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Experiences with the CLANN Geac Catalogue: a survey*

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* Manuscript received September, 1987

CLANN libraries were surveyed to collect information on experiences with the CLANN/Geac online catalogue after one year of operation. The results show some striking similarities across a network of diverse libraries, particularly in relation to user reactions, user education and effects on the library. The article concludes with the suggestions for action to be taken by the CLANN network in response to the findings.

INTRODUCTION

CLANN (Co-operative Library Activity Network New South Wales) is a network of educational and other institutions. Through its co-operative structure, CLANN undertakes several resource sharing initiatives including:

- creation and maintenance of a bibliographic database;
- shared purchase and operation of an integrated library system (Geac);
- reciprocal borrowing and inter-library lending services;
- shared subscriptions to information services.

The CLANN/Geac Integrated Library System was launched officially on 1 May 1986. In its first year of operation, the system provided public access to the CLANN bibliographic database and circulation control. This paper focuses on the experiences of CLANN libraries with the online public access catalogue module.

In May 1987, as part of the CLANN Systems Training and Staff Development program, a seminar was designed to:

- consolidate online catalogue training for reader services staff;
• provide a forum for discussion of strategies for coping with a developing technology.

The one-day seminar was offered on 15 occasions between May and July 1987 to more than 100 staff from CLANN libraries. It covered:

• Training (emphasising advanced search techniques);
• File structures and file transfer schedules;
• Software enhancements, authority records, known software bugs;
• Equipment maintenance and troubleshooting;
• User experiences and user education.

THE SURVEY

Purpose
A brief survey was devised to collect information from CLANN libraries on user experience with and user education for the online catalogue. The results were presented in the final segment of the seminar to provide a stimulus for discussion among network members.

Method
A sample of 23 libraries from 16 CLANN member institutions participated in a phone survey. The 23 participants were representative of the 32 library sites offering public access to the online catalogue at this stage. A list of these libraries is provided as Attachment 1. Although it was time consuming to conduct the survey by phone, this method had some advantages - including a 100% response rate! Most of the contact people had the opportunity to discuss the questions with other staff members if necessary. The questions could be explained so that there were no ambiguities and responses were not artificially limited by the space available on a survey page.

It should be stressed that the survey was designed to collect informal comments or “first impressions” only and was not a formal or rigorous study.

Questions
There were five categories of questions:

1. Library statistical data
2. Catalogue types and usage
3. User difficulties with the online catalogue
4. Education in catalogue use
5. Effects of the online catalogue on the library.

November/December 1987
SYSTEM CONTEXT

The survey results should be considered in the context of CLANN system operations and the online catalogue software.

CLANN System

At the time of the survey, the CLANN online catalogue database contained more than 500,000 bibliographic records and 1,500,000 holdings. There were 185 terminals in 39 libraries around New South Wales with access to circulation and/or the online catalogue.

Each month over 33,000 items are added to the database, 70,000 searches made from public terminals and 49,000 loans transacted (CLANN, 1986). During 1987, total loans are expected to reach 2,000,000.

The online catalogue is available 86 hours per week including weekends and regularly achieves a monthly uptime in excess of 99%.

Geac Software

The online catalogue software in use at the time of the survey was Geac OPAC Software Release 11 (with local/union enhancements).

The search types or indexes offered were:

- TITLE - title, journal title, series title, etc.
- AUTHOR - author, illustrator, editor, organization, conference, etc.
- AUTHOR/TITLE - combination of author and title.
- SUBJECT - subject heading assigned by the library.
- NUMBER - call number, LC, ISN, cataloguing source (control) number.
- KEYWORD - one word taken from title or subject.

The software also provided for a Boolean search capability and an authority structure. Neither of these features were being offered to CLANN users at the time of the survey.

Special Features

There are two special features of the online catalogue software that should be emphasised in the CLANN network context:

- the facility to search for and display local library (LIB) or CLANN union (ALL) holdings;
- the connection to Geac circulation which provides users with the real time
circulation status of items as part of the LIB and ALL holdings displays.

1. LIBRARY STATISTICAL DATA: SUMMARY

This data was collected to see if the type or size of library had any bearing on the responses to the other questions. Attachment 2 provides a sketch of the participating libraries. Because no rigorous definitions were applied to items like "loans" or "staff numbers", these figures should be seen as indicative rather than as strictly comparable.

Where libraries had more than one branch with the online catalogue, the contact person was asked to respond for the library system as a whole. Figures from branches without access to the online catalogue were excluded.

Library type

The survey sample consisted of 20 college, two special libraries and one school library.

