or informal, involves taking personal and professional risks but the ensuing benefits can be worth the effort. Hughes encourages librarians to be innovators and to look at the entrepreneurial opportunities in networking. Services and resources need to be evaluated and change initiated, if necessary, to meet the mission of the library and its institution. She points out that "the dynamic of taking strategic risks is critical to a library's ability to remain vital...." (Hughes, 1989).

Some networking efforts may take more initiative than others. Most of the networks described here have nominal membership costs, if any, but do require personal effort to develop interpersonal connections and to learn how to access a variety of electronic communication systems. Participation in a local, multitype network may a bigger but not impossible challenge. We were fortunate to have access to an already existing, formal multitype network (MOBAC). Availability of this type of network will vary by location. However, even if one does not exist, the aquarium librarian can still encourage cooperative efforts with other local libraries. Eventually more formal resource sharing arrangements could develop. It is essential to look beyond the fear of change and balance it with the personal and professional benefits derived from expanding access to the information needed by your institution.

MONTEREY BAY AREA COOPERATIVE LIBRARY SYSTEM (MOBAC)

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Harrison Memorial Library
Monterey County Free Libraries
Pacific Grove Public Library
San Benito County Free Library
San Juan Bautista City Library
Santa Cruz City/County Library
John Steinbeck Library
Watsonville Public Library

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

University of California at Santa Cruz,
McHenry Library
Monterey Peninsula College Library
Hartnell College Library
Cabrillo College Library
Gavilan College Library
San Jose State University,
Monterey County Campus Library
Monterey Peninsula Unified School District,
Instructional Media Center
Monterey Institute of International Studies Library

GOVERNMENT LIBRARIES

Naval Postgraduate School Library
Fort Ord Library System
TEXCOM Experimentation Center,
Technical Information Center

MEDICAL LIBRARIES

Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula,
Medical Staff Library

MUSEUM LIBRARIES

Monterey Bay Aquarium Library

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APPENDIX 1

NETWORK CONTACTS

American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums

AAZPA Librarians Special Interest Group
Kay Kenyon
National Zoological Park Branch Library
Smithsonian Institution Libraries
Washington, DC 20008
United States

Phone: (202) 673-4771
FAX: (202) 673-4900

AAZPA
Oglesbay Park
Wheeling, WV 26003-1698
United States

Phone: (304) 242-2160
FAX: (304) 242-2283

CompuServe

CompuServe
Customer Service Department
P.O. Box 20212
Columbus, OH 43220
United States

Phone: (614) 457-8650
(800) 848-8990 (toll-free in U.S.A.)

Consortium of Aquariums, Universities and Zoos

Donna FitzRoy Hardy, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
California State University
18111 Nordsoff Street
Northridge, CA 91330

Phone: (818) 885-4970
(818) 885-2827
E-Mail: DHARDY@VAX.CSUN.EDU

David G. Hughes
Glasgow Zoo
Uddingston
Glasgow G71 7RZ
Scotland United States

Phone: (0417) 711-185

International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers

IAMSLIC
c/o Library
Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution, Inc.
5600 Old Dixie Highway
Fort Pierce, FL 34946
United States

E-Mail: SCIENCEnet bulletin board -- IAMSLIC

Monterey Bay Area Cooperative Library System

MOBAC
Library Building
Monterey Peninsula College
980 Fremont Blvd.
Monterey, CA 93940
United States

Phone: (408) 646-4256
FAX: (408) 646-5618