

Current Awareness in Librarianship

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THIS ARTICLE WILL EXPLORE the ways in which librarians keep up to date (if they do) through the use of professional literature.¹ The term commonly used to describe the process of keeping up to date is *current awareness*. Current awareness is also defined as "a system, and often a publication, for notifying current documents to users of libraries and information services." To add to this confusion, selective dissemination of information (SDI) is also used synonymously with current awareness services.² To avoid confusion in this article, current awareness is defined as the process of keeping up to date; current awareness services as systems for notifying users of current documents; and SDI as the provision of current awareness to users based on a statement of the individual's information requirements (called a profile).

Current awareness then is knowledge of recent developments in a field. Generally, the knowledge is of developments which relate to an individual's profession. Kemp has listed four types of knowledge involved in the current awareness process: "new theoretical ideas and hypotheses; new problems to be solved; new methods and techniques for solving old and new problems; and new circumstances affecting what people do and how they may do it."³

In many respects the current awareness process is the opposite of the retrospective search. The retrospective search begins with the need to locate information on a specific topic for a specific purpose. The goal of

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current awareness on the other hand is less specific. It is the need to understand current developments in order to do one's work more effectively. The assumption that information can be applied on the job is what motivates a professional to maintain current awareness. The current awareness process is one of serendipity rather than one of organized purpose. Unlike the retrospective search which time usually circumscribes—only the last five years for example—the current awareness search is, by definition, rooted in the present.

The need for current awareness should be obvious. Schon has described a contemporary crisis in confidence in professional expertise. While acknowledging that the crisis in confidence may be due in part to the bureaucratization and self-centeredness of professionals, he believes that "it also hinges centrally on the question of professional knowledge."⁴ Schon also quotes Harvey Brooks who states that "the dilemma of the professional today lies in the fact that both ends of the gap he is expected to bridge with his profession are changing so rapidly: the body of knowledge that he must use and the expectations of the society that he must serve."⁵ Yet Clark has demonstrated that practitioners in psychology and sociology were less motivated to keep up to date through the use of literature than were teachers and researchers.⁶ With this in mind, what pattern emerges when library practitioners' use of professional literature is examined?

Although there has been no research specifically on librarians' current awareness activities, there are studies that examine librarians' use of professional literature. A summary of several of these is useful in understanding current awareness patterns. In 1981, Ali utilized survey research to measure practitioners' perceptions toward journal literature, secondary services, conferences, etc.⁷ His aim was to determine the usefulness of these methods in the dissemination of research results. He mailed a self-reporting questionnaire to chief librarians in the United States and the United Kingdom. His survey population included public, academic, and special librarians. Results of the survey indicated that in both countries journal literature was the primary source of information. In the United States, twelve journals were regularly scanned by at least eleven respondents. *Library Journal (LJ)* was at the top of the list and *Library Resources & Technical Services (LRTS)* and *RQ* (which Ali mistakenly called Reference Quarterly) were at the bottom. Almost ten times as many respondents read *LJ* as *LRTS* and *RQ*. Two other popular U.S. journals, *American Libraries* and *Wilson Library Bulletin*, followed *Library Journal* at the top of the list. When different types of libraries were examined, slightly different patterns emerged.

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Public librarians scanned the top three journals almost exclusively. Academic librarians read *College & Research Libraries* more than any other journal and the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* rather than *Wilson Library Bulletin* (fourth on the list). Librarians from special libraries read *Library Journal*, *American Libraries*, and *Special Libraries* in that order.

A similar pattern was indicated by respondents from the United Kingdom with the popular general journals, *Library Association Record* and *New Library World*, topping the list. However, more journals (twenty) were listed by respondents and, whereas the U.S. list included only journals published in that country, journals from the United States comprised an important part of the U.K. list. Public librarians in particular read a wider variety of journals.

