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The Mid-America Law School Library Consortium Catalog on CD-ROM[*]

Richard C. Amelung[**]

Dr. Amelung describes the CD-ROM union catalog project of the Mid-America Law School Library Consortium and analyzes the reasons behind its success in fund-seeking and implementaion.

History

The Mid-America Law School Library Consortium celebrated the tenth anniversary of its founding in 1991. Although preceded by informal meetings of law school deans and librarians in the late 1970s, the Consortium was formally constituted in 1981 as a regional group of law school libraries interested primarily in slowing the rise of expenses through greater cooperation and resource sharing. At the time the Union Catalog project was beginning, the group consisted of eighteen institutions in seven states. The Consortium included all accredited law schools in six of the seven states represented.[1]

The guiding philosophy of cooperation and resource sharing has taken several concrete forms over the past decade. From the outset, free interlibrary loan and photocopying were stressed. Several initial projects were fairly modest, albeit labor intensive. These included the compilation and distribution of union lists of audiovisual materials, microform holdings, and a list of primary Canadian materials.

In the fall of 1982, the Consortium launched its most ambitious project to that time: the Mid-America Law School Library Consortium Union List of Serials on OCLC.[2] Several aspects of that project were to provide the model for later endeavors.

First, organizationally, the directors of member libraries approved the project, set the goal, and agreed to commit time and staff and to under-

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write local funding. The most crucial aspect of many group undertakings is ensuring that each participant is aware and in support of the common goal of the project. Individual reasons for supporting a project may vary, but one can be reasonably sure of success if the end result is agreed upon.

Second, while each institution designated an agent to assume responsibility for the project within that particular institution, one library agreed to provide a staff member to serve as primary Agent. This person's tasks included the overall supervision of the project on a day-to-day basis by keeping local agents informed of deadlines and progress, dealing with outside vendors, monitoring budget and funding with the Consortium's treasurer, and reporting to the directors at their quarterly meetings. The union list of serials project marked the first time that such a large degree of responsibility and autonomy of action had been delegated to a group below the director level. The continuing success of the union list of serials, which to date includes more than 4,000 titles, coupled with the network of relationships and personal contacts that it fostered, set the stage for the union catalog project.

Another element that became crucial to the success of the project was the positive experience of grant writing. The Consortium received funds in 1985 on the strength of a grant proposal authored by John Christensen, director of Washburn University School of Law Library, and Eileen Searls, Law Librarian at St. Louis University. This grant provided monies for the placement of telefax machines in more than half of the member institutions, further strengthening and facilitating long-standing interlibrary loan agreements.

The Union Catalog Project

The initial impetus for this project occurred at the annual chapter meeting of the Mid-America Association of Law Libraries, held in Kansas City in the fall of 1986. The program of that meeting, developed by Blair Kauffman, then of Northern Illinois University Law Library, focused on the burgeoning applications of CD-ROM technologies and their place in the law library setting. One session was dedicated to bibliographic databases, automated catalogs, and related topics. During the convention, attendees were able to try out systems that were exhibited. The one that caught the attention of several of us was the Intelligent Catalog (IC) marketed by Library Corporation, whose Bibliofile product was already well known.

Upon returning to St. Louis, I spent some time analyzing the costs of maintaining the library's old card catalog and decided that our institution could capitalize on an inexpensive automated system as a bridge to an

integrated library system. I was not alone in my interest. Library Corporation provided a terminal with a sample database, and several of our sister institutions came for a closer examination. During ensuing discussions, four Consortium members, including St. Louis University Law Library, decided to implement the Intelligent Catalog as their local public access catalog. This action lead to the idea by my director, Eileen Searls, of combining these libraries' data into a union catalog on the same CD.

At that time in the spring of 1987, Northern Illinois at Dekalb, Southern Illinois at Carbondale, Washburn University in Topeka, and St. Louis University law libraries were making plans either to add another terminal for holding the union database or to convert an existing IC database, which held only local records, to the union purpose. Upon the suggestion of Consortium president John Edwards of Drake University, we decided to poll the entire Consortium membership to ascertain if any other institutions wished to participate and to consider grant funding. In October 1987, I mailed a survey to the heads of technical services in the membership. The results showed that eleven of the eighteen members were supportive of the project and an equal number felt that a grant proposal was an appropriate course of action. At a January 1988 meeting of the Consortium directors, the Union Catalog Project received the official approval of the directors. I was asked to act as Agent (with a capital "A"), and John Christensen, successful for the group in his past grant-writing endeavors, agreed to plead our case once again with funding sources.

