

Computers in Libraries 2000

Highlights from the 15th annual conference

by Peter V. Deekle

Computers in Libraries 2000, prepared in cooperation with the Special Libraries Association, was held in Washington, D.C., March 15–17. Its sponsor, Information Today, Inc., described it as “North America’s largest technology conference and exhibition for librarians and information managers,” and, if initial estimates reflected actual attendance, more than 3,000 persons attended the three-day event.

For those unfamiliar with the conference format, each day consists of concurrent morning and afternoon tracks, with pre- and post-conference daylong programs before and after the main conference. All conferees receive published proceedings at the onsite registration desk.

Among the sessions I attended for the Learning: Training and Instruction track, was “Virtual Instruction—Tutorials and Literacy.” The two presenters, Erica Lilly from Kent State and Karen Hartman from Mary Washington College, highlighted unique Web tutorials and the means for their creation and maintenance. Crediting ACRL’s “Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services” as a basis for planning and setting service priorities, they demonstrated models of virtual reference service.

How to do it on the Web

I particularly appreciate the variety of program types at this conference, ranging from

panel discussions and presentations to demonstration sessions and practical “how to” sessions. The latter included “How to Do It on the Web” featuring the Bibliographical Center for Research’s Michael Sauer and Laura Cohen from the University of Albany. They conducted a session on how to teach searching skills for a dynamic Web environment. For another program Karen Hartman joined Tufts University’s Regina Raboin for “Networked Teaching—What to Teach and How.” They offered interesting approaches to teaching the “essential Web” in 50 minutes.

Digitizing, ownership, and future

A whole track at the conference was devoted to the design and maintenance of library Web sites. Annemarie Del Vecchio of LEXIS-NEXIS moderated three successive sessions. Design tips, promotional strategies, and advice on overcoming hurdles were reported by presenters from academic libraries.

Content and collections were the substance of “Digitizing Case Studies.” These two consecutive sessions on the second day included a live demonstration by Carol Ann Hughes, of the University of Iowa, of a digitized special collection project. The second program highlighted the use of digital media technology in producing machine-readable documents for all major United Nations organs by Nathalie Leroy and the Army Research

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Laboratory's digital collection (over 5,000 PDF files) of technical reports by Lillian Woon Gassie.

Not all of the programs concerned services and resources. W. Lee Hisle of Connecticut College and Danielle Mihram from the University of Southern California joined a panel of attorneys, legal policy analysts, and the Register of Copyrights in a wide-ranging presentation concerning ownership rights, censorship, and protection. This session raised ethical and legal questions for libraries and society regarding an individual's right to unrestricted information access, regardless of an individual's age.

Forecasting trends and developments has always been a significant part of this conference. Laverna Saunders of Salem State College, provided a comprehensive description of the virtual academic library and its impact on staff, organization, work styles, and outcomes measures. But in his presentation, "Yes, They Still Want to Print!" David Bennett of Robert Morris College, reminded conferees that as electronic resources increase in number and variety, more patrons want to print copies.

Computers in Libraries has established a tradition for evening hospitality venues. This

year, the evening "Technology and Knowledge Forum: A Look at Dead and Emerging Technologies," an informal panel of presenters, opened this social/post prandial event with a rousing rendition of The Beatles's "Hard Days Night." During a free-wheeling exchange of opinions, panelists traded concerns and predictions, including: worries about the Microsoft stranglehold on creative development, the proliferation of new search engines designed by persons without indexing or metadata knowledge, limitations of bandwidth for information access, and a worrisome shortage of librarians in this "information age."

One reason the conference moved from its Crystal City, Virginia, site was the need for more exhibit space, which the present venue at the Washington Hilton provides. Nearly 100 information technology vendors participated. Their generous sponsorship provided the means for the diverse program offerings throughout the conference week.

Computers in Libraries 2000 proved, once more, that a conference with "something for everyone" could be both educational and entertaining. ■



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