Ali also explored the use of "current awareness publications." He identified three which covered library and information science. *Current Awareness Library Literature (CALL)*, *Current Awareness Bulletin for Librarians and Information Scientists (CABLIS)*, and *Current Contents*. *Current Contents* was scanned by a limited number of practitioners in both countries. *CABLIS* was widely scanned in the United Kingdom, but the U.S. publication—the ill-fated *CALL*—was almost unknown in both countries. Finally, the practitioners in Ali's survey indicated satisfaction with their library's role in acquiring a library science collection.

Another self-reporting survey was conducted in the United Kingdom in 1980. The survey was funded by the British Library Research and Development Department and carried out by the Aslib Research and Consulting Division in the persons of Peter Lynam, Margaret Slater, and Rennie Walker. A sample was drawn from membership in Aslib, Institute of Information Scientists, and the Library Association. Completed questionnaires were returned by 850 participants (more than twice the size of the Ali survey).

Findings of the Lynam et al. survey were quite similar to those of Ali. Journals were the primary mode of receiving information. Twenty-three primary journals were seen by at least 6 percent of the sample. *Library Association Record*, as in the Ali survey, was at the top of the list. There was considerable overlap between the lists, although some additions to this list are worth noting—e.g., *Online*, *Online Review*, *Library History*. This survey also explored the use of secondary services—newsletters, research reports, and theses. Newsletters, from the British Library, Library Association etc., had a fairly wide audience. Secondary sources were seen by a bare majority (51 percent); research

reports were occasionally or rarely seen; and 91 percent hardly ever saw these.⁸

Other studies have also investigated reading habits of librarians. Swisher and Smith compared journals read by members of the Association of College and Research Libraries in 1973 and 1978. They found that the academic librarians surveyed read almost the same average number of periodicals (5.73 in 1973; 5.9 in 1978) both years. The five most frequently read journals in 1973 were *American Libraries*, *College & Research Libraries*, *Library Journal*, *Library Resources and Technical Services*, and *RQ*; in 1978 the list of five was almost the same except that *Journal of Academic Librarianship* had moved to fourth place pushing *LRTS* into fifth place and *RQ* into sixth. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* was sixteenth on the reading list in 1972 and ninth in 1978. Other nonlibrary journals were *AAUP Bulletin*, *Change*, and *Today's Education*, but all ranked at the bottom of the list in 1978.⁹ Ali, in another study, interviewed library practitioners from public, academic, and special libraries in Illinois to "determine their perceptions of the usefulness and dissemination of research results in the areas of librarianship and information science."¹⁰ Ali again found that popular journals were the means by which practitioners discovered research findings. *American Libraries*, *Library Journal*, *Illinois Libraries*, and *Wilson Library Bulletin* were the most widely read. The popularity of *Illinois Libraries* undoubtedly reflects the location of the population surveyed. Academic librarians differed in their journal readings in that *College & Research Libraries* was second on the list and *Journal of Academic Librarianship* and *Special Libraries* tied for third. Public librarians read *American Libraries*, *LJ*, and *Wilson Library Bulletin* in that order and special librarians read *American Libraries*, *LJ*, and *Special Libraries*. The list of scanned newsletters included *LJ/SLJ Hotline (Library Hotline)*, *College & Research Libraries News*, *NSLS (North Suburban Library System)*, and *OCLC Newsletter* as the most read. Ali's list of newsletters included twenty in all, some of which were local or regional.¹¹ Other studies by Nash and Swisher have information on the reading behavior of librarians. Nash, for instance, surveyed heads of Illinois public libraries to determine whether professional qualifications influenced channels of communication of the librarians. He found that the public library cosmopolite (national/professional in outlook) read twice as many journals as the public library localite (locally influenced), but he also found that the most frequently read journals of both groups were *Library Journal*, *Illinois Libraries*, *Wilson Library Bulletin*, and *Publishers Weekly*.¹² Swisher, who drew his sample from membership in the Association of College

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and Research Libraries, reported that while over 50 percent of the respondents to his 1972 survey read one to five library professional journals, six out of ten librarians report reading no nonlibrary professional journals.¹³

