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## Information Online and Ondisc 1997 was held on the 21- 23 January 1997

At a conference of this magnitude with such a broad range of papers and products the knowledge, information and impressions you take away with you are definitely influenced by the issues you are currently facing in your own work environment

Therefore I have not attempted in this column to give a general overview of the conference, but have instead concentrated on three areas which I found of particular relevance to the information management issues we are facing in our law firm library.

The three areas are:

- information products and information formats - how to deal with the proliferation,

- online services and hybrid CD-ROMs, and

- the Internet - user perceptions and misconceptions

As you are also facing similar challenges caused by changes in the information industry I can only hope that this discussion of some of the developments highlighted at the conference is useful and relevant to you.

The conference proceedings are available on the Information Online and On Disc 97 homepage

## Information products and information formats - how to deal with the proliferation

One of the major themes of the conference was the information management issues facing libraries as a result of the growth in electronic publishing, the proliferation of information formats and the rapid rate of technological change.

In the library at Minters we have certainly experienced dramatic changes over the past few months in the way we acquire and disseminate information to our users The variety of formats in which we receive information has also increased.

The most recent challenge we have had to face is that of receiving our material from Capital Monitor (a political and information monitoring service) over the Internet in PDF (portable document format) rather than in hardcopy.

Some issues we face as a result of this are:

- how to incorporate this material as part of our present electronic current awareness system which includes CCH summaries and other image formats

- what software do we need to work with these PDF documents and what changes do we need to make at the user's desktop to enable them to access this material

- and most importantly what training and support do we need to provide to users to ensure they are familiar with these changes

New delivery options can provide more efficient access to information and enable us to further customise our services to meet users requirements However they also force us to reassess our current services and future plans for dissemination of information to users.

What methods of dissemination should we use? Do we continue to push information out to users via email (eg. electronic current awareness services) or allow users to access information, from a central location such as Lotus Notes, when they require it (pull dissemination).

It seems that in the future we will be offered a vast array of information formats and delivery options and be required to make informed decisions regarding the management of these resources.

To make these decisions we need to develop a clear understanding of how our customers utilise information in this networked environment and what formats they prefer This may involve the use of surveys or focus groups.

We will also be required to develop strategies, that enable us to maintain a balance of formats to meet the different research needs of our users and allow us to be ready for continual change How do we go about this?

With these issues on my mind I came to the conference determined to learn as much as possible from the experiences of other organisations and those who had already addressed similar information management issues

Several speakers spoke specifically about changes in publishing formats and dissemination, however the two papers that I found most helpful in addressing the issues that I have discussed above were, Lyn McCullagh's paper on "Customer needs and service provision" and Jinette de Gooijer's paper on "Developing a strategy when only tactics will do: Information management in an environment of technological determinism".

Lyn McCullagh's paper outlines ten strategies for successful service delivery in the unpredictable changing environment in which we operate She encourages libraries to ensure that the customer is

at the centre of information service provision and to develop a "vision for information service delivery which may exceed the current capacity of technology and infrastructure to deliver" Her paper gives practical advice for looking beyond the technology to the user's specific needs - we must understand how users want to receive information, rather than how we think best to provide it. We must be prepared to discuss these issues with our IT departments, as use of these new technologies will require greater knowledge of our systems.

Gooijer's paper also discusses the dilemma which faces libraries in devising strategies in an information environment which is characterised by "radical changes occurring monthly rather than annually".

The paper outlines the development of an information management strategy for the CSIRO based on Tom Davenport's work An Ecological Model for information Management. She stresses that information management is essential for, and should be concerned with, ensuring "alignment between the human processes and the information systems" rather than managing systems and the information resources delivered by these systems. This statement strikes a cord with the majority of us who work in networked environments. We realise that if the use of technology (including our information services) is to increase within our firms, we must understand user's work practices and how our services can fit in with the way they work

Gooijer also points out that the development of the information management strategy at the CSIRO, has contributed more to their understanding and ability to express the issues to be faced, than to solutions to the problems. She sees an information management strategy as an ongoing strategic process which enables us to ask the right questions from which the solutions will emerge

This paper offers valuable principles that can be applied to the information management issues we are facing, or will face in the future. It also helps us to understand the questions we should be asking and the steps involved in developing an information management strategy for our library.

