The Public and the Computer:
Reactions to a Second Generation Online Catalog

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THE PIKES PEAK LIBRARY DISTRICT (PPLD) located in Colorado Springs, Colorado, is the home of Maggie III, a public access catalog (PAC). The original Maggie was a real person, the head of cataloging at PPLD. Not long after she retired, the library began automation of library records and named its new computer Maggie II. Maggie II was replaced in 1986 by Maggie III, a Tandem Computer with four four-megabyte nonstop TXP processors. This system is currently running approximately 300 terminals.

When Maggie II was replaced, so was the original online catalog created by in-house staff in 1981. The new public access catalog was developed by the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries (CARL) and is now in use by libraries all over the state of Colorado. The transition to CARL software also resulted in a change in the software for the Community Information Files originally developed in 1978. The current eight databases employ the same software as the PAC to create a more powerful retrieval capability and the same search strategy as the PAC for the user.

In addition to the library staff, the "user" consists of both visitors to one of the two full-service library facilities or its eight branches and "home users." Home users dial directly into the library's computer from their home or office microcomputers. The presence of many high-tech firms and one of the highest education levels in the United States may contribute to the high number (between 3,000 and 4,000) of people who like to access library information (both bibliographic and community facts) in this fashion.

The Pikes Peak Library District has been a leader in the develop-

ment of online community information databases. To date PPLD has been unable to monitor usage of those files without burdening the user with a cumbersome protocol. Library staff are reluctant to impose such time-wasting steps on patrons, particularly home users. The survey on which this article is based provided a subjective picture of how often people access these information files and what types of information files they are interested in.

The information available to the home and in-library user online from Maggie III is the same. All of the databases can be searched by name or word (or string of words) or may be browsed through. Any specific search may be "saved" and tried in several different databases. The following databases are available online:

—*Public Access Catalog*: Contains information about the library's book, record, and video collections including checkout status and location of the item.

—*Calendar*: Lists events of interest to Colorado Springs residents that are usually cultural in nature. Information includes sponsor, type of event, date, and cost.

—*Agency*: Lists social service and community action agencies in the Pikes Peak region, including the contact person, phone number, eligibility requirements, and application procedure.

—*Club*: Lists clubs in Colorado Springs and El Paso County and includes information on contacts, memberships, and meeting times.

—*Courses*: Lists information about adult education and recreation opportunities in El Paso County. It shows courses by subject and includes name, address, phone number, and contact person.

—*Local Documents*: Annotated lists of documents from local government agencies. Most of the documents are housed in the Local History division of the library and include such things as City Council minutes, maps, blueprints, studies, and reports related to the Pikes Peak region.

—*Local Authors*: Lists all identified published authors in the Pikes Peak region.

—*Facts*: Contains miscellaneous facts from magazines, public hearings, Congressional hearings, and public opinion polls.

—*Senior Housing*: Lists facilities that provide various levels of care and alternative living situations for senior citizens in the Pikes Peak Region. Level of care, physical layout, cost, services, amenities, location, and eligibility requirements are provided for each of over 100 facilities listed.

—*CARL*: Provides access to the collections of the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries including Auraria campus, Denver Public Library, Colorado School of Mines, University of Northern Colorado, the University of Colorado at Boulder, and Denver University.

—*Marmot*: Provides access to the collections of seventeen western slope libraries including Adams State College, Aspen Schools, Colorado

Northwestern Community College, Durango Public, Eagle County, Fort Lewis College, Mesa College, Mesa County Public, Mesa County Schools, Montrose, Pathfinder System, Pitkin County, Southwest System, Three Rivers System, Vail Public, Western State College.

In order to assess the level of use of these databases and assess the satisfaction of the library's two types of online users as well as providing specialized data needed by the Systems Division, it was necessary to use two different survey instruments. It is anticipated that Systems will eventually add the software which will allow the library to conduct this type of survey online.

METHODOLOGY

The two surveys were both conducted in May/June 1988. The Home Users Survey was mailed to 400 of the approximately 4,000 dial-up users. The response from this group was 32 percent (128 surveys returned).

The Public Access Catalog Survey was somewhat longer than the survey mailed out to home users and was conducted by the surveyors by approaching every person using the terminals at the two full-service libraries—Penrose and the East Library and Information Center. These surveys were conducted at random times and days, morning through evening.

While the response rate was much higher than can normally be expected from a mail survey without a second mailing, the in-house PAC survey return rate was much lower than expected. One possible reason for this is that people entering the building were asked to fill the survey out and return it before they left the building. We were making specific demands on their already allocated time. The home users, on the other hand, could fill the survey out at their leisure and return it without personal expense.

