

DOCUMENT SERVICES

ANNUAL REPORT, 2000-2001

Abridged Version

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

Desktop article delivery (Web-Docs) was the single most important service enhancement of the year, responding both to the recommendation of last year's Document Delivery Task Force and to the voice of our customers. Why, they asked, can't you send us this article in the same way you send a thesis – electronically? Another important service change, although not as popular with library patrons, was the **implementation of fee-based public printing** throughout the Libraries, in response to the need to control printing costs. With the retirement of Mary Pensyl and the diminishing demand for customized database searching, the Libraries **closed the Computerized Literature Search Service**, reallocating the resources to a new position of GIS Specialist.

WEB-DOCS

Building on our popular electronic thesis delivery service of last year as well as one of the recommendations of the Libraries' Document Delivery Task Force, we implemented a desktop article delivery service. Faculty in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science were the first to try the service, but we quickly expanded it to the entire MIT community, and eventually to outside customers as well. It has been popular with the relatively small group of patrons who have discovered it, but has not grown to the volume that we would expect of such an attractive service. Marketing Web-Docs has been a lesson in the need for continuous reminders. The software program behind Web-Docs is Prospero, open source freeware which was developed by Dan Chudnov, now a member of the DSpace staff.

PAY-FOR-PRINT

As the Libraries' collections have gradually shifted from paper-based to online, we have seen changes in patron printing habits. Declines in photocopying have been accompanied by rises in computer printing, but because printing was free of charge, there was no incentive for users to exercise any restraint. Consequently, printing costs were rising steadily and there was every reason to think they would soon grow out of control. Steering Committee decided in the Spring of 2000 to install the UnipriNT management system in most public areas of the Libraries, and to finance its initial capital expense from P-Card revenue. Document Services and the Systems Office were asked to coordinate the purchase and implementation, and to share maintenance responsibilities. The installation process began with Dewey in June and continued with other locations throughout the Fall. After a two-month break-in period in which the system was operational but printing continued to be free, the charging was turned on in late February. Most patrons have accepted the change with very little complaining. MIT users are still able to print for free at Athena clusters, but excessive printing in the Libraries has ceased. It is hoped that revenue from the system charges will offset its costs within a few years.

COMPUTERIZED LITERATURE SEARCH SERVICE

Last year's annual report made note of the recent business trends in online searching and urged a reassessment of the continued need for the service. In September 2000, after careful consideration, the Libraries made the decision to close the service. Soon after that Mary Pensyl announced her intention to retire from the Libraries at the end of February 2001, and has continued to work part time for MIT's Technology Licensing Office as a private contractor since then. As a result of closing CLSS, the Libraries has opened a search for the new position of GIS Specialist.

ELECTRONIC THESES

After several years of using various names to describe our online thesis collection, we finally settled on Digital Library of MIT Theses (DLMITT, pronounced D-Limit). The size of the collection now stands at 5,500, about 60 of which are electronically *submitted* documents, i.e. they were born digital, not scanned from paper or microfilm. There continues to be strong interest in electronic delivery of theses in PDF, which now accounts for 40 percent of our thesis distribution, more than either paper or microform. Other developments:

- In conjunction with Archives, BAS and Preservation Services, we carried out an experiment in January to test an alternate workflow for processing new theses. The goal of the experiment was to accelerate access to the thesis from the point that the processing cycle began. In the standard workflow, cataloging is the last step before the bound document appears on the shelf; it would then be placed online by scanning the microfilm if and when a request was received for it. In the trial workflow, cataloging was done much earlier in the process, followed by scanning and microfilming of the new, unbound paper copy. Then the paper copies were bound, barcoded and finally shelved. By implementing these changes, access to the catalog record as well as the online images was accomplished within a few weeks of the start of processing, as opposed to the normal six to twelve weeks. In addition, the alternative workflow eliminated some redundancy in bibliographic description, produced a superior online electronic image because of the paper (as opposed to microfilm) scanning, and eliminated the need for future recalling and disbinding of originals to correct image flaws. The experiment uncovered a number of minor workflow difficulties which need to be addressed, but the general consensus was positive and staff are interested in trying again with some modifications. There was agreement that this change accomplished the goal of earlier access, but there is continued concern that we run the risk of accidentally releasing patent holds as we speed up the process.
- We are noticing a modest increase in interest to submit theses in electronic format. Most of this is coming from a few faculty members who want their students' theses to be available online soon after graduation, and consequently encourage their students to do an electronic submission. Another incentive is that electronic submission allows the retention of any color images used in the thesis. Coupled with some alleviation of the technical difficulties in file conversion to PDF, we see electronic submission gaining interest. There are still some difficult challenges ahead if we expect a significant number of theses to come to us in electronic format: digital authentication and hold verification are two of the most important. But the advantages of collecting a digital version from students at the time of submission are also significant, even if such a change does not eliminate the paper version.
- We have been disappointed in the slowness of the process to add abstracts and URLs of our DLMITT titles to their Barton records. This was to have been accomplished by now because of an arrangement we made last summer with the Software Patent Institute (SPI) to convert images of abstracts to text format. Among other things, SPI seriously underestimated the size of the task and their ability to carry it off quickly. Consequently, we are still waiting for the bulk of the work to be completed and returned to us, so that we can add these valuable enhancements to the Barton thesis records.
- The Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD), of which MIT is a member, is in the process of redesigning their approach to expansion and technical development. Rather than pursuing initiatives and new members on a national and international scale, they will try to develop regional programs involving several key administrators per institution. MIT has been asked to host such a regional meeting, should the program move forward.

