Library Catalogs, the World Wide Web, and Serving the Off-Campus User:
Boon or Bust?

Kevin A. Furniss
Winthrop University

Doug Kariel
Athabasca University

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to outline some ways in which library catalogs can be enriched to meet the needs of the off-site searcher, and to suggest some ways in which an off-campus library services librarian can work with catalog librarians to enhance the catalog for their particular patrons.

Introduction

With the explosion of the Internet and the ubiquitousness of personal computers more and more library users are remotely accessing library catalogs. As these users are not able to physically access the collection they depend even more greatly on the information contained within the catalog itself to satisfy their information needs. The purpose of this paper is to outline some ways in which catalogs can be enriched in order to meet the needs of the off-site searcher and to suggest some ways by which the off-campus library services librarian can work with catalog librarians to enhance the catalog for their particular patrons.

Enriching Bibliographic Description

Each library needs to decide which types of material they want to have more accessible to its patrons. Librarians responsible for distance education services should have input to this decision as this decision will affect the ability of students to locate materials when searching the catalog. One of the best ways to enhance access to material through the library online catalog is to enhance the description of certain types of records. Including the table of contents of material such as readers or conference proceedings provides the user with direct access to individual papers, and allows users to find more items written by prominent authors. This is especially useful in disciplines such as distance education where much of the literature is in conference proceedings or collections of articles in a book. Sometimes conference papers and chapters of books not readily accessible when searching bibliographic databases such as ERIC or ICDL.

Tables of contents are added by entering contents notes to a catalog record, or by creating analytic records which are linked to the original record. The authors suggest that adding contents notes is faster and just as effective in terms of finding the original material. Contents notes are part of the original record, whereas analytical records are separate records which refer back to a parent record. Analytic records also add to the number of record in a system which may result in the necessity of paying for indexing and storage of more records than a library really needs. The authors suggest that adding contents notes is a faster and just as effective means of finding the original material.

Contents notes can be entered fairly quickly with a minimum of staff time. This is done by entering the table of contents into MARC field 505 of the main record. For ease of viewing by users, a library may wish to have several contents fields, so that sections of a conference can be easily identified.

Enriching Bibliographic Access

The enrichment of bibliographic access involves adding subject headings to bibliographic records and adding cross-references (SE and SEE ALSO references) to authority records in the catalog. Catalog searches are much more efficient when the controlled vocabulary of Library of Congress subject headings is used. Items that may be spread about the collection with a variety of classification numbers will be grouped together in the catalog under a subject heading[1]. This is particularly important for off-site users, as they typically will be unable to physically browse the shelves. Off-campus library services librarians can work with catalogers to help add additional appropriate subject headings to existing bibliographic records. Also, they may recommend additional cross-references to subject authority records in order ro guide catalog users from key words to subject headings. By using subject searching reports generated within an OPAC, the Library of Congress Subject Heading Weekly Lists, and the Subject Headings of Current Interest section of the Library of Congress Service Bulletin, librarians can examine the subject searching patterns of off-site users and suggest supplementary subject headings for bibliographic records and cross-references for authority records.

A. Using subject search logs

Among the statistics reported in OPAC search logs is the collection and transcription of unsuccessful subject searches, i.e. searches entered into the subject field of the OPAC that yield no direct hits. The primary reason for these failed subject searches is that catalog users have entered the subjects of their inquiries as uncontrolled keywords rather than Library of Congress subject headings. Many OPACs can generate alphabetical lists of failed subject searches and indicate the dates, times, and terminal numbers in which the failed searches occurred. By looking specifically at those inquiries that were generated off-site the librarian can see how off-site users are searching the catalog. Types of failed searches include searches written in sentence form, personal names in direct order, and searches that contain misspellings and typographical errors. By consulting with public service librarians catalogers can enrich access by adding additional cross references directed toward the catalog inquiries of the off-campus user. The public services librarian can examine this list for "plausible" searches that look as though they should have retrieved bibliographical records. Once these searches have been identified the off-campus library services librarian can consult with the catalog department to determine whether the collection contains material that would be covered by these search terms, and, if so, suggest additional cross-references within the authority records of existing subject headings to guide the searcher to appropriate headings; or to suggest subject headings new to the catalog that reflect the subject content of the failed search.

Logs of failed searches can be helpful to the off-campus library service librarian in other ways. The failed searches can help to identify gaps in the collection, and as such can aid in the collection development. Examples of failed searches can be incorporated into OPAC help screens and used as examples of key word searches. Further, these searches can enhance bibliographic instruction, as they can show catalog users how they can move from a key word search to a controlled vocabulary search.