Choosing a Vendor

Once the Consortium members had agreed that the union catalog was a desirable project, we located potential vendors other than Library Corporation, to ensure that such a project could be realized as inexpensively as possible. This task resulted in four potential vendors: Library Corporation, Marcive, Autographics, and Ocelot. GRC had been suggested, but it seemed at the time that they had not yet branched out into union catalogs. Another major vendor was excluded because some members had expressed dissatisfaction with other work it had performed. We were never able to locate any information about Ocelot, and Autographics felt that the size of our database was below their threshold.

We were left, then, with a choice between Library Corporation's Intelligent Catalog and Marcive. Upon examining both systems, it was discovered that, functionally speaking, either vendor could produce an acceptable union catalog along the lines we had planned. The ultimate decision was consequently one of cost. Library Corporation's pricing was much more competitive. While the initial start-up costs were roughly

comparable, Marcive's basic cost allowed for only five search keys (others could be added at $500 each). Furthermore, the inevitable remastering of the CD was included in Library Corporation's monthly charge for both software and hardware maintenance, whereas the Marcive option would have necessitated a $5,000 remastering charge approximately once a year. Since Midwesterners in general, and the Mid-America Consortium members in particular, never have had a reputation for throwing around large sums of money, the decision suddenly became crystal clear.

At the time, Library Corporation required that participants purchase the company's hardware, and theirs alone. Consequently, as the project manager, I was spared the endless haggling and comparing of compatibility among different computer manufacturers.

The most likely source of funding at the time seemed to be the U.S. Department of Education's Title II-D College Library Technology and Cooperation Grants Program. One type of grant this program offered seemed to have been developed with the Consortium's project in mind. From the *Federal Register* of March 21, 1988, one reads, "Joint Use Grant. These grants are designed to establish and strengthen joint-use library facilities, resources or equipment."[3] Awards for this type would average $125,000.

Although my small part in the grant proposal consisted of gathering data and developing a preliminary budget for the three-year grant period, I am able to share some of the arguments used to our advantage in convincing the Department of Education of the project's worthiness. First of all, the Consortium had a solid, well-documented track record for having developed, implemented, and supported projects on our own with positive results. Second, we were experienced in the administration of large projects and grant funding requirements. Third, the Consortium had institutional commitments to see the project through. Fourth, the union catalog could be viewed as the next logical step to follow previous successful endeavors in the areas of interlibrary loan and resource sharing. Finally, in 1988, CD-ROM technology for public access catalogs was still fairly new. While it could no longer be considered experimental, it was in the forefront of new technological applications and had what I like to call the "glitz factor."

The first and most crucial hurdle in the grant application process involved securing a copy of the guidelines. The Department of Education's delay in issuing the guidelines gave John Christensen a scant six weeks to

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3. *College Library Technology and Cooperation Grants Program*, 53 Fed. Reg. 9,247 (1988).

write the grant. To complicate matters even further, the grant application required proof of compliance with Executive Order 12,372:

> The objective of Executive Order 12372 is to foster an intergovernmental partnership and to strengthen federalism by relying on State and local processes for State and local government coordination and review of proposed Federal financial assistance.
>
> Applicants must contact the appropriate State Single Point of Contact to find out about, and to comply with, the State's process under Executive Order 12372. Applicants proposing to perform activities in more than one State should contact, immediately upon receipt of this notice, the Single Point of Contact for each State and following the procedure established in those States under the Executive Order.[4]

Mr. Christensen, therefore, was constrained to contact someone in each these seven states. These calls ran the entire spectrum of sophistication in the area of automated systems: some did not have a clue what he was talking about; some were suspicious that it was going to cost them something; others needed to be convinced that a single non-networking CD-ROM workstation would not be a threat to their state's master automation plan.

The final bit of paperwork required by the grant (and, being quite elementary, forgotten until the eleventh hour) was a written commitment from each Consortium member's institution that said institution was in support of the grant proposal. This document was to be signed by the law school dean, if possible. The process to secure this signature began at 4:00 p.m. on a Friday afternoon in May, with the application due in Washington on the following Monday. A couple of us devised a form letter, divided the membership list, and began calling all the members. At this point, we were saved by the results of our previous grant, the installation of telefax machines at member institutions. By later that day, all necessary documentation was in Christensen's hands in Topeka and by the following Monday, the grant application was at the Department of Education in Washington.