PUBLIC COPIERS

As noted above, this year we have continued to see an increase in printing from online resources and a corresponding decrease in photocopying from traditional print resources. FY01 marked the eighth consecutive year of photocopy reduction, and at 25%, the largest by far. In one sense this is good, since it means there is less wear and tear on our journal collection due to rough handling on the copiers. But much of the overhead expense associated with the copiers is fixed and not affected by a drop in volume, so the end result is a lot less revenue to cover overhead. Since FY93, revenue has fallen by a total of 43% or nearly \$125K; between last year and this year, revenue dropped by nearly \$55K!

One action we took to mitigate this circumstance was to raise the price of a card copy from nine to ten cents this spring. MIT was the only BLC institution still charging less than a dime for a copy, and in fact we had not raised the price since the copy card system was installed in 1986. It was a justified change, and I'm happy to report that there was not a single patron complaint.

Due to our replacement of all the copiers over the past two years, we had far fewer problems in general with equipment failure or poor quality copies. This year we also replaced all the copy card vending equipment and bill acceptors in order to increase reliability and compatibility with the new currency. Patrons have expressed their pleasure with the duplex copying feature which is now present on most machines. Ninety-five percent of all copies are now made with copy cards, and coins are accepted only in Rotch and the Branch Libraries.

E-MAIL MANAGEMENT AND SECURITY

The office staff began using IMAP (Internet Message Access Protocol) this year to help manage the large number of email requests and inquiries which we receive. This could not have been accomplished without the help of staff in the Systems Office. IMAP has had a very positive impact on our ability to manage email, but it stops short of the solution we would like: a real "order-tracker" product which assigns a unique ID to all incoming requests and allows updating and status checking. Such products are available, but are not affordable for an operation of our size and limited budget.

Again with the help of the Systems Office staff, and growing out of our investigation of MIT's e-commerce plans, we accomplished a major improvement to our online order forms: they are now encrypted so that credit card information can be transmitted without fear of interception by a third party. This has made a huge difference for both patrons and staff as they place and process orders. It was important to make this change before we shift our payment options to favor credit card, as we plan to do. As for other aspects of e-commerce at MIT, we are particularly interested in the proposed automated solution to bulk processing of credit card transactions. Because we do not sell our products from an "inventory" – such as a book store – it is not practical for us to use the more widely seen e-commerce products which receive orders and automatically charge customers.

DOCUMENT SCANNING AND DSPACE

These two topics are related due to recent interest expressed by several MIT groups to digitize their past research publications and to consider DSpace for the future, creating an attractive "total management" package. We are currently scanning the entire collection of publications from the Laboratory for Information and Decision Systems (LIDS), whose technical reports will be placed in DSpace and whose theses will reside in the Digital Library of MIT Theses (DLMITT). This was prompted by LIDS' impending move to the new Stata Center and their desire to eliminate paper files. In addition, they look forward to having all of their materials available online. The Sloan School is also considering a similar approach with their large Working Paper collection, although they have not decided how much of the existing collection they will put online. Sloan seems very interested in DSpace for their new papers.

The Plasma Science and Fusion Center is having us scan a substantial number of their theses to place in DLMITT, but they also plan to mount the PDF versions on their own Web site rather than simply linking to DLMITT, which means that all the world will have free access to PDF. Thesis distribution has long been a cottage industry among many MIT departments, labs and centers, but the impact on Document Services' overall distribution has not been significant. With the evolution towards local mounting in printable formats, we see the potential erosion of our ability to recover the costs associated with DLMITT specifically, and our overall fixed costs in general. It is not possible for us to control what individual groups at MIT choose to do with the theses written under their auspices, and I am convinced that any attempt to do so would backfire. DLMITT offers free online image access and storage, attractive features for any MIT group. Those who also have the desire and means to mount and distribute their theses locally will no doubt do so.

