Role of Cataloguing in the Automated Library Activities and Services

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Abstract

Automating house-keeping operations is a major effort in the area of computer application to libraries. Technology is the most significant factor forcing libraries and information centres to develop more effective methods of service delivery. Catalogues are being computerised the worldover to facilitate better access points and multi-dimensional searches in the library holdings. The emergence of online catalogues has offered better access capabilities. Access to a variety of databases is one of the recent developments which is greatly influencing library services in general and catalogues in particular. Librarians now require to maintain their library catalogue in such a way that it should be able to serve the diversified needs of a wide range of users and systems.

1. INTRODUCTION

Catalogues have been in existence in one form or the other perhaps as long as the libraries themselves. Amongst many ancient libraries, the famous library of Alexandria had also a catalogue developed by its scholar-librarian Callimachus what was called as Pinakes. Both the librarians and the library users have been interested in catalogue as an information retrieval tool. However, Charles Ammi Cutter set out the objectives of the library catalogue way back in 1876; and since then the library professionals have been attempting to fulfil those objectives through card form of the catalogue.

2. ROLE OF CATALOGUE

As libraries and information technology progressed, computer applications in libraries began as an effort towards automating the house-keeping operations, such as acquisition, circulation, serial control, and also cataloguing.

Technology is forcing libraries and information centres to develop more effective methods of service delivery. Catalogue record has been computerized to facilitate better access points and multi-dimensional searches in the library holdings. The libraries in automated environment have to make maximum avenues of access to knowledge and information collected by them, and more and more libraries are now heading toward that.

Libraries have 'identified and organised the records for ease of retrieval', said Wedgeworth, and stated further that they 'have developed extensive bibliographic standards and controls that enable the users to identify and find individual items among the millions of works created each year throughout the world.' He has clearly underlined the importance of catalogue which has guided generations of scholars, and now their relevance in the automated environment has rather been increasing.

In the automated library activities and services, the role of cataloguing becomes rather important. The librarians have to make known to its users the availability of the range of documents collected. Librarians, through their catalogues, have to arrange and present the information contained in a wide variety of documents so that their intellectual contents become clear to the users. As the catalogue will be integrated with other automated library activities, it will be able to provide access to materials other than books alone unlike the manual system. This will further boost the library services which can be made more efficient as well as effective by retrieving citation to many more formats of documents.

In such an environment, emergence of the online catalogues has offered better access capabilities. Libraries can also think of extending the catalogue, while making it online, and providing access to a range of databases and information services. The OPACs in the automated environment are becoming more than the catalogue, as through database these provide access to a variety of other documents such as periodicals, special files, catalogues of other libraries, reference and information sources, etc., located at different places. Thus OPACs are not only serving as information retrieval system but as a module of an integrated library management system.

But in most of the cases, libraries at present are in a transitional stage from card catalogue to online catalogue. Even in developed countries, it will take some more time to reap the full benefits of a networked information system as there are various stages of development among the libraries going for online catalogue, whereas developing countries lack infrastructure support in terms of technology and finance. In the libraries of these countries therefore the traditional approach to catalogue will continue for some more time at least for two reasons: (i) millions of existing records in libraries; and (ii) enormous financial implications of the change from one to another format.

However, in the times to come, the attempts towards online catalogues leading to OPACs are increasing the worldover. This is keeping in pace with the challenges and opportunities of the future libraries, what could be called as electronic or digital libraries. These libraries with such catalogues can make available to their users much wider range of information from a series of containers more speedily. The users also seek efficiency and the libraries have to use technology only to serve their users, and society.

In order to fulfil the users' information needs, catalogues generally integrate, structure, control, and maintain information about the library collections. When computerised catalogue will provide for complete, up-to-date structure, the computer will allow multidimensional searches in comparison to linear searches in earlier forms. Computer can now provide as many access points as the data elements and thus enhance its capabilities. Computerised catalogue has therefore more flexible access mechanism than the card catalogue, and hence it makes possible linking of data at the 'post-coordinate' stage. This will also increase the service level to the users.

In this way the bibliographic access system of the library is reaching out for the benefit of the users. These access systems will have to adequately take care of the growing needs of growing variety of users. Pat Oddy is of the view that 'the second age of bibliographic control' is at the threshold, and we may find ourselves away from the well established MARC, UNIMARC, etc., because the move of linking the catalogues to other databases and catalogues of other libraries is increasing. Such moves will help integrate the catalogue with the documents facilitating better access to the new variety of materials even in digitized form.

In order to create a future library bibliographic access system that will provide efficient and high quality retrieval, Oddy realises the following need for at least three requirements:

❑ Work towards a common analytic approach and development path for both general and specialist bibliographic standards.

❑ Extend the use of bibliographic standards and tools over a wider range of materials.

❑ Develop a subject approach to information.

3. CONCLUSION

It is therefore asserted that an integrated automated catalogue can function effectively and efficiently in retrieving the intellectual content from the collection. Ultimately, the library catalogue has to be maintained in such a way that it is able to serve the diversified needs of a wide range of users as well as systems. We have to attempt to find a solution to give an access to the excess of information resulting from information deluge of today. Our libraries are now striving to adapt themselves to the changing world and developing technologies, problems notwithstanding. It is believed that the new technologies may offer opportunities about equality of access to information, particularly access to electronically stored information in electronic mterials, so that we could serve the users better than before, and accomplish the goal of shaping the society into a well formed society. This is the real challenge that lies ahead.

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