Even though the existing research on the information-seeking behavior of librarians is quite limited, some observations are possible. Reading of professional library journals appears to be the favorite method used by British and American librarians to gain information. The journals read are popular general journals, and many are official publications of library associations and are received on membership. British librarians and American academic librarians seemed to read more and in more different journals than American public librarians. There is little evidence that librarians are reading widely in journal literature in other professional fields. There are, of course, some problems with the research findings. Most of the populations surveyed were either members of library associations or library administrators and probably present a more positive picture than would a survey of librarians in general. Further, some of the survey populations were either small, local, or both. However, Shields has reported that a survey of graduates of library education programs spanning ten years revealed that over 80 percent of the respondents indicated that they read at least one library-related periodical.¹⁴

Turning back to the question of current awareness for librarians, it is useful to look at some of the current awareness services. Services may consist of one or all of the following components: summaries of recent events, table of contents services, SDI, journal routing, book reviews, abstracts of articles, acquisitions lists, and calendars of events. A current awareness bulletin combines many features. *CABLIS* is an example of a current awareness bulletin. *CABLIS* is compiled in the British Library by the Library Association Library. The bulletin includes recent news of interest to librarians; a calendar of meetings, conferences, and courses, chiefly in the British Isles; an annotated list of new books; tables of contents, sometimes selective, from about fifty British and American library journals, and occasionally from other non-English journals; contents of a few conference proceedings; and a subject list of additions to the Library Association Library. Some issues also include abstracts of theses. The advantage of a publication such as *CABLIS* is that it provides maximum information in minimum space. Issues range in size from sixteen to thirty pages and can be browsed quickly for relevant information. Ali found that *CABLIS* was scanned by 41.8 percent of his British sample,¹⁵ but only 26 percent of the Lynam survey reported that they saw *CABLIS*.¹⁶ *CABLIS* is probably unknown in the United States

except by library science librarians. Another major British information society, Aslib, publishes companion current awareness bulletins—i.e., *Aslib Information* and the *Current Awareness Bulletin*.

The only national current awareness bulletin published in the United States with a strictly library orientation was *CALL*. *CALL* suspended publication in 1980 after a failure to gain national recognition. *CALL* contained contents of several hundred library periodicals as well as reviews of old and new library journals, articles about library literature, and a limited number of abstracts of journal articles.

Two newsletters that attempt to serve as current awareness bulletins for both library and information science are *Information Hotline* and *Information Reports and Bibliographies*; both are published by Science Associates/International. *Information Hotline*, which is published eleven times a year, emphasizes technological developments. Issues often include descriptions of grants and contracts of federal agencies, a reprint of part of the Library Association publication *Current Research in Library & Information Science*, and a summary of market studies about technology. Although the news section of *Information Hotline* will sometimes include reports on library activities, telecommunications, databases, and automation systems are most often featured. The bimonthly *Information Reports and Bibliographies* has a topical bibliography, an article or two (often reprinted from other sources), contents pages from a selection of library journals, and a bibliography of ERIC documents. *Information Reports and Bibliographies* is eclectic in format, and topics covered include copyright, new technologies, preservation of library materials, and “publish or perish” for academic librarians. The audience, if one can be identified, may be academic librarians. Both of these publications cost approximately \$100 annually. Some state library agencies provide current awareness services free to librarians in the state. *Library Developments*, published bimonthly by the Library Development Division, Texas State Library, is an example. *Library Developments* prints official and unofficial news and reports about libraries in the state, an annotated subject bibliography of new books in the state library’s library science collection, a calendar of continuing education opportunities, and other miscellaneous items of interest to state librarians. A form is included in each issue to request new titles for loan from the state library. Minnesota’s Office of Library Development & Services issues three separate publications which together comprise a current awareness bulletin. The publications are: a newsletter, *Libraries in the News*; a quarterly calendar, *Educational Events*; and an annotated booklist, *Resources in Library*

and *Information Science*. Materials on the booklist can be borrowed from the office.

