A Statement of Opinion

Working Under Cover to Promote OPAC

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With apologies to any whose job title is bibliographic instructor, I would rather be forced to watch reruns of *Lost in Space* than to admit involvement in anything called bibliographic instruction. Sure BI is a noble pursuit, ranking right up there with flossing regularly or saving the whales. However, I would rather it be called something a little less stuffy, like "teaching library skills".

Our OPAC: In the Beginning

Once upon a time, prior to 1982, the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library had a card catalog. It was a big catalog for a big library with a big name, and take my word for it, it was a big mess. As the graph in Figure I shows, the larger an object, the messier it is, which I'm sure you'll all remember from library school as "Cutter's Law of Utter Clutter." The labor involved in catalog maintenance for 22 branches and Central Library's three catalog sets was truly Brobdingnagian. Despite the hard work of our Cataloging staff, our card catalog had become very out of date. Successive generations of subject authority and cataloging rules contributed to the chaos, as did the huge number of books which had been missing from the library for years, and for all we knew were no longer in the Western Hemisphere. There was also no easy way to tell if a book was checked out or to see if one of our branches owned it.

In the early 1980's the online public access catalog (OPAC) was beginning to come into its own. Whereas before that time computerized catalogs were little more than online circulation systems, newer second generation systems offered many refinements. The catalog we eventually purchased from CL Systems has author, title, and subject access, shelf list, online help screens, full bibliographic records, branch holdings, shelf status, and online reserves. Patron and circulation records are handled online as well. We are eagerly awaiting the imminent arrival of the third generation OPAC, expected to offer keyword searching, boolean searching, better authority control, and probably a built-in wet bar besides.

The CLSI system is a so-called turney system, the theory being that, like a car, you simply turn the key and drive it off the showroom floor; but in practice it's more nearly the equivalent of winning the Space Shuttle on a trip to Epcot Center, and being told you have to fly it back to Indiana. The very difficult process of converting from cards to computers was ably

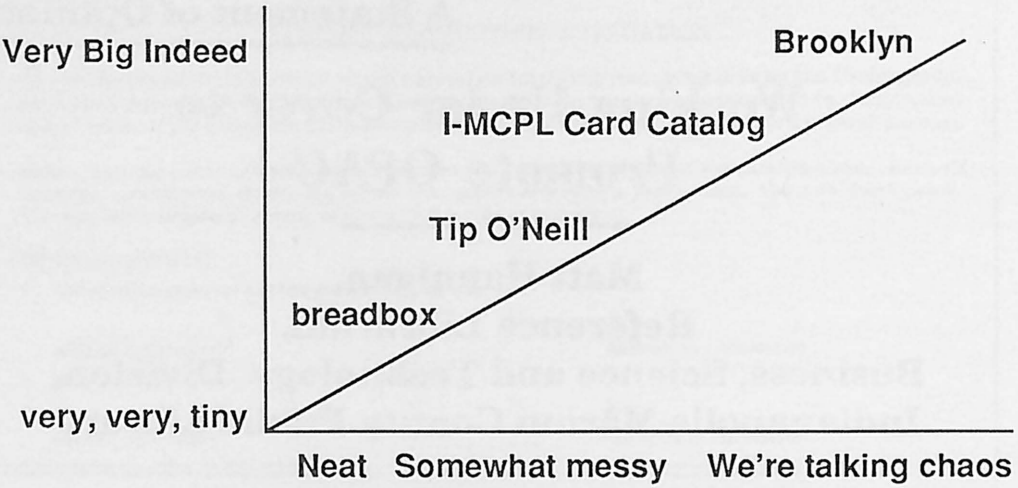


Figure 1. Illustration of "Cutter's Law of Utter Clutter."

accomplished by our technical services staff in a protracted effort reminiscent of the siege of Leningrad. While I haven't the space or background to relate that story, for those of you well versed in hardware, software, and presumably underwear, I offer these tidbits:

1. Eighty-five public access terminals (12 keyboard. 73 touch sensitive), 56 circulation terminals, 14 reference terminals and 17 technical support terminals were installed at 24 locations.