Loan Activity

The figure requested was total loans for 1986 (excluding reserve loans). Loan figures ranged from 9,415 to 164,499.

User population

Each library was asked for the 1986 headcount of their biggest user group. Because of the predominance of libraries from educational institutions, these responses are listed under the heading "students". This headcount ranged from 400 to 44,000.

Library staff

Total permanent library staff ranged from four to 48. The percentage of these staff involved in giving catalogue assistance to users ranged from 22% to 100%, with an average of 62%. The percentage involved tended to be greater in libraries with smaller staffs. There is some evidence that increasing use is being made of technical services staff for catalogue and other reference assistance.

Implementation

The date of implementation of the online catalogue ranged from December 1985 to November 1986. All participating libraries had at least six months experience with the online catalogue.
2. CATALOGUE TYPES AND USAGE

Online Catalogue
The number of public terminals ranged from one to 10. Seven participants had more than four public terminals.

Fiche catalogue
The number of public fiche catalogues ranged from none to 15. Only one institution had no fiche solely for public use. At least two other libraries were discouraging use of fiche by limiting the number of public fiche catalogues available.

Most of the libraries use the CLANN Union Catalogue. However, five libraries had a local catalogue and there were several regional catalogues.

Other catalogues
Fourteen libraries still had a public card catalogue containing older material or records in specific subject areas. Eight libraries also used other special lists, usually for serials or audiovisual material.

Preferences for catalogue type
Twelve libraries said that the online catalogue was preferred by users. Seven libraries said that the catalogue preferred depended on its coverage. This was especially true in libraries which still had to convert a large number of records to machine readable form. The fiche catalogue was preferred in four of the five libraries using local catalogues.

Queues for the Catalogue
Sixteen libraries said that users queued to search the catalogue (both online and fiche). Catalogue queues were often more difficult to detect than queues for other library services, e.g., loans, photocopiers, because users tended to “hover” rather than to stand in line. There was some evidence that users would browse the shelves or use other catalogue forms rather than queue for a particular catalogue type. Catalogue queues may occur at times other than the normal peaks in library usage. Some libraries mentioned that queues were generated as the result of reader education classes, especially when exercises were given.

Relative Strengths of Catalogue Types

Online Catalogue
The online catalogue was preferred for the following reasons:
• increased access points and search types;
• speed of known item searching using combined Author-Title search (especially from reading lists);
• availability of subject tracings;
• availability of status information;
• more up to date than the fiche;
• doesn’t get out of order like the fiche;
• printing of data.

Fiche Catalogue
The fiche catalogue was preferred for:
• browsing in broad subject areas to get an overview of library or network holdings;
• long corporate authors;
• multiple editions of the same work;
• subject and author authorities;
• backup to the online system.

Other Catalogues
• local serials lists helped to decrease pressure on terminals and were useful because of some difficulties in finding serial records;
• card catalogues were necessary until full retrospective conversion of records was achieved.

3. USER DIFFICULTIES WITH THE ONLINE CATALOGUE

The common difficulties experienced by users can be divided into the following groups:

a) System problems
• slow response time at times of peak load, especially on those screens showing circulation status for union holdings.
• software bugs;
• item status in the catalogue, record not yet in circulation file (file transfer or invalid record problem).

b) System enhancements desired
• authority records (particularly subject);
• multiple keyword (rather than full Boolean);
• more terminals;
• more “forgiving” searches e.g. tables of equivalence for US/British spelling;
• improvement in text of help screens and error messages.

c) User skills
• keyboard use: typing skills, fear of computers:
• spelling;
• reading the screen;
• getting started;
• lack of practice.

d) User concepts
• coverage of the catalogue:
  - when to use fiche/card/online?
  - what is the CLANN network?
  - what does LIB/ALL mean?
  - where are the journal articles?
  - what is being searched? What can I expect to find?
  “multiple choice” - selection of an item from a screen list; completion of a search to obtain the call number of the item;
• understanding a “close match”, especially in combined Author/Title;
• understanding library codes, location codes, prefixes, status information;
• what is an author? title? subject? (definite problems with library assigned subject headings).

User Groups
Many of the difficulties expressed were as applicable to library staff as they were to library users. These difficulties are also common to many online catalogues (Fayen, 1983) and to staff searching on other online systems (Cochrane, 1981).

