The new librarians: valuable ideas in new worlds
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The purpose of this article is to examine a little some of the ways in which the principles of librarianship may be producing beneficial effect in other fields, owing to the mobility of trained librarians caused partly by those dark aspects of the body economic, job stagnation and redundancy, and partly by growing opportunities.

With what principles of librarianship are we concerned? Dividing them arbitrarily into the philosophical (those concerned with the boundaries of action) and the technical (of technique, the 'how' of action), we shall concentrate on the latter. That is not to say that the principles of unpartisan service to a client population should not infuse the working attitudes of new librarians: such are productive in most occupations.

Technique, then: the Library Association has identified two groups of professional skills: specialist and general (1). Among the general skills is 'Interaction with clients and users', which will include such matters as negotiating the reference request. This skill is undoubtedly useful in the design of 'the user interface' for online services, localized interactive systems, and expert systems, but is shared by many others, such as General Practitioners.

Turning to the 'specialist skills' we find:
"The analysis of the library and information needs of existing and potential users"
"The identification, analysis and organisation of information"
"The exploitation of information resources" (1)

In order to see where these skills might be applied, we must distinguish between the packaging of information and its creation and dissemination. Here the recent report 'Making a business of information' is a handy guide (2), which distinguishes between products, services, their content and what enables them to exist (the technology: hardware). I am discussing everything, here, in the context of new technologies.

Clearly the analysis of the information needs of users is not unique to librarianship. Television companies continually perform such analyses. What is of interest to us here is the context of textual, permanent or semi-permanent information, and the way in which analysis of information needs leads inevitably to the analysis of information access needs, or to give the older names, cataloguing and indexing.

New forms of packaging and dissemination have sprung out of new technology possibilities: remote bibliographic services; viewdata services; electronic publishing; full text information services. Librarians, being largely preoccupied with running libraries, have in large measure missed involvement so far. Bibliographical services, by their nature, have leant heavily on cataloguing techniques to provide adequate access. Other, newer, services and systems are of more interest for our theme.
At this point it is necessary to emphasise that it is not amazing that one finds a lack of perception of what indexing is necessary in order to achieve access to information: many of those who run computer based services are computer or business people, whose professional attributes and preoccupations are quite other than those of librarians. I have seen a full text online newspaper cuttings service, which will not be named here, which allowed the assignment of three terms only per cutting to give access: demonstrating the inadequacy of that by instant analysis of the first couple of cuttings found was of course easy, much to the dismay of the creators (do the library schools teach tact these days?).

I have seen another full text service which provided much fuller indexing, and indeed very easy to learn and helpful screen dialogues, but there were some frequently occurring terms, also frequently used, which caused significant response delays, particularly in combination. Three years later I saw it again. The data base had grown considerably, and response on some commonly occurring searches was easily in excess of five minutes. The problem had been known for three years, but no solution provided, even though steadily worsening. Knowledge of data processing resided in the company, but not sufficiently of the data and the techniques of indexing. To be fair, economic considerations have been paramount in that service.

That brings me to the next point: costs. There are now sufficient analyses of electronic publishing ventures to show that in general they do not pay back the initial investment for five to eight years. Within that timeframe entrepreneurs will be (are!) extremely reluctant to spend further. enhancing the indexing on existing files can be very costly. There are hardly any yet past that timeframe. Only when there is cash for re-investment will there be opportunity for major indexing overhaul. Until that time the effects made by professional librarians, however competent, will be marginal, unless their professional expertise was given due weight at the initial design stage.

But re-investment alone will not cause major improvements in indexing. A changed perception of the need for this on the part of the managers of such services is also required, which might be categorized as the perception that you can’t stick your fingers into an electronic book as you can into one of paper and board. With the growth of perception comes the management search for professionals in the indexing activity to provide the expertise. Are there enough of us ready for the challenge?

The list of possible new technology areas where indexing principles (one is tempted to say: and a little common sense) may be applied beneficially is as long as you care to make it. Our wheels are being reinvented in many places.

The Library Association Report on electronic document delivery and electronic publishing (3) states: "Electronic publishing presents major problems in bibliographic control . . . These have so far received little attention but are areas where the librarians traditional skills should find application."

In addition to electronic publishing, the world of office automation is becoming increasingly concerned with retrieval, and therefore indexing, owing to the discovery of
the great quantity of information involved. There is not now space to describe the
problems here in any depth, but the principles of classification apply: document A is an
invoice to company X for widgets; document B is a letter to the Technical Manager from
company Y on widgets; document C is a confidential report on the future development of
widgets from the Sales Manager to the Managing Director. The multidimensionality of
classification can be observed.

I hope that this largely random sampling of the soils of other worlds has been
worthwhile.

References
   Association. Bibliographic and Information Systems and Standards Committee [1983]

Clement Jewitt trained as an architect, then as a librarian. After experience of automation in the
BNB and within public and academic libraries, he moved into commercial library automation in
1974. He was system designer and project manager for several bibliographical systems, including
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New Library World v86/1018, April '85, pp66-7