

Library networks and co-operatives — Part 2*

by Hans W. Groenewegen

Regional Networks

Technilib

The oldest of these regional networks is Technilib, which was established in 1975 under the Victorian Local Government Act. Initially, Technilib's function was to act as a cataloguing and book processing centre for public libraries. In recent years Technilib's services have diversified and now it offers to its members the following services, from which they may make their selection: centralized acquisitions, cataloguing of both English and non-English language materials, circulation control, microfiche catalogues and retrospective conversion services. Technilib was incorporated in 1985. Like CLANN and CAVAL, Technilib initially made use of the computer bureau Libramatics to support its data processing services. It purchased its own IBM 4361 computer system in 1985 for operation in house, using the DOBIS/LIBIS package for cataloguing as well as circulation control. Technilib currently services 25 libraries. The Technilib data base contains records for some 500,000 bibliographic items and nearly 2 million copies. The Technilib network is spread all over Victoria and at the end of 1988 supported approximately 60 terminals.

CLANN

Prior to 1985 the CLANN network relied, first on Libramatics and then on its successor company, IDAPS Australia, to provide it with computer services.

CLANN acquired its own GEAC computer system in 1985, initially to support OPAC and circulation, whilst shared cataloguing continued to be performed through its computer bureau. In 1987 CLANN decided to also transfer its cataloguing operations to the GEAC system. By mid-1988 the CLANN network was serving 25 libraries or library services, including the major system of the NSW Department of TAFE. The computer installation was upgraded several times and was supporting well over 250 terminals in some 60 sites. The CLANN data base remains relatively small at some 600,000 titles, although it contains almost 2 million locations, evidence of the high level of duplication (average: 3 per title) that may typically be found in collections of TAFE colleges as well as some colleges of advanced education. It should be noted, however,

that CLANN's membership is not confined to educational institutions in New South Wales but includes the special libraries of several NSW State Government departments. CLANN has recently expanded its operations into the ACT.

Like its counterparts, CLANN has diversified substantially since it was first established as a shared cataloguing network and now co-ordinates a range of resource sharing activities, including reciprocal borrowing, co-operative purchasing of equipment, inter-library loans (CLANN members have agreed to waive the \$6 AACOBs inter-library loan charge when borrowing from each other), and joint subscription to data base services (DIALOG).

CAVAL

Following its decision to transfer its shared cataloguing operation to ABN, CAVAL continued to be involved in shared cataloguing, to the extent that it acted as an intermediary between ABN and many Victorian libraries in their use of the system. CAVAL offered technical support and training to staff members of both new and established ABN participants in Victoria and this has contributed significantly to the very high level of penetration that ABN has achieved in that State.

Simultaneously, CAVAL decided to continue to pursue its objective of creating a regional on-line bibliographic data base of the holdings of its libraries, as well as continuing to co-ordinate a growing range of other resource sharing services. These included reciprocal borrowing, joint purchasing, co-operative storage, disaster response, data base access services (Dialog), contract cataloguing and a variety of initiatives in continuing education.

In 1986 CAVAL commenced a trial of an on-line regional OPAC service, based on the TOMUS system developed by Carlyle Systems in the USA. The trial was successful and led to the introduction of the COOL-CAT service on a permanent basis, early in 1988. At the end of the first twelve months of operation COOL-CAT was installed in nine libraries and supported a data base of just under 400,000 items.

Office of Library Cooperation (OLC)

As mentioned, OLC was established just as ABN commenced operations. As a result its programme of activities has been very much influenced by the existence of ABN, to the extent, for

example, that it did not attempt to develop its own shared cataloguing operations. Instead the bulk of its early work was devoted to ensuring a rapid transition by its member libraries to ABN. This included participation in the ABN pilot project, and training of library staff. Subsequent to this OLC has commissioned several useful studies and has been strongly involved in promoting OSI (the Open Systems Interconnection) as a means of facilitating networking amongst libraries with diverse in-house systems. OLC is still a designated training agency for ABN.

ASCIS

This network is unique in Australia because it is both national and only serves one type of library. It is also noteworthy in having been the only major cataloguing network to have been created after the emergence of ABN. In recent years ASCIS has added to its bibliographic (cataloguing) data base information of other types, including curriculum information and software reviews. At the end of the 1987-88 financial year it served about 4,400 schools.

Other Networks

There are many smaller groupings of libraries that have decided to network systems or services in order to achieve economies and to make resources more accessible. Typical are the consortia of libraries that share a single turnkey system, such as the LIBNET group of six college libraries in Victoria, sharing a URICA system based on Footscray Institute of Technology, or the SHORELINK group of five municipal libraries in Sydney which shares a Stowe BOOK system. The formation of consortia of two or three libraries is now a common phenomenon which mostly occurs with a minimum of fuss. Such groupings have of late been encouraged by Government at both Federal and State levels. The Dawkins initiatives in tertiary education have merely hastened the process, as have the recommendations made in Government-sponsored studies such as the Libraries Review conducted by Sylvia Geddes in Victoria.

The outlook for the future

Some of the idealism that led to the establishment of the first library networks may have evaporated but in its place has come a more realistic appreciation of the problems and benefits of co-operation and networking. The technology continues to influence the shape of future networks and networking activity. Even today the most effective networks continue to be the star networks like ABN, CLANN and Technilib, based on a single computer centre, but more distributed networks such as CAVAL's COOL-CAT are emerging.

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Librarians ... take a bow!

DELIA Nichols, writing in the March 1989 issue of *Portfolio* magazine has targeted Library Science as one of the 16 hot careers for the 1990s. Librarians are no longer perceived as pushing trolleys laden with dusty books through narrow stacks of bookshelves, but are now acknow-

ledged to be true information specialists, technologically literate, and aware of the need for continuing education in their field.

Delia quotes Alison Crook, State Librarian for the State Library of New South Wales as seeing her role as letting industry know that librarians are information brokers. 'I am trying to get

the idea across that we are not just providers of a public service, we are providers of information for basic economic development. The information we can provide is critical to the development of the country.'

Investment banks, government agencies, law offices, hospitals, accounting firms, and larger companies are also realising the importance of having their own information databases, and are finally employing librarians.

So, let's take a bow; we're finally getting the recognition we deserve.

Library Networks and Co-operatives ... from page 8.

Plans for the linking of stand-alone integrated systems have remained persistent and the attention paid to OSI at the Australian Libraries Summit clearly demonstrates where some pin their hopes for future networking activity.

But it is not the technology as much as the personal attitudes of librarians and those who employ them that will determine the future of networking. The fact that we have seen a large divergence in the way networks have developed in New South Wales and Victoria, for example, is attributable more to the personalities of those involved than to technological options that were available to them. It is probably fair to say that the options were selected in part because of different perceptions of potential costs and benefits and in part because of differing political realities which were themselves largely shaped by individuals.

There is nothing that would suggest any major change in this situation in the future. The bold will continue to be bold and the hesitant will continue to hesitate. Fear of loss of local autonomy will continue to affect some people's attitude to new networking proposals and they will always be able to point to numerous factors in the environment to demonstrate that the time is not yet ripe to take the next step.

Meanwhile we can be grateful that some librarians were prepared in the final years of the hopeful seventies to meet the challenge and that others in the leaner eighties have continued to demonstrate their willingness to carry it further. Libraries and information services have never been the same since.



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