Library Hotline and *Library Administrator's Digest*, while lacking some features of current awareness bulletins, function to keep librarians up to date. *Hotline*, published weekly except July and August, summarizes current news about libraries in five to seven pages. The editor distills his reports from varied sources including local library newsletters. He often refers to the source which enables the interested reader to pursue the subject farther. *Hotline* does not focus on any one type of library. *Library Administrator's Digest*, a monthly publication, has much in common with *Library Hotline*. The editor also synthesizes the library press. The first few pages are selected reprintings from other sources of information about libraries. The second part of the newsletter, which is called "From the Editor's Desk," reports on practices in libraries, chiefly public, and also consists of a dialogue between the editor and his readers. The title *Library Administrator's Digest* is something of a misnomer because this newsletter should be of interest to most public library practitioners.

Of course hundreds of newsletters exist with the primary purpose of keeping their readership up to date. Sharp has compiled an annotated list of over a hundred of these newsletters and has barely scratched the surface.¹⁷ Some newsletters provide information about a specific organization (*OCLC Newsletter*); some about a type of publication (*Documents to the People, DTTP*); some about library-related activities (*Information Intelligence Online Newsletter*); some information of and about one group of librarians (ALA's *Black Caucus Newsletter*); some technological trends (*Advanced Technology/Libraries*); some library-related research (*Library and Information Research News*); some about a type of library (*The Urban Libraries Exchange*); some about one library (*Library of Congress Information Bulletin*); etc. Many of these newsletters are free or come with membership, but a few are quite expensive. Some of the best newsletters, such as *Documents to the People*, are almost indispensable to the specialist practitioner. Not only does *DTTP* report on the activities of its sponsor, the Government Documents Round Table (Godort), but it also describes current developments regarding government publications, provides assistance in the management of documents collections, publishes bibliographies about document librarianship, and reviews reference tools appropriate to the field. Free to members of Godort and only \$15 to nonmembers, the price will probably not affect the library's willingness to subscribe to this quarterly publication. On the other hand, even though *Information*

Intelligence Online Newsletter contains good up-to-date information about databases and database vendors, many libraries that do only limited online searching may be unwilling to pay the \$50 for ten issues' subscription price.

A number of current awareness services in addition to CA bulletins and newsletters are presently available. The only commercial table of contents service published in the United States that covers library science is the Social and Behavioral Sciences section of *Current Contents*. Table of contents are, however, published in other countries. A particularly attractive one is *Contenta* which is compiled in Finland by the University of Helsinki Library. *Contenta* reproduces contents pages from some sixty journals; a majority of the journals are in English. There is a time lag, of course, in the publication of the contents pages. Most of the contents published in the May 1987 issue of *Contenta* were from January 1987 or winter 1986/87, but *Current Contents: Social and Behavioral Sciences*, which includes around four contents pages per weekly issue, has similar delays in publication and does not cover as many journals as the monthly *Contenta*. Another service created to give access to library periodical literature is *Library and Information Science Update*. This monthly publication by faculty in Library and Information Science, University of Toronto, consists of selective abstracts of journal articles. There are also bibliographies and reviewing sources for new monographs. "The Librarian's Bookshelf" compiled by Olha della Cava is a regular feature of the *Bowker Annual*. This bibliography is arranged by subject and fairly comprehensively covers recently published monographs in library science except those that treat technological issues and these subjects are included in the bibliography "High Technology" in the same annual. The Missouri State Library's *Update* is an annotated bibliographical source of recent monographic works. As was true with earlier state library awareness services, books on the list are available on loan.

Two recent publications have, as a primary focus, book reviews in library and information science. The *Library Science Annual*, which has called itself a companion to *American Reference Books Annual*, began publication in 1985 and reviews more than 200 monographs a year. Its short reviews are arranged by subject, and, as in *American Reference Books Annual*, some are reprinted from other journals. A semiannual reviewing journal, *International Journal of Reviews in Library and Information Science* is published by the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Rosary College. This journal reviews approximately thirty books each issue. The signed reviews average

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about a page and a half. Descriptions of current research in librarianship and information science are available in the Library Association's *Current Research in Library & Information Science* and in the International Federation for Documentation's *R&D Projects in Documentation and Librarianship*. Separately published calendars of events are also issued by various organizations. One of the best is the *Chicago Area Librarians' Calendar* published by the Chicago Library System.

