

MARION COUNTY

INTERNET LIBRARY

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INTRODUCTION

The Marion County

Internet Library provides the residents of Marion County with access to a variety of web-based information resources which augment and expand upon Indiana's state-wide Project Inspire. The two-year project, which began in July 1998, is funded by \$985,000 from The Indianapolis Foundation Library Fund. The Marion County Internet Library provides access to commercial databases as well as creating resources of local interest which are not commercially available. Awareness, training, and an evaluation study are also included in the project. The project is managed by the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library and is governed by a steering committee made up of school, public, and academic librarians.

BACKGROUND

Marion County has a unique resource in the Library Fund of The Indianapolis Foundation. This fund, which was the result of an anonymous gift to The Foundation over a decade ago, produces nearly a million and a half dollars a year to support library services in Marion County.

At the time that Project Inspire was developing at the state level a number of librarians in Marion County began discussing using money from The Indianapolis Foundation Library Fund to create a common resource that would supplement what was being offered by Inspire. With the implementation of Inspire in early 1998, a proposal was prepared for The Indianapolis Foundation to create resources that would supplement the Inspire offerings. The proposal was approved by The Indianapolis Foundation Board and funding began in July 1998.

PROJECT GOALS

The Marion County Internet Library builds on the Inspire project to make additional electronic resources available to the residents of Marion County from the county's libraries, schools, and academic campuses, and from homes and businesses in the county. The project was designed to further the first three goals established in the Library Fund's Strategic Plan. First, the project will create high quality collections that will be available to all of the county's residents and in all of the county's libraries. All public libraries in the county, as

well as all schools, and all colleges and universities are included in the

project. Second, the project is a cooperative one which was supported by all of the libraries in the county. The process used to develop this project was broad based. Third, the resources created by this project enhance cooperation between the libraries and a variety of other organizations in central Indiana. To this end, conversations with the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, the United Way of Central Indiana, Indianapolis Online, and a number of other community organizations were held as part of the planning for the project. These conversations have led to revisions in the proposal and, more importantly, to the realization that there are a variety of opportunities to use this project to develop partnerships that will take information that is available within the community and make it easily available to the community as a whole. Finally, this resource will be unique and should provide a competitive advantage to the county and its citizens. The project should enhance social, cultural, and economic development in Marion County.

PROJECT STRUCTURE

The project proposal established a Steering Committee made up of three librarians from each of the following groups: high school, academic, and public libraries. The Steering Committee evaluates, selects and administers the commercial and local content databases for the project. The Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library is the formal recipient of the grant, manages the contract negotiations, and is the fiscal agent for the project. The Steering Committee hired a consultant to manage the everyday aspects of the project including vendor relations, training, and support.

COMMERCIAL DATABASES

Once funding was approved, the Steering Committee looked at a number of databases and had representatives come in to demonstrate their products. The products chosen were: Electric Library, SIRS Discoverer, SIRS Researcher, and Gale's DISCovering Science, DISCovering U.S. History, DISCovering World History, and the Dictionary of Literary Biography. Business and health resources were also reviewed but rejected because of either a prohibitive cost or because they were too narrow in scope. As would be expected the

project had a strong interest in providing access to the *Indianapolis Star/News*, the major daily newspaper for central Indiana. The two vendors with rights to the *Star/News* were approached for proposals. While pricing was high it was within the reach of the project; however neither vendor could provide access to the product except within library buildings. Since access to resources from homes and businesses was a priority of the project, this was unacceptable. Discussions were held with the management of the *Star/News* and it became clear that they viewed the library market as limited to library buildings. What we viewed as remote access for library users the *Star/News* viewed as the "consumer" market and they were unwilling to license access to it as they had plans to sell directly to this market on a per-article basis.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Access to the databases is provided two ways: IP filtering and user authentication. All schools and libraries which have their own servers are eligible for IP filtering. This method of access is transparent for the end users who need only click on an icon or select a database from a bookmarked list. Over one hundred IP ranges are maintained for schools, universities, colleges and libraries for the entire county. Remote access for patrons is set up with a referring URL that is managed by the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library. Patrons connect to the referring URL and are authenticated by entering their library card number and password. Once the user has been authenticated, access is provided for all databases that are licensed for remote usage.

