The Role of OCLC in Networking of Special Libraries

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ABSTRACT

New technologies and new services from OCLC make it possible for small marine science libraries to further share resources and information. Right now, and in the near future, these libraries, even those not cataloging on OCLC, can use the OCLC Interlibrary Loan Subsystem through the Group Access capability. Union listing can be done online with OCLC to allow access to up-to-date serials holdings information. (And offline products are also available). OCLC’s utilization of CD-ROM technology and the possibility of “mining” the OCLC database give potential for the creation of specialized databases in the CD-ROM form.

OCLC’s Role in Networking

As a serials and monograph cataloger at the California Institute of Technology, I learned a little about the workings of a science library -- although a more accurate description of the Cal-Tech libraries might be that of a cluster or network of special libraries. These special libraries were all within the same building, for the most part on separate floors, or satellite libraries spread throughout the campus. However none of these was a marine science library. So let me begin my talk with the assumptions I have made about marine science libraries.

First, I assume that Ruth Grundy’s statement that her first and foremost responsibility is to the scientific community which she serves is how most marine science librarians feel. The information needs of research staff and faculty and students are more important than knowing the latest 70 cataloging rule interpretation.

Second, I assume that marine science libraries, like all libraries, are hard hit by the rising cost of periodical subscriptions and books. And that the cost of maintaining that core collection is preventing you from participating to the extent you’d like in various automation activities. In her July 1984 article in SPECIAL LIBRARIES, Judith Barnett states that, based on results of a questionnaire study she did, she found that 36% of the marine science libraries that responded use OCLC. Two used RLIN and one used WLN. My third assumption is that these figures have not changed much. So you’ve given good service to your users and as a result have a very active user base. You’re very busy. You see all sorts of ways that automation would help you and your users, but your budgets are not growing as you wish they would. Finally, I assume you’re here on the beautiful, relaxing Oregon coast partly to forget all that, and here I am reminding you.

So to the topic of the role of OCLC in the networking of special libraries. I’ll begin with ways that would require the least output from the library in terms of money, equipment, and staff time.
Group Access is the name of the OCLC capability that allows libraries, both cataloging members of OCLC and libraries that don't catalog on OCLC, to share their resources using the OCLC interlibrary loan subsystem. Through an inexpensive profiling procedure, OCLC will create within the OCLC Online Union Catalog a sort of "subset" of location information for libraries that have cataloged their material on OCLC. This database subset could then be accessible through most dial access terminals to libraries that otherwise did not participate in OCLC. Those users that catalog on OCLC are known as "full users". Those that simply access the "subset" for ILL purposes are known as "selective users". Full users have access to the entire OCLC Online Union Catalog of over 300,000,000* locations. Selective users have access only to the holdings of libraries within their group. They can send an online ILL request to those full members -- and full members can send online ILL requests to selective members. One or more full member can choose to act as a referral library, so that online requests for items not located within the group can be referred out into the whole OCLC database. Recent changes in the programming for Group Access permit libraries to belong to more than one Group Access group, such as a federal library group and a marine science library group. Also now a group may have as many as 5,000 members. If a network or group of libraries chooses to do its periodical union listing with OCLC, this copy-specific information is also available to all members of the group. As I have mentioned, full OCLC users would not see much of a change in their current procedures (with the exception of being able to send requests to selective users). Selective users have full availability of the 18,000,000* bibliographic descriptions in the Online Union Catalog, although some of the cataloging fields are masked -- subject headings and physical description, for example, don't display to selective users. However, there is enough information to identify an item for ILL purposes. The beauty of it then is that someone like Betty Galbraith at the University of Alaska which catalogs on WLN could use existing hardware, to participate in a Marine Sciences Library Group, and take advantage of the existing database and the speed of the OCLC ILL Subsystem. OCLC services are brokered by regional networks, so I can't list costs. However, profiling costs are minimal, particularly for full members. ILL transaction costs are the same for full and selective users. Libraries for the most part can use existing hardware to dial-up to OCLC. OCLC is switching its dial-up service to Compuserve in order to reduce telecommunications costs. The other major charge is for training in the use of the OCLC System -- applicable for selective users only, since full users need no training. Selective users that at some point wish to contribute location information to the database can do so either by becoming full members or by tapeload. Online Union listing of periodicals is also an option for a network of libraries. OCLC currently has over sixty active union list groups. Advantages of union listing online are:

1. Availability of monograph and serial location information in the same database.
2. Availability of monograph and serial location information and a speedy and cost effective ILL vehicle on the same system.
3. Accessibility of accurate and up-to-date serial locations.
4. Ability of libraries to add their individual information directly to an online union list.

OCLC is also developing microcomputer products that make use of data stored on compact discs. The information on these discs could be, for instance, cataloging information which a library could use for local card production. Specially prepared reference packages are also a possibility. A prototype displayed at the American Library Association Conference this past summer for instance contained a database which featured a subset of the Index to the Current Journals in
Education (from the ERIC data-base) and on the same disc, monographic titles pulled from the OCLC Online Union Catalog by call number. Thus a user seeking current information from both books and journals on education would be able to retrieve this data from a single source -- a reference data-base on compact disk.

The search capabilities of this prototype included Boolean, free-text, controlled vocabulary, and specific field searching, ranging, truncation, index browsing, and search history review and modification.

Equipment necessary includes an OCLC M300, IBM PC/XT, PC/AT or PC compatible microcomputer with 512K random access memory. Also, a 10Mb fixed-disk drive and a CD ROM reader.

The final product is due out in early 1987.

Conceptually then this sort of product might be of interest to special library networks. Bibliographic records might be "mined" from the OCLC database by call number or subject heading (or any information in a bibliographic record). This database might then be put on CD-ROM discs. OCLC then could distribute on compact discs a variety of local reference databases created from records in the Online Union Catalog and other bibliographic sources. A library's end users may have access to this tool. OCLC’s mission is to apply its technology to the operation of the library to reduce the rate of rise of per-unit costs and to further the ease of access to knowledge and information. To the extent which OCLC facilitates the network of libraries I think it achieves its goals.

* These numbers were updated in September 1988.