Duplicates On-line: Using the Internet for Materials Exchange

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Libraries are very adept at finding ways to stretch their limited resources, and one of the more successful strategies to this end has been the cooperative exchange of duplicate materials. For the most part, these exchanges are comprised of single journal issues which are used to replace lost, stolen, or mutilated items which create gaps in a library's holdings, but books and hard-to-locate materials are also often included. Many exchange programs have sprung up over the years -- the American Association of Law Libraries formed what may have been the first duplicate exchange committee in 1906[1] and that program has been joined by a Christian colleges periodical exchange list[2], ALA's ALCTS Duplicates Exchange Union (formerly RTSD/RS Gifts and Exchange), and many other programs developed by various library associations and academic institutions scattered across the world from Pennsylvania to New Delhi. The popularity of duplicates exchange programs isn't hard to understand. Many studies analyzing the costs associated with duplicates and exchange programs (which usually include only staff time and postage) have concluded that the cooperative exchange of materials is very cost effective.[3]

Traditionally, exchange programs have followed a simple plan of action. First, a group of interested libraries agree to participate in the program, and each one prepares a list of the materials they have available for exchange. Then they duplicate their lists and mail them to the other members. The recipients read through the lists, mark items they need, and return them by mail to the originating libraries, which in turn, fill the requests. Usually postage is reimbursed. Transaction completed.

While this plan is simple, it is also time-consuming and not very efficient. Preparing the list for mailing takes time, so each participant will probably send out only two or three lists a year. Members of large cooperatives will receive many lists. Going through a list takes time, and going through a lot of lists takes a lot of time and becomes mind-numbing relatively quickly. Many items will be requested soon after receipt of a new list, out-dating the list rather

quickly -- thus time is wasted on requesting items that have already been taken. Even so, the benefits still far outweigh these disadvantages.

The Advantage of the Electronic Age

Even though the described process is time-consuming and inefficient, there is little doubt that cooperative collection-building through duplicates and exchanges will continue in libraries for some time to come. The good news is that in recent years several innovative programs involving electronic mail, on-line programs, and the Internet have been developed to make the process much easier and more effective. Progress is occurring every day, and as more and more libraries incorporate computers and Internet access into their operations, they can take advantage of many opportunities available electronically. Today there are a number of options available, some more sophisticated than others. Many are free, while others like Faxon's *SerialsQuest* involve fees. These alternatives allow libraries to choose programs suited to their level of "electronic sophistication" and their budgets. As these change, library staff can easily switch to another option that is more suited to their needs.

To access any of the following on-line options, a library needs access to the Internet (through any one of a variety of means), but that's all. You don't need to be a computer programmer or have a great deal of electronic expertise. If you can use an e-mail software package, you can participate in duplicates and exchanges on-line.

What Does E-mail Have to Do With Duplicates?

One of the easiest ways to access some of the on-line programs is to subscribe to an Internet "list" via e-mail. An Internet list is sort of like an interactive on-line bulletin board. These lists are given names that indicate the subjects they deal with -- *Autocat* (library cataloging), *Serialst* (library serials), *Travel-L* (travel), etc. People interested in a given subject -- be it libraries, gardening, duplicates and exchange, or almost anything else -- can "subscribe" to a list about that subject by simply sending an e-mail message to the computer that "houses" the list. After subscribing, those with questions or opinions about the subject need just send an e-mail message to the list, and it is then distributed to all other subscribers to that list. After reading the initial message/ question, others can answer or give opinions by responding with another e-mail addressed to the list. Some lists are completely open to anyone and everyone, while others are "owned" by human beings (list administrators or list owners) who moderate the list to some extent.

You may wonder why some messages are addressed to a computer rather

than to a person or a list. Several software programs have been developed so that the general "housekeeping" duties of the list -- adding names to the mailing list, taking names off, postponing mail, etc. -- can be handled automatically by a computer rather than requiring a person's attention. These programs are known as "listserv" or "listproc" and thus you send subscription requests to the listserv address, while messages intended for general distribution are addressed to the name of the list.

BACKSERV

One very popular option is an on-line Internet list called *BACKSERV* (the Back Issues and Duplicate Exchange List).[4] It is hosted by Readmore, Inc., and the list administrators are Marilyn Geller and Amira Aaron. To subscribe to *BACKSERV*, address an e-mail message to LISTSERV@SUN.READMORE.COM. Leave the subject line blank. In the body or text of the message simply say: subscribe BACKSERV yourfirstname yourlastname, i.e.: subscribe BACKSERV Hillary Clinton. Then send the message. Soon the computer will reply with a welcome message from *BACKSERV*.

BACKSERV is a list devoted exclusively to the informal exchange of serials back issues and books among libraries. The list provides a forum for the listing of both available and desired serial issues and books in all subject areas. Once you have subscribed to this list, you will begin to receive messages through e-mail from other members. Most of the messages are rather informal and say things like, "We have the following journals available:" or "We need the journals below to complete our holdings," and are accompanied by a short list of titles with volumes and dates. While the list was originally intended as a forum for serials exchange, requests and offers for monographs appear with some regularity, and books have recently been officially added to the scope of the list. As the messages arrive you can scan them to see if you either need or have any of the listed titles and issues. If so, simply reply to the sender and make a request or an offer. If you want to post a message for the other subscribers to read, address an e-mail message to the list: BACKSERV@SUN.READMORE.COM and then write the text of your message as usual. Note that you address the listserv (or computer) when you subscribe or do any other housekeeping duties, but you address the name of the list, *BACKSERV*, when you want to distribute a message to the other members.

