

of chaos that sometimes comes with using the Internet. The author allows the librarian to constructively approach the vast quantities of information that are on the Internet. Her aim is to give librarians "a sense of the Internet as a community of individuals and organizations who share information through online conversations and online resources." (p.xi) To do this she covers the use of e-mail, newsgroups and Frequently Asked Questions, as well as library catalogues, databases and electronic books in reference and collection development work. While the lists of Web sources in the appendices are most suitable for public libraries (and some appear to no longer exist), there are useful strategies and principles here for the library professional, particularly those working in customer service areas. This book can only help boost any librarian's confidence, especially the more inexperienced Internet user, when approaching this rather daunting information resource.



In July the Riverina Regional Library Service launched a new library system. This was the worldwide launch of the very attractive windows-based Libero system from Insight in Queensland. The following short article describes the process of getting to this stage. Although this system is in a public library, the experience described here would be of interest to anyone dealing with branch libraries.

AUTOMATING FOR THE THIRD TIME

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John Scott

During the early part of 1994, it was becoming increasingly obvious to senior management at the Riverina Regional Library that the existing automated library management system was not catering to our needs, particularly in the area of service provision to our remote branches. The regional library includes a total of 10 branches within a 100km radius of the central library at Wagga Wagga, nine of which are not within local call access. The existing computer system did not facilitate the delivery of a number of basic library services at branch level, such as book reservation, member registration, automated catalogue facilities, and OPAC access. All work associated with these processes had to be done manually at headquarters, using either fax or phone to communicate messages; far from an efficient or cost effective means of doing business!

Consideration was given to installing direct lines at branch libraries, but costs ruled this option out and at the time our existing vendor was unable to provide an appropriate software solution. The quality and philosophy surrounding the telecommunications infrastructure in rural Australia leaves country residents seriously disadvantaged in terms of access to technology in situations such as these.

The decision was subsequently made to apply for a Library Development Grant in the annual NSW Library Council grant process to assist us in funding a computer system which would fulfil the immediate and future needs of the Riverina Regional Library. Early in May 1995 confirmation was received of a grant allocation of \$80,000; this amount, combined with library funds, enabled us to take the first steps towards purchasing a computer system which would meet our specifications. Earlier research had revealed that few software vendors currently had products available that would meet all of our remote branch requirements, without compromising the considerable functionality that our existing system provided at the central library, so we proceeded to write a very detailed tender specification document for our specific site requirements. Thankfully, we were able to use the excellent document prepared some months earlier by Richard Nichols of Clarence Regional Library as the basis for a very comprehensive and detailed specification.

We attempted to document all of our requirements in almost agonising detail, recognising that anything not included may well be omitted from the end product, and the vendor could argue "it was not in the tender document".

Some 30 tender documents were requested in response to advertisements placed in national papers, after which we waited (impatiently) to see what products and prices would be offered to us.

The day eventually arrived when the responses were opened, and from an initial field of 8, we very quickly identified three systems which had the potential to fulfil our many requirements. Vendor presentations were scheduled, and after detailed presentations in which strategic staff were involved, the choice was narrowed down to two vendors. After considerable deliberation, including visits to existing sites at which each product was operational, the decision was made to select Insight Informatics, offering a new windows-based product which was in the final stages of development from the existing character based system. Several factors influenced our final decision:

- Insight guaranteed that we would have extensive input into the software development process, ensuring that the end product would be tailored to the requirements of our site in as far as practical
- Insight's existing user base was specifically public libraries in NSW, and the company demonstrated a very clear understanding of the needs of country public libraries
- Existing Insight sites which were either visited or contacted spoke highly of the quality of the product and the support offered by the staff.

In December 1995 the development process began with the arrival of Sam Patane, the CEO from Insight Informatics in Brisbane, just two days after we notified him! A test system was set up on a stand alone PC with the skeleton of the new Windows system loaded. January 1996 saw a test data outload begin, which was sent to Brisbane for analysis.

The library system had made the decision to concurrently upgrade computer hardware throughout all branch libraries, and expressions of interest for the supply of hardware were sought in early February. The quotation from Total Peripherals Group (Wagga Wagga) was successful because of its competitive edge in price, availability of local support, and a three year parts and labour warranty which was significantly greater than other offers.

A variety of factors contributed to a less than ideal experience with data conversion; there was a distinct lack of information available about the structure of data held on the existing system, which did not make the task easy. Libraries do, at times, decide to move to different software platforms because of changing needs, and vendors need to recognise this as part and parcel of the nature of technology; whilst vendors cannot be expected to reveal proprietary information, the process need not be as difficult as ours proved to be.

The Insight Libero Windows-based library management system has, at the time of writing this article, been operational at the Wagga Wagga City Library for one week, preparatory to its staged introduction to the remainder of our branch libraries. This is the first time that the system has been installed anywhere in the world; it is currently being demonstrated in Europe and Asia, and is the subject of strong reviews and a great deal of interest. We believe that the product has matured significantly over the duration of our involvement, and will continue to grow and develop in the coming twelve months.

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