THESIS FILM PROJECT

In order to make room for the new compact shelving in the Hayden Basement stacks, we completed a project in May to move about a third of our thesis roll film collection (7,000 films) to the Harvard Depository. These films are seldom needed, so HD is a much better storage location for them. We hope to move the remaining films to the same location within the next year.

STAFF

Comings:

- Pete Cocaine, Part-Time Technical Assistant
- Margo Miller, Searcher

Goings:

- Lucine Barsamian, Searcher
- Anthony Hudson, Part-Time Technical Assistant
- Trish Reid, Searcher
- Joan Thompson, Document Resources Librarian

The loss of two out of three Searchers during the Summer of 2000 was difficult, but we were extremely fortunate to interest Margo Miller in the job. Margo, fresh from formal retirement, was filling a temporary librarian position at the Science reference desk for part of the year, but wanted to move to a full-time position if possible. The Searcher job seemed just the ticket, so she straddled both positions part-time until the one in Science finally ended this spring. We have filled only one of the two open Searcher positions because this is adequate for our current volume of business, along with occasional hours from “casual” staff. Betsy Nichols was promoted from Searcher to Section Head – Searching, in order to address the need for a senior position in the searching section, taking responsibility for directing the day-to-day operations.

Joan Thompson’s departure at the end of October to become the Assistant Director of the Boston Library Consortium was a huge loss for the department and for the Libraries. She had built excellent working relationships with many staff throughout the system and played important roles on committees. The eight-month vacancy in her position has been hard on DS staff, but thanks to the strength and independence of her direct reports, operations have proceeded reasonably smoothly. The question of how and when to search for a replacement is challenging due to the funding issue. In response to the report of the Document Delivery Task Force, the Libraries have decided to move ILB from the Humanities Library into Document Services, creating a single resource sharing unit serving both the MIT and outside user communities. Joan’s former position will be directly responsible for overseeing that combined operation, and as such, must be supported jointly by Document Services (for the lending portion, which generates revenue) and by the Libraries (for the borrowing portion, which does not). The supervision of ILB in Humanities cannot be moved with the staff who actually carry out the function, since this is currently done by the department head, so the Libraries must find other resources to allocate in order to make this change come about.

Christine Quirion was a member of the Libraries’ Advisory Committee on Workplace Issues, the group charged with the daunting task of designing and implementing the *Infinite Mile Award Program*, part of the Institute’s new *Rewards and Recognition Program*. When she wasn’t attending those meetings, she was taking a wide range of management training courses at ARL or at MIT’s Human Resources Department. Still later, she found time to enroll at Simmons and begin her degree in Library and Information Science! Christine also inherited the department’s web responsibilities after the departure of Joan Thompson, wrote numerous FAQs and publicity articles about our services, and attended the *School for Scanning* in Seattle last fall.

In addition to Aleph training taken by the entire staff, several other individuals participated in various computer and customer service training programs during the past year: Beth Burke attended sessions on Adobe Acrobat and Web Publishing; Mike Cook took classes in Acrobat and Microsoft Excel; Judith Gallagher learned more than she ever wanted to know about SAP; Bill Guarente trained in Windows 2000; for Neal Johnson it was Acrobat, Excel and Adobe Photoshop; Betsy Nichols boned up on Vera and JSTOR; and Tim Sheehan took two sessions given at HR – Customer Services and Accounting Principles – plus basic SAP.

VOLUME OF BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL

Despite a continuing downward trend in many of our business lines, we ended the fiscal year with a surplus of about fifteen thousand dollars, which we transferred to our nearly depleted reserves. The financial “success” was due primarily to the unfilled position of Document Resources Librarian and the reduction of the searching staff by one, along with other cost containment measures. We continued to pay off long-term equipment and supplies debt aggressively, having now retired the supplies portion entirely and reduced the equipment portion future years to \$50K or less annually.

Try as we do to promote our services to users, the downward business trends in addition to alternate online sources continue to cut away at the volume of services, from photocopying to document delivery. Although the thesis business is reasonably brisk, the growing popularity of electronic delivery is causing a drop in the revenue available for fixed overhead costs. Marketing and maintaining responsive services while downsizing an already small staff will be even more challenging in the future.

MAJOR PLANS FOR THE COMING YEAR

- Run with Web-Docs. Promote it inside and outside MIT as much as possible.
- Fill the Document Resources Position and integrate ILB into the department.
- Continue to look for opportunities to scan collections of MIT publications.

- Continue as part of the E-Reserves team.
- Offer optical character recognition (OCR) service in conjunction with scanning.
- Add abstracts and URLs to e-thesis Barton records (holdover from last year).
- Potential involvement in DSpace, Open Course Ware, and Open Knowledge Initiative.

Keith Glavash
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