The Consortium's application met with a positive response, and we were able to implement the union catalog workstation in all member institutions. We received notification of the award in October 1988. Due to problems at the Department of Education, the money finally became available in early 1989.

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4. *Id.* at 9,250.

Challenges Concerning Archival Tapes

Essential to full participation in such a project was the ability to contribute archival MARC records representing the institution's past cataloging activities and to initiate an ongoing method of contributing current cataloging on a regular basis. Both matters presented challenges to even the most sanguine and experienced members of the Consortium. Each had used a bibliographic utility for years, but the local agent for the union catalog project was rarely the same person who had made the archival tape arrangements during the initial profiling process. There seemed to be no pattern to the different institutional situations that unfolded before my disbelieving eyes.

First was the question of law school library autonomy from the main library or university library system. Many academic law libraries have had their bibliographic identity closely associated with that of their main library; some libraries' technical services departments had been subordinated to a university-wide computing and information center. Five members of the Consortium labored under the constraints such historical relationships impose. At the outset, three members lacked a unique three-character OCLC symbol (i.e., they cataloged under the same institutional identifier as their main library). Because OCLC does not provide archival tape services for institutions considered to be at the collection (or fourth character) level, these institutions were confronted with the expense of having their records stripped from their parent institution's tape. In one case, the main university library had not subscribed to its archival tape, but had relied on its network, Amigos, to acquire its records, making the cost of extraction prohibitive. In a second case, the law library's archival records, as part of the university library system's three-character symbol, were collected and stored at the university libraries' computer center, which would neither strip the law records nor make a complete set of tapes available to be manipulated elsewhere. To date, this is the only institution in the Consortium that has not been able to contribute any records to the union catalog.

Some members, although subscribing to their archival records from their utility, participate in a local integrated library system, in which they perform ongoing maintenance. Therefore, their archival records, while providing an original version of their institution's holdings, provided a less accurate picture over time, as records were edited in the local system but not in the archival tapes. When the union catalog project began, none of these institutions, which were on three different systems, was able to output a MARC tape from its local system; today, all have this capability and are contributing to the union catalog. In one case, this ability was

programmed specifically so that the law library could participate in the project.

As stated above, some members counted on their network, state library, or other agency to gather and refresh their archival records. In one instance, this reliance led to unfortunate results. A library learned that its records were not, in fact, with the state library as had been assumed. The state had turned them over to a vendor to create a statewide union catalog without retaining a backup tape. When the library attempted to get a copy of its records back from the vendor, it was informed that this was possible for a fee. The state intervened since it had assumed the vendor was holding the records as a courtesy; money had been paid to the vendor for the state's union catalog, and the state attorney general felt that the records should be returned gratis. After threats of law suits and a settlement, the library finally received a de-duped copy of its records. Unfortunately, for no apparent reason, in all OCLC control numbers beginning with 15,000,000, the "5" was changed to a "0" during processing. There was no immediate way of determining subsequently if a record beginning with a control number of 10,000,000 was a true 10 million or a former 15 million whose second digit had been changed in error. The tape over which so much ink had flowed had to be discarded. In the end, the library found it necessary to go to OCLC and request its records from day one.

Although record maintenance and further contributions to the database were not grant requirements, many of the institutions eagerly made such arrangements. Some rely on their computer centers to provide such a service. Five or six schools were already subscribing to the Peter Ward acquisition list service through which records are sent on an OCLC group tape directly from Dublin, Ohio, to his offices in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Rather than going to the expense of a second tape subscription solely for the union catalog, I arranged with Ward & Associates to strip the subset of Mid-America Union Catalog institution records from this group tape and to forward it on to Library Corporation on a second group tape.

Unfortunately, our desire to let automation perform the work it was meant to do became yet another cause of delay, due to misinterpretation of the term "group tape." When OCLC creates a group tape of current cataloging, the records are copied from the daily journal tapes; that is, records are written in chronological order regardless of which member of the group is creating those records. Library Corporation's understanding of "group tape" was that the tape would contain the records for multiple institutions but that the records would be grouped by institution, not jumbled together in chronological order. As in other cases, delays occurred for us not in trying to solve problems that developed, but rather in attempting to identify and define the problem in the first place. This time,

Mr. Ward was able to add a step to his procedure which, during the copying process, separates records by institution. In this way the OCLC group tape becomes a Library Corporation group tape.

