

Facsimile Transfer

Can libraries afford it?

A METHOD OF ELECTRONICALLY transferring exact copies of documents from one library to another seems to be something that libraries would welcome enthusiastically. This has not happened. Initial enthusiasm has waned. Is there a future for facsimile transfer in a library situation?

The technology is simple to use. A facsimile machine is hired, contact is made with a facsimile machine in the library to whom a copy of a document is to be sent, pages of the document are fed into the sender's machine and an exact copy is printed out at the receiver's machine.

The cost of telecommunication and machine rental have been two of the main reasons that have precluded the adoption of facsimile by libraries. Various studies have been undertaken in Australia and none of these has led to the enthusiastic adoption of the technology. Facsimile fade out?

Problems

There were other aspects of the facsimile situation which mitigated against the adoption of the technology by libraries. The machines did not have a flat bed scanning facility; the pages of the document or article, or a photocopy of the pages, had to be fed into the machine; different facsimile machines could not in all cases communicate with each other.

There is a substantial volume of traffic needed to justify the cost of the facility and telecommunications costs; the need for urgency of delivery must be considered; other means of document delivery are available. The list of negatives is formidable.

Flat bed machines

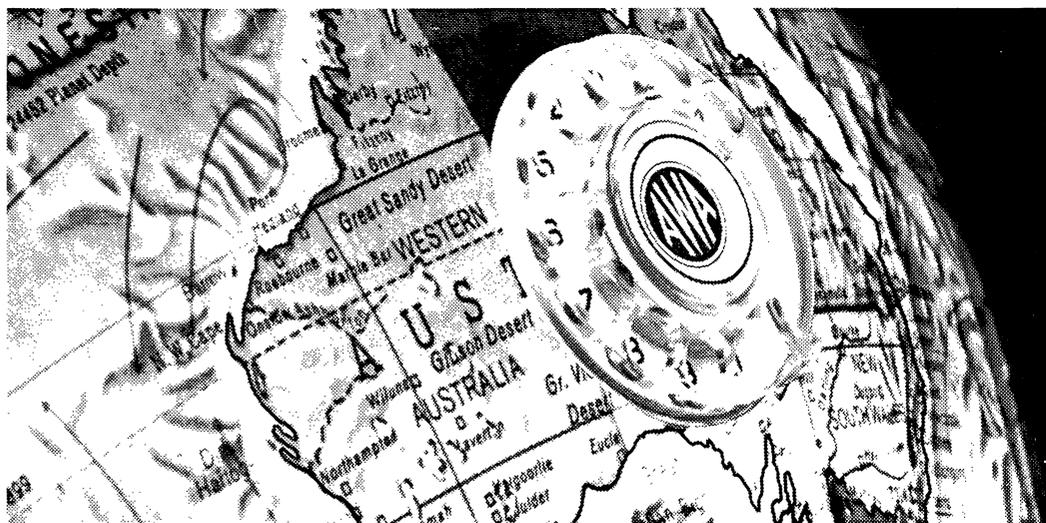
Has this 'curse of death' situation changed at all recently or is it likely to change? The answer is yes.

Flat bed scanning machines are becoming available and compatibility between machines with the same speed of transmission ie six minutes per A4 page, three minutes per A4 page, 30 seconds per A4 page etc, is assured by international standards and there is the capability in the machines, from some manufacturers, for 'downwards compatibility' ie a three minute machine's ability to transmit to a six minute machine *from the same manufacturer*.

Digital facsimile machines are also becoming available but this adds to the problem of compatibility. Significant reductions in telecommunication costs and rental cost of machines would help of course.

Distance charges

Can we hope for a reduction in telecommunication costs? This is unlikely in local call charge areas and in any case the need for facsimile transfer of documents between libraries in these areas can be said to be generally low because of the relatively short



A document can be dialled to anywhere in Australia or the world. Illustration courtesy AWA.

distances between libraries and the general lack of special urgency for document receipt.

In other situations a distance independent charge for a telephone call may hopefully be more than a faint possibility but is this likely to tip the scales in favour of general use of facsimile transfer?

A 10-page document transferred using a six minute A4 page machine will take an hour to transmit. If the distance independent tariff is \$10 per hour then it will cost \$10 in telecommunication costs alone to transmit the

document. A 50 seconds a page machine could cost \$20,000 a year to rent! A technology ideally suited to libraries that we cannot afford!

Maybe the reductions in budgets will lead to more requests for photocopies which will tip the balance for some libraries. Maybe the machine suppliers will strike a special rental rate for libraries, or maybe if you appraise your situation you could find a niche for facsimile machines in your libraries.

New Executive Director for LAA



SUSAN ACUTT, 25, has been appointed to the position of Executive Director of the LAA.

Previously she has worked in the University of Queensland Libraries, and for the last three years as a Readers' Adviser in the Undergraduate Library. Her connections with the LAA have been considerable and

include Secretary of the Queensland Branch in 1979 and 1980, Branch Councillor and Newsletter Editor in 1981, and President of the newly formed Queensland Group of UCLs in 1981.

She has a deep, enthusiastic commitment to the Library Association of Australia and feels very strongly that librarians should have a strong, unified and publicly recognised professional association. She is hoping that her appointment to the position will help strengthen the youthful base of the Association.

Susan completed a BA in 1975, BEcon in 1979 and is currently studying for her Master of Economic Studies at the University of Queensland. Her major area of interest is the economics of information and particularly the economics of library networks. She feels that in the past the disciplines of library science and economics have had too little connection, and has found the application of economic theory and methods to practical librarianship most enlightening and rewarding.

Susan is looking forward to meeting the challenge of this position with great enthusiasm.