Networks and Bibliographic Standardization

At the conference on Interlibrary Communication and Information Networks held recently at Airlie House, a group of librarians, computerniks, and communication experts gathered to review the state of the art of network development in the United States, to assess problems and prospects, and to provide a sense of direction to the eventual implementation of a national network system. Groups were established to explore these topics: network needs and development; network services; network technology; network organization; and network planning.

After a week of concentrated, exhausting effort, the groups offered an impressive array of recommendations. One obvious conclusion is that we are a long way from achieving the goal of a national network system. The technology may be available, but there are many problems to be solved before a national system becomes a reality. Among the yet unresolved problems are: a means of regulating large scale networks to ensure the public good; securing large sums of money to train people to operate and manage networks; and promoting federal and state enabling legislation, where necessary.

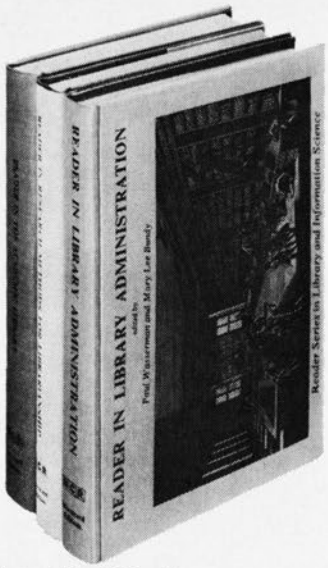
One old problem which reared its ugly head time and time again was the question of how to achieve bibliographic standardization. We have given much lip service to the need for standardization, while in fact we have gone about our separate ways. Anyone who has been involved with cooperative programs is well aware of the bibliographic spaghetti we have created.

One might have assumed that with the introduction of MARC II, libraries would have taken steps to insure interinstitutional compatibility in order to avoid the high cost of inputting records locally. Not so, according to Barbara Markuson, who reported, with a hint of deep frustration, that over three million records have already been converted into machine-readable form, and in spite of all caveats, these records are largely incompatible.

The national network will probably be composed of many local and regional networks linked together, so that compatibility will be essential for bibliographic data interchange. While the next few years may not be our last opportunity to solve the problem of standardization, time is against us. The longer we procrastinate, the less will local and regional networks be able "truly" to exchange bibliographic data.

It was suggested by several people attending the conference that in order to insure standardization, those agencies which accept federal funds to support network development should be required, as a condition of the grant, to agree to adhere to professionally agreed upon standards. While I shudder at federal control of most things, at the moment, realistically speaking, there seems to be no other way to achieve bibliographical standardization except by establishing a program at the national level.

RICHARD M. DOUGHERTY



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