2. Our mini-computers are by DEC, our drives are from Control Data, and our terminals are from Interactive Systems, Inc.

3. Online storage capacity is 7 gigabytes (7 billion characters).

When the terminals were first put in use we received a reasonable amount of attention from the local media. The publicity was certainly more positive than that accorded the Ayatollah Khomeini, but I think it would be fair to say that the new catalog was viewed with a certain amount of skepticism by the Fourth Estate. It was just about this time (1982) that we reference librarians realized that there were over 700,000 Indianapolis residents who knew less about the new catalog than the average schoolchild knows about the Laplace Transformations (for that matter I don't know anything about the Laplace Transformations either, but I assume several people besides Mr. Laplace know what they are).

We had a short period of grace when we had both the card catalog and the computer catalog. Finally though the time came when the card catalog, which was "frozen," became so out of date that we simply threw it out. Patron reaction to the passing of the card catalog ran all the way from elated to homicidal. Some people viewed the passing of the card catalog as one might the death of a loved one or the cancellation of *60 Minutes*. One guy I knew likes to think the old catalogs are safely hidden in steam tunnels beneath the Central Library, wrapped in Visqueen and guarded by feral alligators. Mostly though, people demonstrated a cautious acceptance, coupled with a willingness to learn something new.

What about Instruction?

As educators are fond of telling us different people learn best in very different ways, and at a varying rate.

The amount of practice, the kind of instruction and the degree of personal attention needed differs for each of us. Some people like to plunge right in and try their hand at something without much real preparation. These are the type of people who try to dry their socks in the microwave or pop popcorn with a hair dryer. Others of us are far more methodical, the kind of people who would actually read the directions on shampoo befor using it (Wet hair. Lather. Rinse. Repeat).

Well, in theory it's a fine and very American thing to recognize that each of us has a unique method of learning (I prefer to be taught by statuesque Amazons), but in practice, time, material, and personnel limit the kinds of instruction that can be offered. Nevertheless within those limits, we decided to offer a variety of ways people might learn about the computer catalog including:

1. Online help screens.
2. Written instructions at each terminal.
3. Instructional articles in *Reading in Indianapolis*, the I-MCPL newsletter.
4. One-on-one instruction.
5. Formal classes.

Online Help Screens

Online help screens come with the CL Systems software, involving no real work on our part, and are somewhat helpful to a limited number of patrons. You'd be surprised though, at the number of people who thought the "Help" light worked like a nurse call light in a hospital. They expected that when it was pressed, a librarian would come over, perhaps responding via a CL Systems brain implant.

Handout

We also developed a nice tri-fold handout (see Figure 2) of the type libraries are so fond of producing, and which patrons like to use as bookmarks and scratch paper. This too was quite helpful to a significant number of people, but has the basic limitation of all written instructions; if you provide enough detail, no one wants to read it, and if you make it too short, critical facts are missing. Unfortunately these categories overlap.

Articles

Two articles on the new computer catalog were published in the library newsletter and served to publicize the system and ease the transition from the card catalog ("PAC Terminals are a Soft Touch" *Reading in Indianapolis* Feb. 15-28, 1985; and "The Sex Life of Computers/Update", *Reading in Indianapolis* November. 15-30, 1986). Both contained a palatable amount of instructions for using the terminals, and although the effect of any newsletter is indeterminate, copies were sent to 15,000 subscribers.

One-On-One

Probably the best way for most patrons to learn is by one-on-one instruction from the librarian or clerk. When we first got the catalog, we spent many, many hours honing our demo skills ("Here it is the latest in computer catalogs from Ronco; it slices, it dices, it chops, it grinds, and it's dishwasher safe"). Eventually enough people learned so that the time we devote to this was substantlally reduced, but will probably drop no lower.

Instructional Classes

A number of our patrons began to voice some interest in signing up for classes on using the catalog. This was perfectly agreeable to us, except that we did not yet offer such a class (actually several of our more adventurous branches began offering classes

on their own, but nothing had been organized systemwide). To remedy that situation Catherine Gibson, our Adult Services Coordinator, enlisted the help of Barbara Felton, Head of the Warren Branch Library, and myself. Our goal was to design a "packaged" (turnkey?) presentation which could be used in whole or in part by any of our 22 branches or at the Central Library.