The remote access through Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library worked technically, but it was hard to explain, especially to the general public. The URL for the library is not easy to remember and explaining what to do once you got to the site was not simple. In order to solve these problems Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, at the suggestion of the project, found a good domain name which can be used to promote the service. A new gateway site with the simple address of www.iLibrary.org will be put in place shortly. This site will have access to the project's resources, the Inspire databases, and the databases to which the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library subscribed. Our hope is that the new site will make promoting the site easier.

Technical issues can become problematic when dealing with different types of access such as a referring URL and IP filtering. Our experience was that sales representatives may not be knowledgeable about the types of access that their companies can provide. We found that it is important for library technical staff to communicate with the vendor's technical staff to make sure that access problems will be minimized or alleviated before signing a contract.

The referring URL was problematic for some vendors either because they did not have the technology or they did not allow access in this way. For this project, the referring URL was necessary so that users would not have too many access hoops to jump through. Users need only remember one password—the public library ID card. Part of the project's philosophy was that access to the databases must be as easy as possible.

ISSUES IN NEGOTIATIONS

Negotiating county-wide contracts can be tricky. The project was fortunate to have the experience and resources of the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library during this stage. The first issue in negotiations is pricing. Each vendor seemed to have a different system for determining a price quote for a county-wide population of about 800,000. Some vendors would price strictly by the number of people who would have access. Others went with a building count for each site that would be IP filtered and added a flat rate for remote access. One vendor took almost two months to give us a quote because they had to determine their *potential* customers in the county. Based on that figure they calculated a loss of revenue and provided pricing for the county.

It is possible to lock in pricing for future database selections. For example, for one new product whose interface was not fully developed, the vendor gave a good price because it was new, and adding it to this project would be a huge boost for the vendor. When a contract was negotiated with that vendor for another product, a clause locking in the price for the next six months for the new product was added.

In all cases additional clauses in the contracts were added to make sure that any problems that might arise, no matter how improbable, were covered. An institution's right to terminate its subscription is rarely written into a contract. Conceivably a vendor could get rid of 85 percent of its content, and the institution would not be able to terminate the agreement. Instead the institution is locked into the agreement and would then be paying for a product that is essentially useless. A termination clause can guarantee that you will not pay for products that are not as they were when you purchased them. Upon termination, we reserved the right to receive a prorated refund for any time remaining on the contract.

Performance clauses are also written into the contracts. Databases cannot be going down on a weekly basis while vendors perform upkeep. Naturally, some upkeep is necessary if they want to continue to provide the best possible product. But even two hours a week is too much. An acceptable downtime was determined and written into the contract. If the downtime ex-

ceeded that amount, we reserved the right to terminate the agreement and receive a prorated refund. Y2K is also a performance issue, and all contracts are written to promise that the products are Y2K compliant.

CONTRACTS

Despite how carefully the contracts are written, problems may still arise. Perhaps the most significant contractual problem we've had with vendors is the lack of accurate statistics. The contract was written to make sure that we received accurate statistics for the databases. We want the statistics to be broken down by IP address so that we will be able to accurately evaluate the usage of the databases. We also want the statistics so that we can report back to The Indianapolis Foundation on how their money is benefiting the citizens of Marion County. It is also in the interest of the vendor to provide us with accurate statistics, not only because they are legally bound to do so, but also because renewals will be based on those figures. All three of the vendors had trouble providing us with statistics at some time. It can be difficult to determine the cause of these problems, and our Training and Awareness Consultant spends a lot of time trying to figure out where the problems lie. So far we have been able to gain free additional months of the products from the vendors who have consistently not satisfied their part of the contract.

