

Using the Internet in serials management

By Marie Kascus and Faith Merriman

A cost-effective means of resolving problems quickly

In February of 1993 the serials staff in the Elihu Burritt Library at Central Connecticut State University received training on the Innovative Interfaces library automation system. Soon after training, the staff began to convert systematically the manual records creating online check-in cards for approximately 3,400 current serials and continuations. Almost overnight, the manual check-in file was transformed from an internal working record to a public record of receipts in real time. Along with this change came the need to be attentive to the OPAC display to ensure that the check-in cards were helpful and not confusing. The daily record of receipts is now part of the online catalog displaying in tandem as material is checked in. Changes in both workflow and procedures came with the transition from a manual to an automated system, providing new challenges and opportunities for using the change to enhance serials operations and improve service.

One avenue we are exploring in meeting these new challenges is use of the Internet. Two of the basic Internet applications that are useful in daily serials management are: 1) remote log-in to another computer and 2) e-mail. Gillian McCombs is correct in noting that much of the current library activity on the Internet has emanated from public services,¹ but we feel that the Internet offers new possibilities for facilitating technical services work. We are using the Internet in a variety of ways to locate and communicate information as we seek more pro-

ductive and cost-effective ways to manage serials in an automated environment.

Remote log-in Internet application

The ability to review the thinking of a larger body of peers in making policy decisions has advantages. Having the benefit of the collective thinking of other colleagues helps to provide a rationale and a framework for making decisions, even if you choose not to handle a problem in the exact same way.

During the conversion process, we found it helpful to log in to OPACs at other Innovative Interfaces sites to view their check-in cards. This was done when we were deciding how to handle the public display of specific kinds of materials such as indexes, microforms, CD-ROMs, or loose-leaf services. Using this application we can quickly and easily gather decision support for formulating policies on how to handle particular serials check-in records based on the choices other librarians are making in processing the same materials. Remote access to other catalogs provides an invisible way of sharing information and cooperating.

Remote log-in to other online catalogs helps to inform claiming decisions in monitoring receipt of our serial publications. Using remote log-in to other OPACs, we can quickly investigate suspected delivery problems with a particular subscription. Nonreceipt of a current issue for an irregularly published serial makes it difficult to know whether to claim the issue immediately or to wait. Now we can log in to another library catalog, call up its check-in card for the delayed title, and know immediately if the issue we are missing has been received at another library and, therefore, needs to be claimed. With publishers' limited stock, jour-

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nal issues can quickly go out of print, so claiming in a timely manner is important and can affect whether an issue is received at all.

Also via the Internet, we telnet to a remote computer in Alabama to access EBSCO's worldwide serials database for several purposes: 1) to use the EBSCONET system to claim missing issues; 2) to view the Journal Express Transport Service's check-in records for delayed title information; 3) to search EBSCO's missing copy bank of popular titles and request that EBSCO send us the needed issue instead of claiming it from the publisher; or 4) to locate title and publisher information. Access in this way is quick and cost-effective.

E-mail Internet application

The e-mail application makes it possible to correspond without having to consider geographical boundaries or time zones. The communication is virtually instantaneous, does not

Using traditional forms of communication, it could take weeks or months to get answers to questions that now can be answered in days or minutes.

intrude on the recipient as telephone communication does, and allows the other person to respond with the needed information when it is convenient. E-mail has the added advantage of facilitating a response by making it quick and easy to *reply* to the message received.

Since problems come to the surface more quickly in the online catalog, solving them in a timely manner is important. One way we are trying to resolve problems quickly is by utilizing the Internet to communicate with journal publishers about delays, nonreceipts, and problems in enumeration. Our recent Internet communication includes two examples of bindery preparation problems that were resolved by e-mail on the Internet.

For the journal *Computer Graphics* we were unable to determine if the latest two volumes were complete with two and three issues each, since the previous pattern had been four to five issues per volume. We found no information in the issues themselves to help resolve the problem. An e-mail address was located in

the journal, a message was sent, and a response was received within 20 minutes indicating that volume 26 was complete in three issues and 27 in two issues, but the publishing frequency would revert back to the previous pattern of four issues per volume with volume 28.² With this information confirmed, we were then able to send the volumes for binding with confidence. We were also able to modify the check-in card to project the expected date for future issues based on the frequency information provided.

Bindery preparations identified a problem with the journal *Chromosoma*. It was not clear if volume 102 was complete in 10 issues or whether a supplement had been published for that volume, as in previous years, and not received. Again, an e-mail address was located and an Internet message was sent. The response back indicated that the volume did, in fact, have a supplement mailed out with the December issue and that the delivery department would send us a copy in the next few weeks if we did not receive one.³ Since we had not received the supplement, we used the REPLY option to their message to request that it be sent.

With serials, it is not always possible to resolve problems of incorrect enumeration or nondelivery. Incorrect enumeration sometimes results in repeated claims for the wrong issue and wastes time and effort on the part of both library and publisher. Nondelivery can result in issues being out of print when claimed creating gaps in the journal collection. Problems in nondelivery impact our ability to serve our clientele. Using traditional forms of communication, it could take weeks or months to get answers to questions that now can be answered in days or minutes. To be able to solve problems in a timely manner means increased productivity in serials operations and better service to our public service staff and users.

Preliminary survey of the availability of e-mail addresses in journals

In the short time that we have been involved with our new integrated online system and the Internet, we have observed an increase in the number of journals that include e-mail addresses along with the more traditional ways of communicating. Internet addresses are being provided in journals for a variety of purposes including communication with the editor, copyright, document delivery, article reprints,

(Serials cont. on page 176)

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