The preceding is but a small portion of the current awareness information available to library practitioners. One conclusion that can be drawn from these listings is that, except for the British professional associations and some state library agencies, there has been no effort to produce a coherent current awareness system. This would be less surprising if librarians were not the architects of some very sophisticated current awareness systems. Compare services available to librarians with those services provided by BELLPAR (Bell Laboratories Library Publications Acquisition and Retrieval) to more than 6000 technical and management employees. Using an in-house database, two types of current awareness bulletins are created. One bulletin (*Current Technical Papers, CTP*) employs a subject approach, and the other bulletin supplies tables of contents journals. *CTP*, which is published semi-monthly is the product of an extraction of citations from commercially available databases such as INSPEC. Both *CTP* and the table of content bulletin(s) are published in subject editions, and subscribers may choose any combination of editions. A photocopying service is linked to the bulletins.¹⁸ A potential explanation for this lack of coordinated current awareness in the United States may rest in part with the sheer number of U.S. librarians. While differences in definition of librarian make exact comparisons impossible, the 17,159 "full-time qualified staff" identified in the 1981 census in the United Kingdom¹⁹ is a much smaller more manageable group than the 136,120 "librarian positions in full-time equivalency 1982" identified in the King report.²⁰ This may explain why current awareness systems exist in the United Kingdom but not in the United States. In addition, although special librarians and sci/tech librarians in particular have embraced the concept of current awareness service, it has received mixed reviews from other American librarians. Katz hints at this ambivalence in his review of *CALL* when he says "the whole current contents approach is up for debate."²¹

A second conclusion about current awareness publications to be drawn from previously cited research is that, except for relatively small audiences, they are not widely read or scanned. All of the available research supports the fact that journal literature is what library practitioners read and that most of these practitioners read the same rather

small list of professional journals. If the evidence from the previously cited surveys is not enough, consider that Bobinski, in a recent article on library journals, identified only nine journals with more than 10,000 subscriptions. Five of the nine are received as part of professional membership and one of these, *Journal of Information and Image Management* (new title: *Inform*), is of interest outside library and information science. Only *Library Journal* and *Wilson Library Bulletin* are strictly professional journals purchased by subscription.²² To be sure, many journals are routed and therefore seen by more than one professional. Some material is also available without charge and information about distribution is not readily available. The authors of this article asked the Library Development Division, Texas State Library, about the distribution of *Library Developments*. They were told that there were 550 names on their mailing list in October 1987, and that about 100 requests for material were received. State of Texas law requires that the mailing list be purged each year, but by October most libraries or librarians interested in the publication had reinstated their names. Once again it needs to be stated that a single publication can be seen by more than one librarian, but even using the most optimistic estimates, it would appear that the audience for a valuable service like *Library Developments* is still quite small.

How well does the popular American library press provide current awareness? If many public librarians, for instance, get most of their information about current developments from *American Libraries*, *Library Journal*, and *Wilson Library Bulletin*, how successful are these publications in meeting information needs? Earlier Kemp was quoted as listing four types of knowledge in the current awareness process: (1) new theoretical ideas, (2) new problems, (3) new techniques, and (4) new circumstances. Respondents to the Lynam survey identified the extent of their interest in various aspects of journal content. They indicated interest in: (1) developing trends in library and information work (48 percent); (2) problems faced by library information units (46 percent); (3) availability of new services—information on (46 percent); (4) how other units run (44 percent); (5) discussion of ideas (35 percent); (6) forthcoming events information (29 percent); (7) research experience (12 percent); and (8) personalities—news (8 percent). Although differently stated, the two sets of criteria have much in common and can be used to measure the relative success of the popular American journals in meeting current awareness needs.