Database Configuration

One of the first and most crucial factors to be considered was the configuration of the database: which records would exist in the database for a patron to search and which library's record would the patron see once a title was retrieved? Would the database include each institution's unique records, or would the records representing the same title be merged, retaining only the institution's identification and local call number?

Clearly, from the Consortium's point of view, the first description was the more desirable. Few members had automated their public catalogs at the time. Those who did were looking for a cost-effective backup if their multimillion dollar library system went down. It was hoped, therefore, that the union catalog would serve the double purpose of providing access to the collections of other members, and to local information. Further, it was felt that the retention of everyone's records would facilitate collection comparison and development throughout the region. The question of database configuration would prove to be the cause of the greatest delay and the widest emotional swings from elation to disappointment during the entire process.

From the outset, we assumed that all the members' unique records would exist in the union catalog and that, schematically, they would reside in separate files. Thus, one library's holdings could be searched separately, or the patron would have the option of searching selected institutions or the entire union catalog. We had been led to this conclusion based on Library Corporation's assessment that it ought to work. For those with experience in these matters, an alarm bell should have gone off at the phrase "it ought to work."

The first sign of trouble was the fact that the mastering of the database was taking so long. The target date for delivery of the sample was pushed back at least four times. Finally, during a conversation with one of Library Corporation's representatives, I was informed that they would eventually be able to do what we wanted, but that particular capability might be three years away. They could, however, deliver a merged (i.e., master record) database immediately.

With grant money needing to be spent and members to be satisfied, I returned to the agents and asked how they wanted to choose the master record. According to Library Corporation, we would have to provide the company with an institutional hierarchy that would be immutable, based

on which the master record would be chosen. I offered our members four choices for determining this order: (1) ranked from greatest to least number of MARC records available to be loaded, which would theoretically provide the greatest homogeneity; (2) the reverse of the first choice, thereby insuring that all institutions would be represented on some master records; (3) alphabetically by OCLC symbol; or (4) in reverse alphabetical order by OCLC symbol. The agents voted in favor of the first method.

We notified Library Corporation of the results. Library Corporation admitted that it would not be able to merge all the institutions because the merger was based solely on the OCLC control number residing in the 001 field of the MARC record. Consequently, RLIN records from the University of Iowa as well as the local system output records from the University of Tulsa and the two University of Missouri institutions would not be susceptible to merger. We were therefore going to be confronted with a hodgepodge of merged and unique records. We finally resigned ourselves to this situation and began making virtue of necessity.

In December 1989, as yet another delivery date came and went, I called to inquire why a database configured to the vendor's liking was taking so long to master. During this conversation, I learned that Library Corporation had held up our catalog because, at long last, they felt they could build it to satisfy the original request, and not in three years but in a mere three more months. While indeed welcome news, this development provided us with yet another problem. With the indexing structure, a CD can comfortably accommodate about 500,000 MARC records. Two factors had pushed the Consortium's holdings to the very limit of the magic half-million number. First, several member libraries had seriously underestimated the number of MARC records in their library on the initial survey conducted in the fall of 1987. As long as we had been operating under a merged database model, these record count inaccuracies were relatively unimportant. Now, however, each record counted and was occupying critical space. Second, many institutions, with an automated catalog soon to be a reality, seized the opportunity to convert even more old paper records to machine-readable form, thereby compounding the space problem.

At this point, Library Corporation recommended that we have our initial iteration of the union catalog reside on two CDs. This change, however, would cost $600/terminal more--the cost of the second CD drive. Upon consultation with John Christensen and subsequent discussion with our grantor, we managed to move unspent money from other lines in the grant budget to cover the extra $10,800 increase in equipment. Four and one-half months later, in April 1990, the database was delivered configured to our original specifications of September 1988.

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Description of the Union Catalog

When the project began and the grant proposal was written, the Consortium included eighteen members. In some ways, delays in the initial mastering worked in our favor, enabling the group to begin the first union with MARC records representing sixteen member institutions. All but two were able to submit all their available MARC records. Only one institution, however, the University of Iowa, said that it had completed its retrospective conversion.

Since each institution's unique records reside in the catalog (except for the two state schools in Missouri, which submitted a merged tape), by April 1991 the Mid-America Law School Library Consortium Union Catalog included 597,669 records residing on two CDs. Of the sixteen libraries, twelve contribute current cataloging to the union at varying frequencies.