BACKSERV is easy to use, and with almost 500 members it is a busy list. During a seven-day period in late January 1995, seventy messages offering or

requesting items were distributed to the list. Some participants report exchanging hundreds of titles per year. However, *BACKSERV* is not a moderated list, i.e., the list administrators don't monitor any of the message traffic. The welcome message states that "it is meant purely as a communication vehicle for librarians and library staff offering or seeking back issues of serial titles or books." Therefore, in many ways *BACKSERV* merely automates the traditional paper process that duplicate exchange sections in libraries have been using for many years, although communication is much quicker and turn-around time is shortened considerably. However, there is another option that uses even more of the powerful tools that the electronic age provides.

DEU-L

DEU-L (Duplicates Exchange Union List) began as an on-line pilot project that was approved by ALA's Association for Library Collections & Technical Services DEU Committee in early 1994. It is now maintained at Sam Houston State University (SHSU) and is managed by Janice Lange at SHSU. To subscribe to *DEU-L*, send an e-mail message to LISTSERV@SHSU.EDU. Leave the subject blank and the text of the message should read: subscribe DEU-L yourfirstname yourlastname. As you can see, the process for subscribing to DEU-L is identical to subscribing to *BACKSERV* (except for address and list name).

However, the similarities between the two lists end there. While *BACKSERV* serves as a busy, informal, unstructured means of communication, *DEU-L* has very little traffic. Other than basic instructions, occasional questions, and notices that new lists have been received, *DEU-L* carries few messages. Instead, the heart of this project lies in the indexed DEU files located on the SHSU gopher.

What is a gopher? Basically, a gopher is a collection of databases (and perhaps other electronic products) that a site such as a university, a commercial enterprise, or a branch of the government maintains for its users. To access these various databases, the site creates a subject menu that a user uses to simply pick and choose items. The top, or main, menu often leads to submenus, which lead to yet other choices. It provides an easy route of access. Many universities (and other sites) have gopher servers that are available for public use.

Sam Houston State University maintains a gopher that includes the DEU project as one of its options. You can access the SHSU gopher several ways. You can follow this gopher route: Choose: All the Gopher Servers in the World --

North America -- USA -- Texas -- Sam Houston State University. Or, if you have a World Wide Web browser such as Mosaic or Netscape, use the URL (Uniform Resource Locator) gopher://niord.shsu.edu. Once you've accessed the SHSU gopher, choose the DEU Library Prototype Demonstration Area. Here you will find several choices -- names and addresses of participants, individual lists you may scan, and, best of all, a searchable index which allows you to search all of the available lists at the same time.

The DEU project works differently than do most duplicate exchange programs. A participant uses a word processing program to prepare a list of titles and issues available, then sends the list to the DEU manager, either on disk or via e-mail. The manager then posts that list to the SHSU gopher and indexes it along with all of the other lists. Since all of the lists are in one index, the user only has to enter a search for a specific title once in order to check all lists available. Gone are the days of flipping through pages and pages of list after list looking for that one issue of *Sports Illustrated!* One search will retrieve all instances of the desired title; if the right issue appears, simply contact the originating library to request it. The only costs involved are postage reimbursements.

The lists posted to *DEU-L* can also be more current, thereby creating a more accurate and useful database. When exchanges are made or new issues become available, editing the list with a word processing program is an easy task. Since the newly edited list doesn't have to be printed or prepared for mass mailing, it can easily and quickly be forwarded to the DEU manager for updating. The *DEU-L* project is still young, and as of February 1995, there were only fourteen members. Since the success of any duplicates exchange program depends on the number of institutions participating, the true efficacy of the system can't be judged until more interest is generated in this exciting new program.

Other Options

Other duplicate exchange options available on the Internet target specific interest groups. Faxon's *SerialsQuest* deals primarily with medical journals and at present generally serves only members of the Medical Library Association. This is a fee-based service that operates on the centralized database concept. Members submit lists of titles offered and/or titles wanted. The software looks for matches and e-mails or faxes lists of matches to the requesters. Libraries are charged for issues received and credited for issues provided.[5] For libraries with engineering collections, the Engineering Libraries Division of the American Society for Engineering Education also operates an on-line duplicate exchange

mailing list called ELDNET-L. This list doesn't use listserv or listproc software to automatically distribute mail to subscribers; instead libraries submit lists to the project coordinator who then redistributes them via e-mail to current members of the exchange.[6] An average of two lists per week are distributed to the 150 members and the lists are also posted to *BACKSERV*.

Conclusions

This is an exciting time for libraries. Increasingly, our everyday operations are enhanced and made more efficient by new applications made possible by developments of the "electronic age." It is noteworthy that one of the oldest methods of collection development, duplicates exchange, has been so greatly influenced and improved by the use of the Internet. And while someday, maybe, electronic journals will replace print, that day is still a long way off. In the interim, this is an example of the future touching today.

Endnotes

1. Tim J. Watts, "A Preliminary Examination of the AALL Exchange of Duplicates Program," *Law Library Journal* 81 (spring 1989): 293.

2. A list of participating libraries can be found in "Periodicals Exchange," *The Christian Librarian* 36, no. 2 (1993): 64-66.

3. Lynn Branche Brown, "Serians Duplicates Exchange Programs: Costs and Benefits," *The Bottom Line* 6, no. 2 (1992): 28.

4. Quotes from *BACKSERV* welcome message distributed to participants upon subscribing are used with permission from the list administrators.

5. For further information on SerialsQuest, contact Glenn Jaeger at Faxon; E-mail: GJAEGER@FAXON.COM.

6. Questions about the ASEE/ELD Duplicates Exchange should be directed to Orion Pozo, coordinator; E-mail: ORION_POZO@NCSU.EDU.