B. Using Library of Congress Tools

Each week the Cataloging Policy and Support Office at the Library of Congress issues a subject heading list. This detailed list reports changes the Library of Congress has made to its subject headings during that week. These changes include contains changes in cross-references to existing headings, headings that have

---

[1]Mann, T. (1993). Library research models: A guide to classification, cataloging and computers (pp. 15-44). New York: Oxford University Press.

been canceled (and if replaces, new headings and cross-references), new authorized subject headings and changes to free-floating subdivisions. This list is used to keep authority records up-to-date, particularly as many new cross-references have been composed in more"naturalistic" language. It also announces major changes in geographical headings, such as the change from Zaire to Congo (Democratic Republic). Referring to this list is the best way to keep current with additions and changes in subject headings. The list is posted to the Cataloging Policy and Support Office's home page at the following address: **http://leweb.loc.gov/catdir/wls.html**

For a synopsis of the subject heading changes you can look at the Cataloging Service Bulletin, which is issued quarterly. It provides an overview report of the subject heading changes and revisions made since the previous issue. It also includes a list of subject headings of current interest. This section will be of particular interest to the off-campus library services librarian, as it notes new subject areas and acknowledges current terms. One of the best uses of the subjects of current interest is to perform a key word search in the catalog for those terms. Once bibliographic records are found the off-campus library services librarian can work with the cataloger to determine if the new subject heading can be added to appropriate bibliographic records. These new subject headings are also helpful in collections work and bibliographic instruction, as they identify new and current subject areas.

Accessing Internet Resources

Today's World Wide Web based library catalogs often have links to various resources that are accessible through the Internet. These can be very helpful to off-campus students as they can access material that the Library has already determined is likely to be helpful. If students can access full text, the student may be able to obtain the information they require, or acquire information that supplements the materials that the library provides. In library circles there is much discussion as to what is the best way to provide access to these resources. Some of the usual ways of doing this are:

- connecting via a URL (Uniform Resource Locator) imbedded in the catalog record,
- having a separate list of resources on the Library's web site, or
- connecting to various databases using a Z39.50 gateway. Sometimes the URL for these databases is included in a catalog record.

Since the purpose of this paper is to discuss how "virtual" catalogs can enhance the Off-Campus user's ability to access resources, we will focus on the first option. While there are needs for all three methods, the authors prefer to have Internet resources which are actual publications as a bibliographic records within the catalog. This is especially useful when providing access to electronic journals or various government reports. If possible databases should be searched using a Z39.50 process, as this allows the user to the use the interface that they accustomed to for searching other databases.

Obviously, what must be done first is to determine which resources the Library wants to include in the catalog. The Off-Campus Librarian should have input into these decisions. The authors suggest that Internet resources be chosen carefully so that they either complement strengths of the collection, or provide access to information which will supplement a discipline in which there are a limited loadings in the home collection. In addition, for publications that are issued in multiple formats it is useful to include the Internet sit for those publications that are accessible in electronic form as well as the format that the library holds.

The challenge with adding URLs in the catalog is that they do not necessarily remain the same; therefore the library should have a plan for maintaining them. Libraries with many URLs in their database often have some method in place to check the validity of these on a regular basis. Karen Schneider presents a synopsis of some of the ways that are in use for dealing with changes to URLs in her column in the March

1997 issue of *American Libraries*[2]. One method to which she refers, and which the authors think is particularly good, is to use the PURL (Persistent Resource Locator) software developed by OCLC. (See **http://purl.oclc.org**) In this case, the PURL will connect to the resource even if it has changed location, as the PURL is solely a representation of the actual URL. The PURL software is available without charge on the PURL web page mentioned above.

Collaborating with Technical Services and Systems Staff

Librarians responsible for distance education services or off-campus programs need to work closely with the staff who direct Technical Services in a library. In particular, they need to work with the person in charge of cataloging. The distance education librarian often aware of how students need to search for in a catalog or what they need to find for their program. The Off-Campus librarian should check the catalog regularly to ensure that new material is readily found. If the required items do not come up as a result of searching a catalog record may be available so that the material can be found. In addition, it is vital that the distance education librarian understands how records are created so that they can provide input to the catalogers about what might be able to be done to enable access to the material.

It is important for all librarians to understand the basic record field that are indexed in the OPAC that is used in their library, and determine whether each index is a keyword or an exact match index. It is vital that one understands which fields of the catalog record are included in each searchable index. Questions that can be asked include:

- Are contents notes annotated? In other words, are the titles included in the title index and authors included in the author index, or are all words included in the title index?

- How are series indexed? Is there a separate series index or is are these included in the title index?

- What fields are part of the author index? Does this include corporate and personal authors, and are MARC 7xx fields (author added entries) included?

Conclusion

The distance education librarian who understands how the catalog woks can be much more effective in assisting users to find material in the catalog. In addition, if one understands the structure of one catalog, one is more likely to suspect the structure of other catalogs when they are searched. Often distance education librarians need to search other catalogs to help students find material that is closer to where they live. Further, distance education librarians have an important role to play in organizing information for retrieval by off-site users. Their knowledge of their patrons can add significant value to the cataloging process. Even as library catalogs, the media being cataloged, and the users themselves become increasingly virtual the need for standardized rules for bibliographic description, structured access points, and indexing systems remain. However, the special needs of distance education users requires an added investment and advocacy by distance education librarians to ensure their patrons get a level of catalog access fully appropriate to their needs.

---

[2]Schneider, K.G.(1997) Cataloging Internet resources: concerns and caveats. American Libraries, 28(3), p.77.