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# Providing online services to end users outside the library

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*A library and a computer center cooperate to serve users who overwhelmingly prefer remote access.*

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**W**ith the burgeoning of online and CD-ROM services in libraries and information centers comes the question of access to and control of many of these new services. They may be so popular and oversubscribed in the library that many requests are received for use outside the library's doors. Large academic libraries are finding that mounting tapes of the more popular databases (such as the Wilson indexes) on mainframes which can then be accessed along with their online catalogs serves their clientele well.<sup>1</sup> Smaller libraries, unable to afford the high cost of mounting tapes, may find, as we did at Bentley College, that offering a few passwords for remote access by interested faculty and staff could meet some of that demand for more access time as well as foster a good working relationship with members of the computer center staff.

Bentley College is a business school that offers undergraduate degrees in management, marketing, finance, banking, and accounting as well as

graduate degrees in business, computer information systems, and taxation. Many of our students, faculty, and staff are extremely computer literate. For several years now Bentley has had a program that provides every undergraduate student with his or her microcomputer for home use. All full-time faculty are provided with a computer for home or office use.

In 1987, in order to meet the demands of faculty and staff for uploading and downloading to and from the college's minicomputer, a Prime, from their homes or offices, the college computer center made communications software available for the asking. Given to faculty and staff, the software was distributed by the Academic Computer User Services, a group that offers microcomputer support campuswide. The software chosen by ACUS was Procomm, a very versatile shareware program that offers a site license for a reasonable price. Menus were written and macros were created by ACUS to enable the end users (faculty and staff) to upload and download easily to their accounts on the Prime.

About the same time, the library introduced its new online catalog, christened SOL (Search On-Line), and nicknamed for the library's benefactor, Solomon R. Baker. SOL, a Dynix system, was also running from the campus Prime and had dial-in

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<sup>1</sup>William G. Potter, "Beyond the Online Catalog: Steps Toward Creating an Online Library," *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 14 (January 1989): center insert.

capabilities. The computer center staff cooperated with the library to add SOL to the menu screen for the Procomm software that was distributed. Along with SOL, macros for online databases were added to the menu for remote use by faculty and staff.

For a number of years the library has offered all students, faculty and staff unlimited use of LEXIS and NAARS<sup>2</sup> (NAARS is the National Automated Accounting Research System of the AICPA) as well as use of the Dow Jones News Retrieval Service. We maintain two rooms for end user searching in the library, a "Dow Jones Room" with two XT clones dedicated for that purpose and a "LEXIS Room" with two dedicated PCs. For Dow Jones, printing and downloading are available without any charge. For LEXIS, we offer printing only in the library.

Passwords were given to interested faculty and staff, and Procomm macros were created by the campus computer center to make easy dial access possible. The library has purchased three passwords from Dow Jones News Retrieval and maintains one for remote use. This means unlimited use of one password all day and night for end users. As for LEXIS, the library has one off-peak password dedicated to remote use. This means end users may not be able to search LEXIS from 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily. Weekend use for both Dow Jones and LEXIS is unlimited. End users working from their offices do not even need modems for their remote access, because the Procomm macros access the 9600 baud modems on the Prime for dial-out access.

Both LEXIS and NAARS require some training, for they are not menu-driven. The library has always offered specialized tutorials to individuals and groups. Dow Jones, a menu-driven system, requires little formal training. Our colleagues in Academic Computer User Services needed some training on the use of full-text online services.

These services market themselves. Word of mouth has spread the news across the campus that the library offers access to databases for use in homes and offices. New faculty members often are told by their colleagues that the service exists.

### Changes in the library

There have been some changes in the library itself as a result of remote access to online databases. We have all become quite adept at providing a new service that, for lack of a better name, we can call end-user counseling. Many librarians are being asked nowadays not simply how to explain Boolean

operators but to talk to patrons about terminal emulation or baud rate. Or we are asked what we think is a good modem to buy. The library staff distributes packets of information about using the remote online databases and about communications software settings for the home computer, as well as passwords.

A few years have passed since the remote databases have become available, and as far as we are able to measure, there are a good many end users out there, dialing into the library's catalog as well as the databases available to them. We do not have as many distraught calls from users as we did in the early days. Thanks to the billing systems of both LEXIS and Dow Jones, we are able to measure database usage both in the library and from home or office. For LEXIS, which is more difficult to use, remote use is low, averaging about four hours a month. That breaks down to about 15 callers per month. For Dow Jones News Retrieval, a menu-driven system that is easy to use and may have greater applicability to a business school, remote use is very high and keeps growing. In August 1988, when use was first measured, it equalled 47 hours. At that time, in-library use was still greater than remote use. When it was measured again in September 1988, remote use was higher than library use. The equivalent of only one password is available for remote use for the whole campus, whereas two passwords are available for use in the library at two dedicated workstations. In summer 1990 we measured again, and remote use was overwhelmingly more popular than library use. Why make that trip to the library if you don't have to, if you want to check some basic business or international news?

While we know the end users are definitely out there and obviously enjoy doing their own searches, how successful they are with the more complex full-text databases such as LEXIS and NAARS remains to be seen. The Dow Jones databases that are favorites among our remote users are stock quotes and OAG (Online Airline Guide). A survey of remote end users is in the planning stage, and we don't know yet how we will actually reach all those end users out there. At present we have not opened remote access of these databases to students except for those graduate students engaged in research for faculty. Dial-in access to the library's catalog, SOL, is open to everyone and is quite popular among all groups. The percentage of students with modems is still quite low, but the demand for use of online databases among student end users is guaranteed to grow in the next year or so.

*Author's note: The menus and help screens developed by the campus computer center to enable end users to access library databases were written by Hussein Mourta. More information can be obtained from the author.* ■ ■

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<sup>2</sup>Tjaldal Belastock, "Legal Resources in an Academic Business Library," *College & Research Libraries News* 48 (December 1987): 684-87.

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