An analysis of the content of *American Libraries* reveals that it is, as one might well expect, primarily concerned with programs, policies,

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people, and publications of the American Library Association. Discounting job advertisements as well as other ads, news about the association is the single dominant feature in most issues. After news about ALA, the most space is given to general library news. Brief articles, sometimes on a single theme, are in most issues. The articles are usually written to appeal to a broad audience or address a particular professional concern. A regular column, "Action Exchange," does try to help libraries or librarians solve particular problems. "Action Exchange," usually two pages in length, asks its readers to respond to questions submitted to *American Libraries*. Other features of the journal include a calendar called "Datebook," a page-long news sheet about librarians called "Currents," and a section, "The Source," which is a chatty annotated bibliography of materials of interest to librarians. "The Source" includes the Librarian's Library, a brief professional reading list. *Library Journal* also has a calendar, a people page, extensive coverage of library news, and some articles, but in addition it has a series of regular columns and an extensive book reviewing section. *LJ* is, after all, a major book and media selection tool in libraries, and many of its articles and features are related to selection. One column in the journal, "Professional Reading," does review new professional library literature. The articles in *LJ* are also short and general, but they often deal with the application of new technology and do so in a reasonably specific way. The writers of these articles are frequently well known in the profession and sometimes express controversial ideas. From time to time the editor reports on regional or specialized conferences that he has attended and in this way expands the journal coverage to include more local or special concerns.

As was true of *LJ*, *Wilson Library Bulletin* devotes considerable space to materials selection. In a series of regular monthly columns—e.g., "Picture Books for Children"—columnists review both books and media. Norman Stevens writes the column on professional literature entitled "Our Profession." There is a calendar, news, a people page called "Library World," and a series of regular features on buildings, online searching, etc. The articles again are short but, more often than in *American Libraries* and *Library Journal*, reflect the experience of one institution. *Wilson Library Bulletin* is blander than *LJ*, although a column by Will Manley, "Facing the Public," raises important issues in a manner designed to spark controversy.

Do these journals provide current awareness? Yes, of course they do. They are particularly adequate in identifying and describing new trends and circumstance. The semimonthly (except July, August, December,

and January) *Library Journal* covers current events in the profession well, and *American Libraries* and *Wilson Library Bulletin* add breadth and depth to this coverage. All three journals also provide information about services, and all are somewhat effective in discussing ideas. In regard to general features, *American Libraries* has the best calendar, and while Webreck and Weedman have criticized the reviewing of professional library literature and identified its weaknesses—i.e., lack of comprehensive coverage, and critical evaluation²³—the reviews in *LJ* and *Wilson Library Bulletin* do provide access to professional literature. To differing degrees all three journals have the same shortcomings. Problems faced by libraries are covered only in news stories and editorials. The journals are directed to a national audience and therefore unwilling to focus on one library or even one type of library. Solutions to problems presented to the journal, are generalized and avoid controversy. Research is more often than not derided, and even news about people is covered in a cursory way. It is not a criticism of these journals to say that they alone cannot meet the current awareness needs of librarians.

Librarians tolerate this inadequate access to information for more than one reason. Clark theorized that practitioners were more likely to emphasize service and that the daily demands of work would receive a higher priority than being informed of new developments. As a result, he suggests older knowledge and skills are more valued, minds are relatively closed to new ideas, and the use of information is limited.²⁴ Although Clark was referring to practitioners in other fields, his comments have validity for librarianship. It is not within the purview of this article to review the literature of librarianship as it relates to the work ethic. It would, of course, be ludicrous for librarians to denounce reading, but as Plate discovered in a survey of library middle managers, “getting the job done” was what managers expected of their staff.²⁵ Lynch has stated the same opinion in a slightly different way. She believes that libraries as bureaucracies properly emphasize routine and centralized authority.²⁶ A world that stresses acquiescence is not likely to reward current awareness activities which could lead to questioning established routines and practices.