Both papers reinforce the need to be aware of the developments in the technological industry but to keep our decisions firmly related to the needs of our users

## *Intranets*

I will just mention briefly that several speakers at the conference alluded to the fact that in this world of endless formats and electronic resources there is a need for one standard interface that allows access to relevant information regardless of the format or location.

This has become an important concern in our libraries, as we are constantly required to train users on new software, fully aware that they are confused about the numerous products and interfaces used to access the internal and external information resources of the firm.

Ian Hoyle from Connect com.au Pty Ltd in his paper titled "Intranets - a few realities", discussed his experiences in setting up the intranet at BHP. He states that intranets are not special - they are just how networks should be.

Several law firm librarians including myself attended the Birds of a Feather session on Intranets, where there was some discussion of the advantages of using Netscape, Lotus Notes or a combination of both to access internal and external information in our organisations

There is a vast amount of information on Intranets available on the Web, however Ian Hoyle suggested that the Homepage of the company he works for offers some useful links

## *Online services and hybrid CD-ROMs - Is the CD-ROM obsolete?*

The conference certainly heralded some changes to come in the area of electronic publishing Although CD-ROM products were prevalent, there seemed to be a push towards online access, due to the spread of the Internet. Several publishers were discussing online options, including publishing on the Web. I will outline some of the options discussed at the conference and the perceived advantages and disadvantages for our libraries.

Changes in electronic publishing come at a time when most law firm libraries are facing decisions relating to our CD-ROM collections - how much longer will this technology be with us, should we invest in more CD-ROM towers to cope with the growing number of CD-ROM titles being released, how do to we continue to train users on the bewildering array of software and how do we address the currency and administration challenges related to CD-ROMs ?

Currency has certainly become an important consideration for us. The material on CD-ROMs is static and rapidly outdated. Networking CD-ROMs to the lawyer's desktop may have improved access to many publications, however the lack of currency of the CD-ROM products, has meant a continued dependence on the paper copies In some cases the electronic product is four weeks behind the paper copy and lawyers understandably would rather use the product which they know is more current

The fact that it is often difficult to determine the exact currency of a CD-ROM product only compounds the problem. The release date shown on the CD-ROM menus can be misleading for the user Fortunately there are moves to provide more detailed currency information on CD-ROM products in a location with greater visibility.

The administrative challenges of maintaining CD-ROM collections, such as passwords, conflicting software, hardware problems are additional reasons for looking to other delivery options for our electronic products

## *Online*

Online services provided via the Internet or by some other means, seem the ideal solution to our problems, offering up-to-the-minute access to comprehensive information through a standard user interface, without all the administration hassles of CD-ROMs (We have had some problems with our CD-ROM towers over the past few weeks which we could certainly do without)

Publishers such as Butterworths have indicated they will be offering their products online via the Web and Minters like many other law firms is keen to look at this option. However there are some issues that face us when we consider online services Speakers at the conference from the telecommunications industry saw the current bandwidth limitations in communications as a barrier to the use of the Web, even for local sites.

The Web is not always accessible or responsive and we have all experienced the frustration of finding you cannot access a particular site when you urgently need to It will be necessary to compare the response times of the online services with the CD-ROMs.

Other matters such as security, communications costs and functionality of these services (i.e searching and printing capabilities) must also be considered

Although these issues will change gradually over the next few years as high speed network services spread and compression techniques improve, in the meantime what other options are currently available to us ?

## *Hybrid CD-ROMs*

There has been some discussion in the technology industry that a partial or short term solution to the currency problems of CD-ROMs and the bandwidth problems of online services, is hybrid CD-ROMs - a combination of the two technologies.

Although I had heard of this technology I had not taken time to examine its application to the legal environment. I was therefore very interested in the paper at the conference, presented by Russell Kendrick from Dataware Technologies, titled "A bit from here and a bit from there: hybrid CD-ROM / www electronic publishing solutions".

Hybrid CD-ROMs typically store the large volumes of data (static) on CD-ROM and supplement it with current information from the www or some other online source when required.

The benefits of these applications for law libraries are clear The CD-ROMs which we have in our collections, for example *Butterworths Australian Corporation Law Library* or *LBC's Complete Legal Research System,* typically contain large volumes of data, but require updates, often, for currency.