We eventually decided such a class would consist of:

1. A brief lecture touching on the history of catalogs (books, card, Sears, J.C. Penney), ending in a description of the online catalog.
2. A slide show.
3. Supervised practice.
4. Refreshments (teaching library skills whets the appetites of both perpetrator and victim).
5. Evaluation. This provides us with feedback to improve the class (although people tend not to be too critical when you have given them doughnuts).

As I'm sure you can appreciate, nothing thrills people more than to sit down and listen to a long lecture on the history of library catalogs, capped by a windy explanation of the relative technical merits of card catalogs versus the OPAC. With that in mind we designed the lecture part of the program to be quite brief. Over time, that part of the class has been pared down more than Elizabeth Taylor's waistline.

Slides

For the slide program we wanted to have a few introductory slides: pictures of the library, shots of people using the terminal, and so on. Mostly though we wanted to have slides that actually showed the screens on our touch terminals at various stages during a search (see Figure 3). This would allow us to run through the stages in a typical search. I volunteered to do this since it would allow me to look cool carrying around a lot of cameras, lenses and so forth. I had taken a course in photography so I could toss around words like f-stop and aperture, although I had only the vaguest notion of their meaning. Taking pictures of the library and people working at the catalogs was simple enough and offered me plenty of chances to look like David Kennerly. Photographing a CRT screen using only the light cast by the display proved a lot tougher than I thought it would be. Fortunately the spouse of one of our librarians is a professional photographer, who had some experience with CRT shots, and he shared his expertise. After much practice the best results were obtained using a 205 mm lens, and Ektachrome 200 slide film. The camera was mounted on a tripod 75 inches from the center of the screen with the f-stop at 5.6, and the shutter speed at one-half second.

Dress Rehearsal

After a couple of months of preparation we presented our program to a jury of our peers consisting of about thirty librarians from various branches. They made a number of useful suggestions including:

1. Have some introductory slides taken at the branch where the class is being taught.
2. Add slides for cross reference examples.
3. Provide more time for questions and practice, less for slides and lectures.
4. Have a wider variety of baked goods.

Properly chastied, we revised our package and had the text copied, and the slides duplicated. Eight sets were

made so that the class could be offered at Central Library and our seven largest branches. To begin with classes were offered twice a week at Central, and roughly the same at the branches depending on the demand. Class size has varied from two to twenty.

These days since many more of our patrons already know how to use the computer when they come into the library, the demand for classes has dropped somewhat. Nevertheless there are still several times each day I see persons standing in front of a terminal with a blank look on their face as though they expect the screen to begin playing reruns of old sitcoms. . . unlikely any time soon.

We had to add some new slides a couple of years ago when we first introduced keyboard terminals to the public, but those changes are nothing compared to the adjustments we'll have to make as later generations of the OPAC are introduced. Given the choice between teaching boolean searching to a superannuated bibliophile and undergoing a root canal, I think I'd reach for the novocaine.

But Seriously Folks . . .

Certainly the conversion to a fully automated online catalog was a major move for the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library. While the reference librarians were more or less bystanders to the conversion process, we were thoroughly involved in training the public. Our experience with training patrons to use the computer catalog has taught us that there is no match for one-on-one personalized instruction. Nevertheless, a significant percentage of the population benefits from articles, handouts, and of course formal classroom instruction. Such formal training is best kept short and sweet. Time spent by the librarian as a "talking head" should be kept to a minimum, and plenty of relaxed time should be provided at the end of the training for the attendees to have supervised practice on the OPAC.

In the not too distant future we may add another instructional method, that of videotape. With a VCR and a television near the catalog patrons could view a detailed instruction whenever they wish. Such a video cassettee could also be circulated, although it probably wouldn't be much competition for Star Wars.

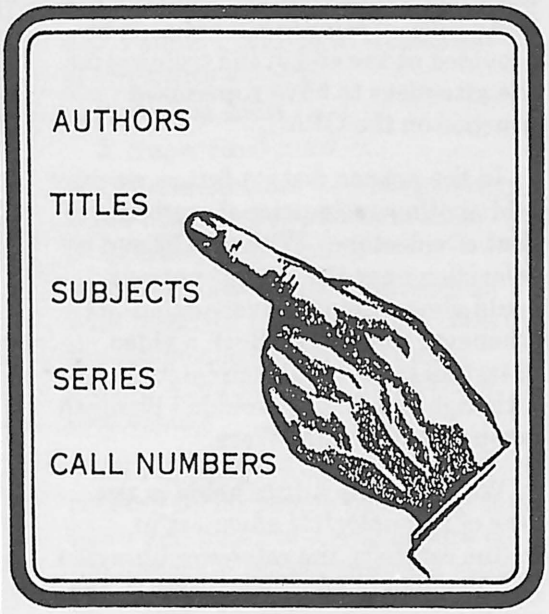
Whatever the future holds in the way of technological advances in online catalogs, the reference librarian will likely play an integral part in the public's use and acceptance of the catalog.