Related to a reluctance to commit time to keeping up to date is the perception that the literature isn't very good. Everyone has either heard it said or read in a professional journal that “library literature” is badly written. This criticism has been reviewed by Plotnik who ascribes it at least in part to the insecurity of the profession.²⁷ Bobinski, however, has written that there has been an increase both in the quantity and quality

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of professional literature since the 1960s,²⁸ and this author finds as much quality literature in the library field as in any other academic or professional field. A corollary to suspicions about the quality of the literature is skepticism about the value of research. Lynam has discussed this question at length, and it is probably fair to say that many American library practitioners would agree with many of their British counterparts that research isn't relevant or practical and that they are too busy to keep up with it.²⁹

Finally, and most importantly, there is a significant amount of literature published, and practitioners are simultaneously uninformed as to what is available and overwhelmed by the amount. It is possible to come to this conclusion on the basis of the amount of professional literature being published, but it is also possible to infer it from some results of the Ali surveys. For instance, in his survey of chief librarians, he reports that respondents did not find secondary services helpful although practitioners affiliated with academic institutions were more favorably disposed than special or public librarians.³⁰ Respondents in Illinois were somewhat more positive, but only 42 percent thought that secondary sources were useful.³¹ These findings strongly suggest that these librarians are not finding the information they need. It is not unusual for library users to be dissatisfied with secondary sources, but the conclusion that has been drawn is that the user was simply not knowledgeable about bibliographic tools.³² Is it possible that librarians are unfamiliar with these tools or is it that the tools do not provide the access needed? One can speculate that academic librarians are more pleased with secondary sources because they have more access to them. It may also be that they are better served by journals. There were two research-oriented journals devoted to academic librarianship at the time of Ali's surveys. *College & Research Libraries* and *Journal of Academic Librarianship* were read by academic librarians in the United Kingdom as well as in the United States. Another reason that academic librarians are better served by journals is that the articles were far more likely to have been written by academic librarians than by public librarians.³³ Thus public librarians' dissatisfaction may really be with the information available rather than with the secondary services.

In summary, there is a reasonable amount of research relevant to understanding the ways in which librarians learn of new developments. There is substantial agreement in this research that practitioners gain information through reading or scanning a fairly limited number of journals. Meanwhile, a larger number of current awareness services exist that are, for the most part, not widely known or used. There is little

or no bibliographic control or coordination of these services. Skepticism exists on the part of practitioners as to the value of professional literature both in terms of its quality and its relevance. This is true at a time when library service is becoming more complex and more specialized.

It would seem reasonable that all groups of librarians should be able to develop current awareness systems more responsive to the needs of the profession. Such a system should recognize that the information needs of librarians in different types of libraries and in different specialized positions will not be the same. It should also recognize that practitioners do not usually have either the time or the library collections to be able to review the large amount of literature available. For a current awareness system to succeed, document delivery is essential.

There are some current developments that may positively affect current awareness. *Library Literature* is now available online and may aid in this awareness process. Ali found that 88 percent of his Illinois survey did not use databases relating to librarianship.³⁴ However, the databases available at that time—*ERIC* and *Library and Information Science Abstracts*—are not as familiar to American practitioners as *Library Literature* and therefore not used. A representative of the H.W. Wilson Company said that they believe *Library Literature* on WILSON-LINE was doing well when compared to other Wilson databases. The CD-ROM version of *Library Literature* may prove to be especially valuable if libraries can afford to purchase it.

The relatively new video services from ALA also offer intriguing possibilities for current awareness. ALANET, ALA's electronic mail system, is already providing practitioners with another new means of communicating and keeping up to date. But one can wonder how widely these services are being used.

In the end, a viable current awareness system for the profession comes down to a question of priorities. Clark stated that, "a knowledge of the literature is necessary to fulfill a professional role."³⁵ He goes on to say that awareness of new methods and theories are prerequisites for increased effectiveness, and it is this use of new knowledge which distinguishes a professional from a technician.³⁶ However, unless effort and resources are put into developing current awareness systems that library practitioners will really use, and some priority is placed on the importance of these systems, nothing is likely to change. Lastly, it is a strange irony that the information systems of a group dedicated to supplying information to others should be so inadequate.

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