Coping with difficulties

System Problems and Enhancements
The techniques used for coping with system difficulties can be divided into two categories:

a) Network relations
• using the CLANN telephone hotline to report equipment or software problems;
• contacting CLANN Office to discuss matters and make suggestions;
• building contacts with other libraries for exchange of ideas;
• contacting members of the Reader Services and Technical Services Committees to raise issues.

b) Public relations
• being positive - a negative attitude from staff will ultimately be reflected in a generally negative attitude from users to the library as a whole;
• putting yourself in the user’s position - try to suggest alternatives, be “inventive”;
• knowing your collection well;
• trying to explain “hiccups” in an appropriate amount of detail;
• giving more help with subject searching.

User Problems
The technique used for coping with user problems has been to devise a user education program to teach both skills and concepts:

a) Skills
• need for a computer literacy program in some libraries;
• access to basic typing skills package;
• provide documentation and instruction in
  - getting started;
  - efficient search techniques.

b) Concepts
• provide user education in catalogue use.

4. EDUCATION IN CATALOGUE USE

Reference Policy
The need for user education is influenced by the emphasis placed on teaching users to find information.

Almost all the libraries said they would emphasise “self help”, particularly in the use of the catalogue. However, in practice, the response to a request for information depends on the question, the user and the time and resources available.

Purpose of user education

When asked why a user education program was provided, the most frequent responses were to:
• encourage independence and self sufficiency;
• teach generic skills;
• "demystify" the library;
• explain the coverage of the catalogue;
• encourage users to ask;
• overcome resistance to fiche or computers;
• decrease the workload through group teaching.

A common theme that emerged in the discussion of reader education was the need to know the user and the environment and to use a variety of approaches.

User education approaches

a) Group Instruction

Tours

Nineteen libraries took advantage of library orientation tours to mention the existence of the catalogue. Orientation tours took from 5 to 60 minutes, with the catalogue component lasting from 2 to 15 minutes. The target group for tours was first year or new students. Many libraries used this opportunity to explain the different forms and coverage of the catalogue. Only libraries with small group tours began any instruction in catalogue use. Some libraries also advertised specific time slots for catalogue instruction, with varying success.

Classes

Nineteen libraries gave catalogue instruction as part of formal user education classes. These classes were typically subject oriented and were provided for students at a variety of stages. Classes were of 15 to 60 minutes duration, with from 5 to 20 minutes devoted to catalogue instruction and the remainder to other library skills.

Coverage

While some libraries taught the online catalogue only, many libraries were also teaching fiche use and reported that this was very time consuming. Many libraries looked forward to a time when they would have only one form of catalogue, but there was an interesting response from the one school library. There the philosophy was to retain as many forms of the catalogue as possible so that students could be educated to use any library they might encounter.

Some libraries were concerned about the amount they tried to cover in a class: "We only get them once" was a common response. The difficulty was what to teach and what will be retained.

Many libraries also expressed the need for a more systematic approach to online catalogue instruction.
Presentation

Most libraries mentioned the difficulty of accommodating large groups around a fiche reader or an online terminal. An extra complication for “live” online instruction could be the response time.

The most frequent approach to group instruction was to use overhead transparencies showing each stage of a sample search. Five libraries had begun to use structured exercises or a workbook approach for practice after initial instruction.

So far there have been two attempts at the production of an audiovisual aid for catalogue instruction - a short, introductory video and an audiotape cassette designed for interactive use in learning advanced search techniques. One of the major strengths of the online catalogue - fast updating of the file - is the biggest enemy of such productions, because the examples used need constant revision.

b) Individual Instruction

All libraries conduct 1-1 training and assistance, usually from a reference or other service desk.

Individual training sessions can last from 2 to 20 minutes depending on a number of factors, including the user and the response time. Assistance was given with all search types and stages. Individual training was seen as time consuming and often tiring.

Typing is one user skill that directly affects the length of the session. There is disagreement among libraries about the best way to cope with this problem. While it is important to let the user do the search, it may be questionable whether instructions are retained when the user is concentrating more on finding the “u” than on the strategy.

Effectiveness

No libraries have had time to undertake any formal evaluation of their catalogue instruction. Many libraries were unsure of how to measure effectiveness. If your policy is to encourage users to ask, is “repeat business” a success or a failure? Since catalogue search techniques cannot be taught all at once, there has to be some repeat contact with the user. There was a general feeling that users seem to “catch on” to the mechanics of searching, but many libraries were not convinced about the understanding of concepts.

Almost all libraries said that individual instruction was the most effective method because you had instant feedback on its success. Other evidence of some success in instruction includes finding users “stuck in the middle” of a search rather than at the beginning, and increased usage of lists of library subject headings.