Our lawyers go to CD-ROMs for most of their search and retrieval needs but require quick access to any information that is not found on the disc At present this means that the library (usually on behalf of the user) must rely on paper bulletins or online services to find the required information to fill the gap.

You also often hear complaints about the number of resources that need to be checked before you can be sure you are completely up to date Hybrid CD-ROMs however, offer a one stop shop - seamlessly linking CD-ROM and online material through one interface, in a way that is transparent to the user

Although several legal publishers may be looking at offering online uplinks for CD-ROMs at the time of writing this article, I have only had hands on experience with the CCH product *Daily Online Updates* which is offered as part of the *Electronic Tax Library* The CCH product works by sending you an update file via email each day. If your CD-ROM is networked, you then transfer the file to a network accessible drive that was specified in the CD-ROM installation The file is called up by the user when they click on the Daily Online Update hypertext link at the top of each paragraph in the commentary The updates notify you of any changes to the paragraph you are looking at or inform you that there have been no amendments made.

Hybrid applications seem to provide greater currency while maintaining the rapid access speeds and security of local resources Drawbacks may be the loss of a standard interface across all CD-ROM products, (which interfaces like Netscape can offer) and an increase in the administration load as a result of handling the varied updating methods.

CD-ROMs as we know them now, may be made obsolete by high speed networks. It is essential however that we understand the hybrid concept, as many in the industry feel that the need for local resources with embedded online links will remain, along with the need for simple standard interfaces.

In the future local storage mediums for our electronic resources may be hard disk, CD-ROM or even a Lotus Notes server. The *Desktop Law Service* developed by Peter Meyer is an example of an information service utilising local and external resources. This service currently provides a comprehensive and up to date service for New South Wales legislation. The data is stored on the customer's own server and updated via email, daily or weekly as required Access is provided via web browser software such as Netscape

Reisman R. in the *New York Media Association News* of August 1996, stated that, "ultimately the networks will be fully transparent media where the user will not need to know or care which application elements and data are local and which are remote"

This is certainly not yet the case in most legal libraries, as we continue to juggle paper, CD-ROM and online services. But it is obvious that in the near future, as communication networks evolve, it will become more common to be offered by publishers a more complex mix of local and online services.

The conference certainly provided an opportunity to increase our awareness of developments in these technologies and their application to our libraries. Continued awareness and collaboration with our users, our IT departments and publishers will position us to respond rapidly to new developments in electronic publishing We must be flexible and willing to try different options-weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of each.

## *Internet - User perceptions misconceptions - Isn't it on the Net*

The conference offered numerous papers on the Internet and our role in this age of the end user They were very well attended

One of the interesting issues raised by keynote speaker, Clifford Lynch and several of the other speakers, was the perceived over estimation by users, of the value of the Internet and WWW for research, which is the result of the swift growth and development of these technologies

With many of our users having Internet access from their desks or access from home I am more frequently asked, "well isn't it on the Internet ?"

No one can deny that the Internet has improved access to many legal, government and business resources For example a new site that was profiled at the conference was the Australian Bureau of Statistics World Wide Web information service Statsite.

The content of the Internet will continue to grow and the search engines will become increasingly sophisticated. However Clifford Lynch points out that there is a need for information professionals to help users understand the uses and the limitations of the Internet.

We must train users to incorporate the Internet into their research in a meaningful way. This will involve teaching them when to go to the Internet and when to use other resources.

The Internet often lacks accuracy and currency and can as yet, only be seen as a complementary research tool. Clifford Lynch encourages us also to pass onto users, our critical questioning and evaluative skills. Users must be prepared to ask questions of each web page they visit.

Two useful articles for those of us considering internet training for our users, were published in the recent issue of *Perspectives. Teaching Legal Research and Writing*, vol 5, no. 2, Winter 1997. They are titled:

"Advanced legal research and the World Wide Web" by Scott Finet at p 52 and

"The why and how of teaching the Internet in legal research" by Michael Whiteman at p 55

Online and Ondisc 97 was the perfect opportunity to catch up with the latest developments in the information industry both here and overseas. It also allowed us to network with other librarians and discuss the issues we are currently facing. I certainly recommend the papers to you.

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### List of URLs

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| Information Online and On Disc97 | **http://www.csu.edu.au/special/online97/** |
| Internet Australia Pty Ltd | **http://www.intra.net.au/** |
| ABS - Statsite | **http://www.statistics.gov.au** |

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