Table 1
Records Submitted by Institution as of April 1991

University of Arkansas-Fayetteville	4,823
University of Arkansas-Little Rock	23,225
Creighton University	12,180
Northern Illinois University	22,644
Southern Illinois University	57,447
University of Iowa	103,234
University of Kansas	37,263
University of Missouri-Columbia & K.C.	58,728
University of Nebraska	12,782
Oklahoma City University	33,006
St. Louis University	86,323
University of Tulsa	24,019
Washburn University	23,742
Washington University	<u>52,891</u>
TOTAL	597,669

Although the menu provides four methods of accessing records in the catalog, the first two are generally the most productive: "find anything" and "view catalog." The first provides key word access to virtually every field in the MARC record, with some exceptions (e.g., fields 260, 300, etc.). Since the system indexes contents notes (field 505), patrons can retrieve book chapters, conference addresses, or articles in anthologies if the cataloger takes the time to input this information. The catalog will

perform such searches using the full range of Boolean operators, but, at this time, only within the same fields. For example, an author/title search is possible only if the MARC record includes the author's name in the statement of responsibility (field 245). The "find anything" search is useful above all when accurate author, title, or subject information is unavailable. Such searches also pull together disparate items on the same jurisdiction, since one can search subject fields 651, $a, and 650, $z simultaneously.

The "view catalog" search is most useful when precise information is available. The system takes the patron into a dictionary catalog arrangement at the precise point requested or, if no match occurs, at the entry just past the one requested. In either case, the patron may scroll through the entire range of entries A to Z. At any time, one may limit a search by date of publication, language (five choices available), format (e.g., book, serial, map, etc.), type of heading (subject, author, etc.), or library. Once a limiter has been engaged, the system will prompt the patron as to the limitation chosen and will display a message when he or she attempts to access a record outside the limits. The patron can override the limits at any time. Any limits engaged are reset to the library's chosen defaults when the catalog is restarted for the next patron.

The Intelligent Catalog has many other features; some are of much interest but are put to less than full use. Included among these are the ability to store up to 99 records and print them off in several different orders (e.g., call number, bibliography), a log that records all the commands and search results during a particular session, and the capability to write a temporary note to oneself or the staff.

The feature that appealed the most to the Consortium is the one stored on what are called the "zoom" keys. These two keys, "zoom up" and "zoom down," function essentially as preprogrammed limiters that allow each institution to decide at the local level upon a set of particular libraries against which a search will be run. One can program up to 99 combinations. Since the system allows for masking the display of records that fall outside of a limiter, a library is able to set the terminal to default to a search of its own holdings first; then, by virtue of the zoom, one can pass immediately to any predetermined combination of libraries.

Pros and Cons and the Future

A survey of member libraries completed in May 1991 allowed members to share their reactions, which included:

Negative comments:
    1. slowness in entering and print searches

2. delays in updates
3. one cannot determine holding library from brief entry screen
4. no cross-field Boolean searching
5. hardware failure more often than it should

Positive comments:
   1. ease of use and patron acceptance (7)
   2. searching power (8)
   3. ability to see other institution's records (5)
   4. experience in preparing for local system (4)
   5. can now view local archival records (4)

Overall, the union catalog was better and provided more help than most libraries expected. Sixteen of the eighteen libraries have put the terminal in the public area where anyone can use it. One institution has sited the equipment in technical services. Surprisingly, one institution has never used the system at all, and only turns it on to load the updates.

The union catalog was used most frequently for interlibrary loan. The next most frequent use was for compiling bibliographies, followed by access to locally held information cataloging copy and collection development activities. While some, on occasion, have used the system in the selection process, the union catalog was infrequently used in weeding.

Developments subsequent to the initial implementation of the union catalog have been most encouraging. In the summer of 1991, we loaded the holdings of our newest member, the University of South Dakota Law Library. This addition has brought the comprehensive state coverage up to eight states. The last major loads included the University of Oklahoma and Drake University law libraries and, finally, the Mid-America Union List of Serials with holdings statements loaded as a separate library. Since the OCLC MARC union list holdings tape comes with the related bibliographic records, one is now able to search the 4,000 records of the union list of serials locally by subject and key word. By the end of 1991, and Mid-America Law School Library Consortium Union Catalog contained a database of over 660,000 records available for patron use.