The primary questions to be answered by the survey were:
1. Does the PAC user (whether accessing the database from home or library) find what she/he is looking for?
2. Does the PAC provide the user a method of access which she/he perceives to be easy and quick to use?
3. Which Community Information Databases are most frequently used?
4. Are Community Information Databases more likely to be used by the home or library user?
5. Which of the databases currently under development have the most potential value for the general library user?
6. What other types of hardware or software would public library patrons like the library to develop or provide?
7. Does the users' frequency of use impact the results of their search?

THE USER

The profile of the in-library PAC user: he is predominately male

(50.4 percent of the respondents were male, 41 percent were female, 9 percent did not respond to the question). Only 20 percent of the respondents had a high school or lesser education. Some had masters degrees or had completed post masters work (19 percent). The rest of the respondents had some level of college education.

The home user survey provided less insight into the respondent as the demographic questions were deleted to keep the survey to one page. We can assume, however, that these users are relatively affluent as they all own their own microcomputers. The majority of them use the library's databases between 4 P.M. and midnight. Of the dial-up users, 91 percent have a current library card, and 51 percent have had their library card more than three years.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL USE

Frequent users for this survey are defined as: those home users who dial into the library's computer at least once a week; and in-library users who use the PAC everytime they use the library. Infrequent users are those users who do not fall into the above categories.

All of the frequent users (home and library) reported that they use the public access catalog. Only 70 percent of infrequent users reported regular use of the library's catalog. Frequent users are much more likely to use the Community Information Databases than infrequent users. The frequent users were two to five times more likely to use a community information database than someone who used the computer only occasionally. The ability to find the information sought was markedly higher for those people who use the databases frequently. Frequent home users were 30 percent more likely to find what they were looking for than infrequent home users.

Items Found

Of the in-house PAC users, 47 percent answered that they found everything they were looking for or more in their search on the PAC. Their actual count of items found in PAC totaled 62 percent of those searched. Another 40 percent of the respondents found some of what they were looking for. One might expect the in-house users to be more proficient in their search since library staff are available to help them. This was not the case, however, as 66 percent of the home users usually find what they are searching for in the PAC.

Community File Usage

The home user was most likely to access the CARL database (62.5 percent), the calendar of community events (58.6 percent), the FACTS database (55.5 percent), and the Club file (48 percent) on a regular basis than any other files. The in-library user was much less likely to use the information databases (all of them used PAC). After the "Help" information, the highest usage was 27 percent for the FACTS database, 20

percent Calendar, 19 percent Local Documents, and 19 percent use Courses at least occasionally. The interest shown in the databases then under development was not great for either the home user or the in-library user. The databases evaluated were:
—*Socioeconomic*: A database of current social and economic statistical indicators such as growth, etc.
—*Electronic City Hall*: A database which will provide information from city hall such as city council minutes and frequently asked questions regarding city operations, etc.
—*Senior Housing*: A database which will provide information on the variety of housing options available to senior citizens in our region.

Of the PAC users, 42 percent felt the Socioeconomic Indicators database would be somewhat useful. Of those responding, 35 percent felt the Senior Housing database would not be useful to them. As 71 percent of the respondents were over the age of 25 and might eventually be caring for their elderly parents, this was a somewhat surprising response. Only 1 percent of the respondents was over the age of 62. An even greater number of home users (63 percent) projected the Senior Housing database to be "Not Useful" to them. They, however, like the idea of the Electronic City Hall database.

CONVENIENCE

All users involved in this study were asked their opinion of the ease and speed of using the computer to access library materials. Home users were the most enthusiastic about the system, perhaps because of their greater sophistication in using it. There were 88 percent who reported it saves them time, 84 percent said it saves them trips to the library, and 92 percent said access from the home should continue to be offered (the other 8 percent did not answer the question). No one said this service should be discontinued.

There were reports that 74 percent of home users made a connection to the library's computer on their first try, another 14 percent were connected on their second try. This indicates a sufficient number of dial-up lines for the current number of users.

Only 14 percent of the home users reported that the computer's response time was not fast enough. As 14.6 percent of those responding were using 300 Baud modems, it is conceivable that their modems are part of the problem. Those using the PAC in the library (86 percent) feel that the computer is fast enough and 64 percent felt the steps to use the computer were easy to follow. Only 10 of the 139 respondents (7 percent) reported that they had to wait for a terminal. Of those ten, four waited less than two minutes; six waited three to five minutes. In previous visits, none of the respondents reported they consistently had to wait for a terminal. The in-library users' most frequently requested improvement was the ability to print the results of their computer search.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the fact that neither the home nor "in-library" user always finds what he/she is looking for in the PAC, both are happy with the convenience and speed of the Pikes Peak Library District's online catalog. Usage of the community files by both in-library and home users was higher than anticipated, but the databases currently under development are of less interest to current users than anticipated. Overall, satisfaction with the public access catalog and community information files was high, but there is room for improvement in both speed and accuracy of records.

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