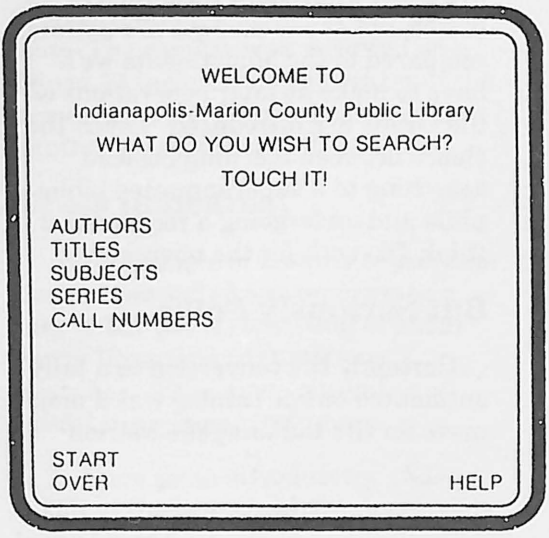
Figure 2. I-MCPL brochure (on the next three pages, with panels in sequence, two at a time)

INFORMATION AT A TOUCH

The new catalog is similar to the old card catalog. It's still a list of the books and records owned by the library. But, yesterday's catalog was on cards; today's is on-line with a computer.

Unlike the old catalog, this one greets you. If it doesn't, touch the part that says "START OVER." You will then see:



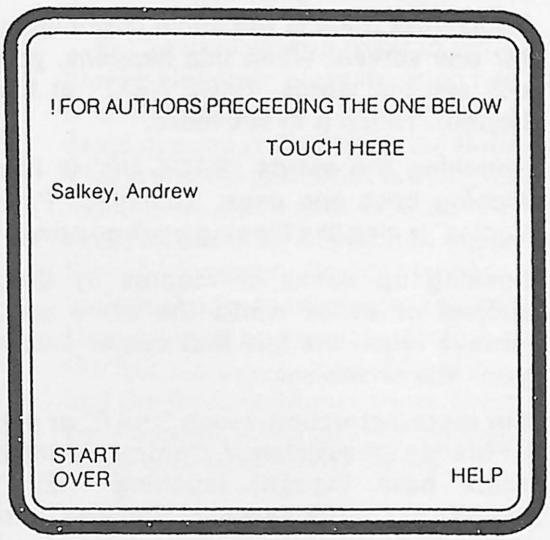


THE TOUCH TERMINAL at your

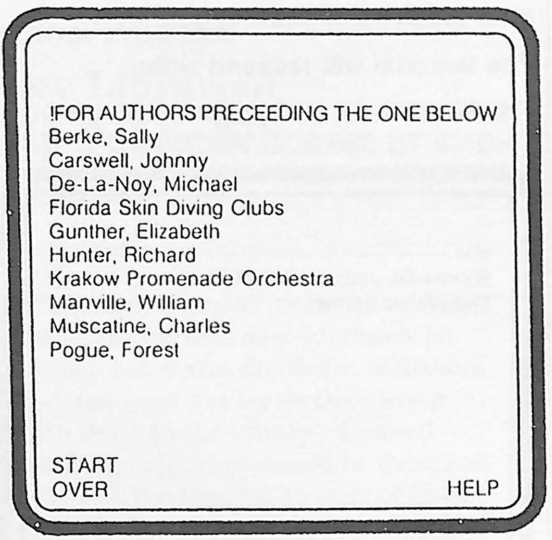
Indianapolis-Marion County Public Libraries

You can look through the catalog by author, title, subject, series, or call number. The following example will show you how to do it.

