



the front line

LIBNET . . . linking libraries for Information for the Nation?

In a rare flight of fancy my South Australian colleague Euan Miller some years ago attempted the establishment of COCOA (Council to Outlaw Contrived and Outrageous Acronyms). Predictably, alas, COCOA was a complete failure, to no one's surprise, least of all Euan's. The number of library acronyms, outrageous and otherwise, continues to exceed the capacity of the 'drudge' compilers of ADAA, LIST, and WAT to record them.

A less outrageous arrival on the library acronym scene is LIBNET, the State Library of NSW's national electronic mail system. LIBNET is not a new acronym, of course. Even in Australia it has prior usage, the URICA (check WAT for that one!) based network for CAE libraries run from Melbourne's FIT Library. The migration of LIBNET north of the Murray causes no perturbation to our Victorian colleagues, I am sure, because LIBNET is a development important to us all, in both a symbolic and practical sense. Symbolically because it lends emphasis to our unique willingness to co-operate; practically because it provides a cheap and fast way for greater communication and co-operation between libraries, librarians and library suppliers throughout Australia and overseas.

What is LIBNET? Essentially it is a not-for-profit electronic mail system for libraries and suppliers which started in January 1988 as the descendant of the Minerva/Keylink Library Network. The latest list of LIBNET users supplied to me by Alan Ventress, the LIBNET Administrator shows over 300 users already, the latest of which is Bond University. Software developed by Alan's colleague Bradley Thomas includes an ILL package, ILL management package and an acquisition package.

Alan also tells me that the average user of LIBNET is online for 9.16 minutes per day, the average number of signons is 222, the average number of different signons is 121 per day, the most popular time to signon is 11.00 am - 12.00 and 3.00 pm - 4.00 pm and the average cost per user is just \$50 a month.

Why, though, is the State Library of NSW developing the national electronic mail system for libraries when the American Library Association is responsible for ALANET, the US equivalent of LIBNET? The LAA was offered LIBNET last year but, not without any misgivings, decided ultimately that LIBNET represented too great a commitment by the Association particularly given that ALANET took some three years to become viable.

The whole of the Australian library community should therefore be appreciative that Alison Crook and her staff at the State Library of NSW and the Library Council of NSW have accepted the challenge.

If the LAA's decision on LIBNET proves to be wrong, if LIBNET proves the success it promises, the LAA should be happy to learn from the experience when it is faced with similar entrepreneurial challenges in future. An immediate challenge, however, is for

libraries throughout Australia to get behind Alison Crook and her colleagues and try to link every library in this large country of ours through LIBNET. The potential of LIBNET to assist in, for example, allowing even a small country public library branch to become an effective access point to deliver Information for the Nation, is very considerable. If that library cannot meet an information need LIBNET provides a cheap and fast way of passing the request onto another that can. Perhaps we now need a series of LAA/LIBNET seminars/workshops throughout Australia to explore the practice and potential of LIBNET in delivering Information for the Nation. It is something we shall be discussing with LIBNET soon.

Pending that possible development, talk to Alan Ventress about LIBNET. Reach him by telephone (02) 230 1424, FAX (02) 232 4816 or write c/- LIBNET State Library of NSW, Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000. If you have access to someone else's LIBNET terminal and number, Alan's LIBNET number is MLN 000001.

The LAA is also now a LIBNET user MLN 207500 - be the first to pen that letter to InCite . . . the electronic way.

Alan Bundy
President

Have you registered for IFLA/LAA yet? Don't miss out - contact the LAA or Dulcie Stretton and Associates for a registration form.

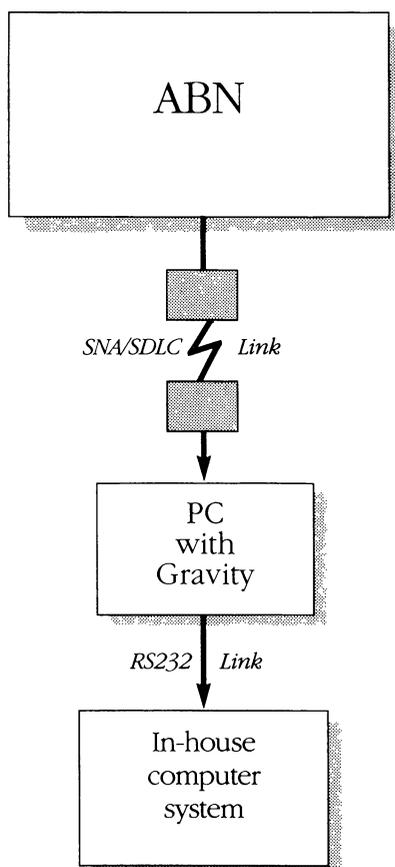
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