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Conference Paper Abstract

The New Virtual Library and Serials: A Kaleidoscope of Options

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In this paper I will focus on the virtual academic library as a place and as a structure or shell for serial information access and services. Specifically, I will relate some of our practical experience of planning, building and organizing library services in the new Kelvin Smith Library, just opened, on the campus of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. The library was planned and designed from the start to be a "library of the future" or "virtual library" and relies heavily on supply of information through electronic resources as well as through traditional means. We will present what we see as the future from our experience and will present a model which is serial based, our "shared digital library" which is based on the proven success of cooperative bibliographic database efforts such as OCLC and RLIN.

The future of serials, at least the next twenty years future, will probably be a meshing of supply sources and access options. These will include traditional print on paper journals, current periodical areas, and bound journal stacks, both on site and off site is linked storage facilities. Becoming more important, however, is the supply of serial information through the new technologies including networked, licensed CD-ROMs, networked e-journals with cataloging and integration in the database and linked through subject gateways, publisher e-journal projects, such as Johns Hopkins Project Muse, Elsevier ESS, etc. Regional, consortia document delivery projects such as OhioLink are and will also play an important role in efficient and economical serial information supply, as will direct commercial document delivery services such as Uncover, CISTI, Swets and EBSCO ventures. I will describe some of the OhioLink experience in negotiating and coordinating between publishers and member libraries.

An important component of our "virtual library" services is our Mellon grant= project which focuses on organizing information supply in the chemical sciences. It is a collaborative approach to the Chemical Sciences Virtual Library which models itself after the OCLC and RLIN database systems which were so successful in consolidating and sharing catalog information and records, and which is a system which has worked. The cornerstone of our concept of a "shared digital library" involves the creation of bodies of digital documents in an area in which libraries can make a real contribution, that is undertaking a digital retrospective conversion full-text, whether images, searchable text, etc. The project makes use of library staff as a labor pool and works with publishers to build a low-cost retrospective database of digital resources for which the publisher could charge royalties. The shared digital library or SDL will consist of several components including image servers, input devices an indexing component or linked to commercial indeses, rights management software and the Internet or its successor as the network for distribution.

Of course the difficult part of doing serials in the new virtual library is in being able to separate the

good new options from the bad, choosing those which are appropriate for your library and its constituencies and in balancing "keeping on top of the new" with supplying serials to students and faculty need now. The options are not only in the areas of format and supply vehicle, ie print, microfilm, electronic CD-ROM, networked, hypertext linked, and online archive sources. They also appear to include acquisitions methods, ie traditional subscription agents and vendors, and "new" software-based, bank linked subscription services. We will cover options we have explored and our success and otherwise with them.

This is the challenge we are facing in our new library, and one which everyone in North America and Great Britain is facing to one degree or another. It is a major transition period in which some supply sources will ebb and decline in proportion to others, some will and have already turned out to be "dead ends" - we hope to be fortunate enough not to invest heavily in any of these. (We feel the Shared Digital Library approach is one that could have applications elsewhere.) It will take more technical savvy, more serials experience, keeping abreast of what is available, what s working and what isn t and just being lucky to make it all work smoothly, and to get to the next stage without sacrificing good service now.