Issues such as these will affect our continuing relationships with the vendors. Renewals of the products are based on a number of factors similar to what we looked at when we purchased the products initially. Usage statistics must reflect usage that warrants spending the money for an additional year. Patrons must like the products, or at least find them easy to use and valuable. And of course, we must be satisfied with what the vendors provide for us technologically, but also what they provide for us in the area of support. We will evaluate issues such as how many problems we've had with a vendor, how quickly those problems were remedied, how often we were juggled around from one person to another and how knowledgeable their staff is. We will also look at factors such as how much initiative a vendor has in keeping their products as up to date as possible. This includes not only how frequently they update their content, but also how often they revisit their interface to make changes that add value to the product. Once interface changes are made, it is expected that vendors provide lots of support when rolling that change out to its customers. All of these factors keep the companies competitive and will help committees make sound decisions on whether to renew or cancel a product.

STATISTICS

Having selected and connected everyone to the databases, an important next step was to monitor their use to determine the appropriateness of the databases to the user population. Our contract stipulated that monthly statistics broken down by IP range would be compiled and sent. Because of several technical problems, there was spotty reporting during the first six months of the contract. The seventh month was the first time all three vendors were able to fulfill this requirement and it was at that point that we could begin to make corrections. For example, XYZ University did not have any statistics; was it because they weren't using the databases? Or are their numbers being reported under some other institution because their IP range was mixed up? Or have they had an unreported change in IP range? There are many possible permutations on this problem! Even though the vendors have been very cooperative, it has taken several months to get "clean and reliable" statistics.

Once there were reliable numbers, there was the process of understanding what the numbers meant. Each vendor uses different terminology and we needed to be certain we were comparing apples to apples. For example, what is the difference between total accesses and total searches? We also had to make the comparisons between the different vendors make sense; one vendor has broken down searches into 8 different categories, so we were required to massage the data into manageable chunks before reformatting them for publication to users. To keep the statistics simple, we looked only at total number of searches and total number of articles* viewed. [*For our purposes, we include images, charts, and maps under articles.] We used a monthly cost for the databases to determine the cost per search and cost per article for each database. For example, in March 1999, the least expensive database search cost \$.70 per search and \$.63 per article, while the most expensive database was \$5.60 per search and \$14.58 per article.

LOCALLY DEVELOPED CONTENT

The project funded the development of content of local interest that was not available from commercial vendors. To date, the projects completed under this part of the grant have been relatively small and monographic in nature. The first projects were two publications of the Indiana University Press: *The Birds of Indiana* and *The Wildflowers of Indiana*. The third project was *Fifty Common Trees of Indiana*, a publication of the Purdue University Department of Forestry and Natural Resources. Projects currently under investigation are focused on local history. There is a particular interest in another Indiana University Press title, *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*.

These local resources were created for the Marion County Internet Library by the Digital Libraries Team of the IUPUI University Library. The product was not particularly difficult, although a variety of technical and organizational issues needed to be addressed. The more difficult issues turned out to involve negotiations for the use of published works. The first two Indiana University Press titles contain a large number of paintings that illustrate the flowers and birds. The artists, understandably, did not want their work freely available on the Internet, and so access was restricted to Marion County residents using IP filtering and the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library gateway. *Fifty Common Trees of Indiana*, which is a short 50-page pamphlet, turned out to be a good source of income for the Purdue Department of Forestry, and they required similar restrictions. The Steering Committee had established a principle that funding would be provided to create or convert content, but that as a general rule we would not pay for content. As it turned out, Purdue was paid for rights to *Fifty Common Trees of Indiana* because of the strong desire to have a product in place for the fall leaf season. Later Purdue was given an opportunity to extend access through Inspire. They declined this offer, and Inspire arranged to acquire comparable content from OhioLink. Our experience with creating local content is not extensive, but some issues are clear. Negotiations for content are time consuming and sometimes difficult. This is in large part true because many content owners do not understand the nature of the products.

