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, 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 productive 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 claim-
ing 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 world-
wide serials database for several purposes: 1)
to use the EBSCONET system to claim missing
issues; 2) to view the Journal Express Trans-
port 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 geo-
graphical boundaries or time zones. The com-
munication is virtually instantaneous, does not
intrude on the recipient as telephone commu-
nication 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 prob-
lems in enumeration. Our recent Internet com-
munication includes two examples of bind-
ery 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 informa-
tion in the issues themselves to help resolve
the problem. An e-mail address was located in
the journal, a message was sent, and a re-
response was received within 20 minutes indi-
cating 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. 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 informa-
tion 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 re-
ceived. 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. 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 re-
solve problems of incorrect enumeration or non-
delivery. Incorrect enumeration sometimes re-
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 cre-
ating gaps in the journal collection. Problems
in nondelivery impact our ability to serve our
clientele. Using traditional forms of communi-
cation, 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 prob-
lems in a timely manner means increased pro-
ductivity 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 com-
municating. Internet addresses are being pro-
vided in journals for a variety of purposes in-
cluding communication with the editor,
copyright, document delivery, article reprints,
(Serials cont. on page 176)
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