

Notes from Online Information 1991

Ione Dean was an invited keynote speaker at this prestigious meeting in London at the end of last year. She has sent us some lively notes describing her impressions:

HERE ARE some personal experiences as a speaker, but a speaker with some rather unusual requirements—not only delivering a paper, but using four computers, audio-tape, two videos and 20 slides, all to be coordinated in a smooth 45 minutes. Of course, we needed to rehearse, and a rehearsal was set for the evening before. All the database vendors turned up, but not British Telecom, despite the confirmed arrangement with the organisers. So 50% of my talk seemed doomed, as two of the computers were to be online. Then there was no conference technical director, like we had in Sydney, so there was a big learning curve there too. The computers were operated from the stage, the video and slides from upstairs and the backstage control room needed two people! The dress rehearsal was a disaster, and it was all held in freezing temperatures as there was no heating connected yet.

Tuesday morning at 8 am saw the database vendor and myself ready for another rehearsal. The conference started at 9.30 am, and my paper was on at 9.45 am. Finally British Telecom came, and the PC's were connected at 8.45 am. A helper came to coordinate the computers—another big learning curve for him. My stomach by this time was threatening to throw at least ten ulcers on the spot.

But by 10.45 am the old adage proved its point again—'she'll be right on the night'. The talk was enjoyed by many, and both DIALOG and I were relieved that their sponsorship of my talk delivered the goods. By comparison, the Sydney preparations were extremely well organised and the technical staff very competent. There were other differences in London: an untidy stage where the overhead projector sometimes vied with the slides for space on the screen, cabling everywhere and a radio mike with the irritating cord. No real portable mikes. It was not as slick as the Australian ONLINE, where the speaker and the paper were announced on slides.

Other interesting comments—there were many German and French delegates, these were the foreign languages most often heard in the heated discussions between sessions. There were many exhibitions concentrating on CD-ROMS. One speaker said that by 1993 CD-ROMS will outnumber online databases.

The most interesting exhibit for me was the DATAPHONE, a combined telephone-videotext terminal with a 7" flat-screen display and a full keyboard. It has an

amazing range of functions, including word processing. It is neat, compact, portable, and can provide easy access for online databases.

Three major aspects of the conference for me were:

1. Concerns by many that the time has come when something needs to be done with all this raw data we can now access with the touch of a button. In this regard, Harry Collier of Infonortics has started an Association of Global Strategic Information with the emphasis on analysis, value-adding, information verification and synthesis rather than just information collection.

2. The buzz papers at the conference were on multi-media, with papers such as *Designing a multimedia staff training package*, and *Analog, Digital & Multimedia-implications for information access*. The paper that won the award was *Future prospects for network-based multimedia information retrieval* by Stephen Bullock of US West Advanced Technologies.

Stephen started off by munching an apple for his lunch, on stage, in a tie and blue jeans and then blew our minds for 1.5 hours (and then ran out of time as he skipped about 30 overhead slides!) on things like ISDN (Interactive Services Digital Network), B-ISDN (Broadband ISDN), frame delay, CGM (Computer Graphics Metafile), HyTime (Hypermedia Time-based Structuring Language), etc., using sentences like 'A single frame of digitized 525-line NISC or component RGB video, at roughly its analog quality, is about 4.9 Mbits. Ten seconds of roughly the same digitized video is about 1.5 gigabits.'

All in all, I found many of the papers presented very technical and came away with an optimistic New Years Resolution to do a course in Advanced Computing or Electrical Engineering before attending another Online Conference!

3. At the exhibition, CD-ROMS swarmed all over the two floors so that appears to be where the future seems to lie. Statistics quoted were that in 1993 the number of CD-ROMS would outnumber online systems.

The paper I found most informative was a tutorial 'Evaluation Criteria for CD-ROMS' presented by Carol Tenopir, one of the Lecturers at University of Hawaii. She looked at scope, content and quality of information in CD-ROMS, stressing that information from CD-ROM vendors was definitely not giving the client the full picture. One needs to dig deeper. For instance, in analysing exactly what scope the CD-ROM covered, one should check size (she found a 100 000-record discrepancy in

one). In checking time span she found some journals were not covered retrospectively, some were not up-to-date, some titles were covered for differing time-spans, some short, some long, some titles not currently covered, some gaps in title coverage, etc. She then gave search strategies on how to check these details and suggested that if the same information is available from different vendors, check each one out, build a map or grid of, perhaps, title coverage and then compare them before buying.

Ione Dean

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A grubby business

Library history as entertainment

THIS WAS the only half-serious title of an after-lunch talk Dr Peter Bishop of the University of Canberra gave to the Annual General Meetings of the University, College and Research Libraries Section of ALIA in Canberra last November. Peter Bishop officially retired from his position in the library school at the end of 1991, although he is still at the University in the capacity of Honorary Research Fellow and will continue as Editor of the Section's journal, *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*. His talk at the AGMs provided an opportunity for the Association to acknowledge his long and distinguished contribution to the profession.

Annual General Meetings? Not a misprint: the Executive of the ACT Group of UCRLS is also the Executive of the National Section for 1991 and 1992, so we had both a National and an ACT AGM—total time taken for the two, about ten minutes. The President's report and the Minutes of the National AGM will appear in *AARL* in due course.

A grubby business? No-one who has used books and papers left undisturbed for decades emerges unsullied; grubbing around and unearthing information is never clean although it may at times be entertaining. Peter stressed the importance and value of library history, but in the process did indeed entertain his large and appreciative audience. Rather than inadequately repeat a few anecdotes here, I hope he can be persuaded to publish a more permanent version of his paper.

Peter Clayton

President, UCRLS □