Education for Staff

Most of the comments on user instruction programs concentrated on student
library users. There were few comments on programs either for library staff or the staff of an institution. Where staff instruction was provided, it was usually on an individual basis. Most seminar participants agreed that a variety of approaches would be necessary with the staff members of their institutions.

c) Documentation or “Offline assistance”

Online catalogue

The Geac software contains several inbuilt help screens as part of the online catalogue. The next version of the software (Release 11.5) to be loaded by CLANN contains even more of these help screens. Because of this “online help”, there is some disagreement among libraries about the need for any printed instructions.

Sixteen libraries either had produced or were producing some printed “how to” instructions. The reasons given for this were:

- some users will not ask;
- command summary needed;
- helps to overcome resistance to computers;
- provides a focus for the first-time user;
- good for public relations;
- can encourage more efficient search techniques.

In some cases this material was presented as a separate leaflet, in others the information was contained in a library or subject guide.

Other printed materials were used to provide the following information:

- library location symbols;
- library names and addresses (reciprocal borrowing booklet);
- subject headings;
- call number prefixes;
- catalogue coverage;
- explanation of status information.

The rapid changes in the database and the software were mentioned as barriers to the production of costly, “professional” printed material. There was a degree of interest in a network approach to the provision of documentation.

Fiche and other catalogues

Many libraries said they were no longer producing any documentation for these catalogues, or that if they were it needed updating.

5. EFFECTS OF THE ONLINE CATALOGUE ON THE LIBRARY

This question was designed to encourage general comments on the introduction of the online catalogue. While it was often difficult for libraries to isolate this
change from others, there were some common responses:

- more demand on the collection:
  - “it says ‘in library’, so where is it?” (loan status display)
  - “the shelves are in a mess”
  - “more aware of collection strengths and weaknesses” (local and union holdings displays);
- more aware of people using catalogues:
  - greater involvement with users
  - more catalogue queries
  - easier to see who needs help;
- greater awareness of the network:
  - increased demand for interlibrary loans
  - more reciprocal borrowing;
- challenge to the strategy and content of catalogue instruction.

Some of these effects were also reported by the Victorian network, LIBNET (Parker, 1987).

Overall, the effect reported by libraries is positive:

- the majority of users like the online catalogue and adapt quickly;
- “even the library staff forget about the need to use the card catalogue”;
- “it’s good to see that the library is part of the twentieth century”.

The overall response to the survey was also positive. Most libraries agreed that it helped to share experiences and to find out what was happening “next door”.

SUMMARY

While there may be great variety and individuality in the libraries of the CLANN network, there was no evidence that the size of the library had any effect on the responses. The results show some striking similarities in experiences with the online catalogue, particularly in relation to:

- user difficulties;
- user education;
- effects on the library.

Network Action

As a result of these findings, the CLANN Reader Services Committee has taken the following initiatives:

1. Establishment of a User Education Subcommittee to:
   a) collect data on catalogue use;
   b) investigate a systematic approach to catalogue education (Baker, 1986, Nielsen, 1987) with emphasis on:
      - software and database structure;
      - a variety of approaches for different user groups;
      - coverage of the catalogue;
      - subject searching;
· documentation and support materials
· presentation methods;
· measures of effectiveness.

c) co-ordinate a regular catalogue training program for CLANN library staff.

2. Compilation of a list of system enhancements in priority order and a more systematic approach by libraries to monitoring of problems.

3. Provision of a forum for the discussion of more general issues affecting libraries, such as more demand on collections and increased inter-library loans.

ATTACHMENT 1

LIST OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

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<thead>
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<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>DEHO</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>HACL</td>
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<td>KCAE</td>
<td>Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education</td>
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<td>- Haymarket</td>
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<td>SCAEST</td>
<td>- Oakley</td>
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**ATTACHMENT 2**

**LIBRARY STATISTICAL DATA**

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

3. Cochrane, P. Improving the quality of information retrieval online to a library catalog or other access service or Where do we go from here? *Online* July 1981 : 39.

Acknowledgement
I would like to thank the survey participants and the CLANN Executive Director for their time and valuable assistance.

THE USER AT THE ONLINE CATALOGUE:
A record of unsuccessful keyword searches – another case study*

Dennis R. Walter, Senior Librarian - Systems,
South Australian Institute of Technology.

*Manuscript received September 1987

Another case study on URICA Keyword Searching at the South Australian Institute of Technology is reported and compared with Henty’s experiences at the Australian National University in *LASIE* vol.17 No.2 September/October 1986.

In *LASIE* 17(2), September/October 1986, Margaret Henty reported Australian National University experience with URICA keyword searching. This prompted me to analyse similar data from the URICA System operated by the South Australian Institute of Technology.