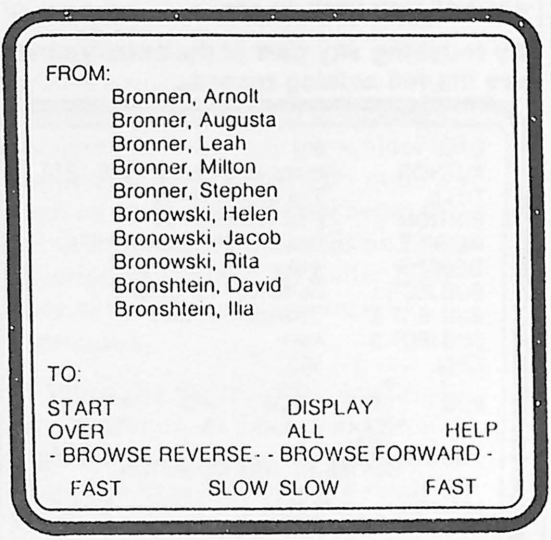
If you want to look for an author, you touch (yes, touch) the word "AUTHOR" The screen then displays a few lines like this:



You see an instructional statement and an author's name. You don't happen to want that author. Let's say you want to look for the books by Jacob Bronowski. Since Bronowski is not shown on the screen, touch the name that comes before it. That is, touch the instructional statement. You will be shown a second screen...



Still no Bronowski. Again, touch the name that comes before it, in this case Berke. Continue doing this until the "Browse" screen appears. The words "FROM" and "TO" appear at the left of the screen. Now all possible names within a limited range are shown. Like so...



(By touching "FAST" or "SLOW" you may see what comes before or after the authors on the screen.)

Now touch "Bronowski, Jacob".

The terminal will respond with:

THERE ARE 17 ENTRIES. TOUCH YOUR CHOICE TO SEE FULL RECORD.

501
Bronowski, Jacob, 1908-1974
The ascent of man

START OVER | SCROLL UP | BACK UP | HELP

By touching "SCROLL UP" **you will see the other 16 entries. Continue until you have seen all you wish to see.**

By touching any part of the entry you will see the full catalog record...

CALL	501
AUTHOR	Bronowski, Jacob, 1908-1974
TITLE	The ascent of man
EDITION	[1st American ed.]
IMPRINT	Boston, Little, Brown, 1974
DESCRIP	448 p. illus. 26 cm
SUBJECT 1	Science -- Philosophy
SUBJECT 2	Science -- History
SUBJECT 3	Man
CALL	501

PUB	PUBYR	COST	MC	L.A.D.
	1974	15.95	B	1/30/85

"COPIES AT THIS LOCATION"

LOCATION	BARCODE	L.A.D.	STATUS
IMD	1978 00535 5433	1/17/85	ON SHELF

ADD'L COPIES | BACK UP

Towards the bottom of the screen you see that one copy is owned by Central Library (IMD), **and it is on the shelf. By touching** "ADD'L COPIES" **you would see that there are 15 other libraries in the system that have this book. If** "ADD'L COPIES" **is still displayed touch again to see still more copies.**

If this had been a children's book, the letter "j" **would be in front of the call number, like this:** j501.

Sometimes there is too much information for one screen. When this happens, you will see the words "PAGE NEXT" **at the bottom. Touch it to see more.**

Touching the words "BACK UP" **is like flipping back one page. Touching** "Prior Copies" **is also like flipping back one page.**

Looking up books or records by title, subject or series works the same way. Always touch the line that comes *before* **your title or subject.**

For more instruction, touch "HELP" **or ask a librarian for assistance. Contrary to what some have thought touching** "HELP" **doesn't get you a librarian! But they'll be happy to assist you.**

AGENCY LOCATION GUIDE

IMD	-- Central	LAW	-- Lawrence
BTW	-- Brightwood	MAR	-- Marwood
BR—	-- Broad Ripple	NOR	-- Nora
BDY	-- Broadway	PIK	-- Pike
BRN	-- Brown	PRO	-- Prospect
EAG	-- Eagle	SH—	-- Shelby
EW—	-- E. Wash.	SO—	-- Southport
EM—	-- Emerson	SP—	-- Spades
EXT	-- Extension	WNK	-- Wanarnaker
FH—	-- Flanner House	WRN	-- Warren
HV—	-- Haughville	WAY	-- Wayne
HOS	-- Hospital	WI—	-- West Indpls.