AWARENESS AND TRAINING

The stated goal of our project is to provide web-based information resources which expand on Project Inspire's databases to *all* residents of Marion County. The diversity of this user population required that we use a variety of instruments to promote the project. A Training and Awareness Consultant was hired to coordinate this aspect of the project. The first step was to identify the different user groups and begin to target training for them. The first training sessions were directed to the librarians in Marion County. Meetings were set up with adult and children's librarians from the three public libraries, and the fall meeting of the Eligible Libraries Group was dedicated to educating high school and academic librarians about the databases. Throughout the fall and spring, the consultant has conducted numerous sessions at elementary, middle, and high schools (both public and private) for parents and teachers alike. Given that the project officially began in August of 1998 it was difficult to schedule training because many of the school districts had already committed all of their in-service days.

The second step was to develop paper documentation descriptive of our databases and logon procedures

including a one-page information sheet, web documentation for librarians, a bookmark, and a brochure. In addition, the consultant has gathered and maintained vendor supplied training/promotional materials for use in training sessions.

Training users on the databases is fairly easy; the hard part is getting users to know of the existence of these databases. We sent out the usual press release to local media and have contacted print media about articles, but we are also interested in finding non-traditional avenues of advertising the project. Part of our awareness program is designed to promote the databases through television, movie spots, and super-market advertisements.

SUPPORT ISSUES

Support issues have two facets: local support for the librarians and support by the vendors to the project. Among the Marion County libraries, there are different levels of knowledge and available support. Some libraries may only need to be told the URL and it is added to their web page; others will need to have a web page created for them; still others need to be walked through the process of accessing the databases. In many ways, this project cuts across library and computer technology lines in some organizations. A change in an IP address might not have been reported to the librarian before, but it must be now in order to maintain access to the databases.

Constantly changing vendor support staff has been a particular problem especially when dealing with technical issues. What seems a simple request from one end requires multiple contacts. You might discover, in your conversations with the technical services department that a school's usage was not being reported because of a mistyped IP address; to change an IP address, you may have to go to Customer Service and that sometimes means being bumped back to a sales representative...it's a dizzying circle. Many e-mails and phone calls are necessary to implement changes.

CONCLUSIONS/LESSONS LEARNED

Because of the history of libraries working together in Marion County which has been built through nearly a decade of Library Fund projects, collaboration on this project was easy.

There seems to be a narrow core of databases that everyone agrees upon. Outside of this core databases were easily classified as specialized or as supporting only a narrow constituency. This seems to be a variation of the classic 80/20 rule. For us this meant that the initial selection was easy, but reaching consensus was more difficult on later projects.

Managing the relationship with the vendors, maintaining IP addresses, administering the project is not trivial. We quickly exhausted the capacity of volunteers to get things done. Hiring a consultant was vital to the success of our project.

Our inability to reach an agreement with the *Indianapolis Star/News* is a concern. We understand that this is not a unique situation. In many cases newspapers are hesitant to sell rights to the so-called "consumer" market in their core market area. If this trend holds it will mean that the local digital libraries, provided by public libraries and projects like this one, will not include one of the most significant and asked-for sources of local information. In fact, it may be that in some cases the local newspaper, as it develops a web presence, will consider library initiatives as competitors. This relationship is clearly different from the generally positive relationships that have existed in the past and might impede the successful distribution of information about a community to that community.

Promotion needs lots of energy. It seems to be very difficult to get people to notice and use the resources

we have made available. We cannot help but wonder why it is so hard to get people to use electronic resources like those purchased and created by our project. While the use of the projects resources has been reasonable in the first year, we are clearly not competing with Yahoo. For some reason *library* type information on the Internet seems to sit outside what people expect and they seem to have trouble understanding its uses and value. We are not certain what this means, though our evaluation study next year should provide some answers. One thing though is clear to us: if you buy it, they won't necessarily use it.

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