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RETROSPECTIVE CONVERSION OF BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORDS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper highlights the retrospective conversion of bibliographic records in academic libraries in Nigeria as well as the dynamics of doing so. It provides a procedure on how libraries can undertake retrospective conversion. In particular, the need for careful planning, meticulous implementation of plans and periodic evaluation of plan implementation was stressed. The paper concludes that though retrospective conversion is expensive, computerized libraries in Nigeria must brace up to the challenges and so integrate both old and new records in the online database for maximum access. Recommendations were proffered such as training and retraining of staff for better job performance, professionals using the same software should master the software and sourcing for additional funds for the management and sustainability of the project.

INTRODUCTION

With the reality of limited and/or diminishing fiscal and human resources, many library administrators recognize that they must rethink agenda, leverage, and create new opportunity in order to accomplish their goals and objectives successfully. Information technologies have provided the means for meeting most of these challenges. Retrospective conversion is a method of providing library past records online. It is important to note that retrospective conversion can also connote the conversion of existing cataloguing records from manual to digital.

Aina *et al*, (2008) and also Aina (2004) observes that the most important of the retrieval tools for organizing a library collection is the catalogue. "It is a list of materials such as books, microfilms, audio recordings, etc, in a collection". The catalogue records describe and locate each item present in the collection and so can be described as a directory of library holdings. One of the most highly developed and most popular forms of library catalogue is the card catalogue. For developing countries like Nigeria, over 98 percent of libraries either use the card catalogue alone or side by side with the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) (Ola, 2001). Since libraries have thousands of books and non-book materials which already have records in the catalogue at the inception of a computerization program, the emphasis is usually on capturing the most recent records in the computer database. The existing records in the manual catalogue are subsequently converted to the new catalogue format in the computer database.

Today, some academic libraries in Nigeria have migrated from Alice For Windows to VTLS. An example is Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. This system enables it to accommodate more information. Also, Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, and Obafemi Awolowo University (Hezekiah Oluwasammi Libray), IIe-Efe, use TINLIB, Alice For Windows and KOHA. Also Obafemi Awolowo University uses Ensythee for E-library because it was specially built for it, but it was formerly using TINLIB.

It is not only academic libraries in Nigeria that are migrating. Foreign libraries also, for example, Faculty of Engineering and Technology library of the University of Botswana migrated from SABINET/OCLC to **innopac** in December, 2000 (Kiderko-

ampem@roehampton.ac.uk). The need for retrospective conversion of bibliographic records in academic libraries in Nigeria is greatly to improve access to information and make people be able to search for these materials via authors, title, subject, call number and keyword search in the online catalogue. However, this paper focuses on the retrospective conversion of bibliographic records in academic libraries in Nigeria.

RETROSPECTIVE CONVERSION OF BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORDS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

The first step in the retrospective conversion of bibliographic records in academic libraries is to form a committee. The committee should be made up of business librarian/information specialist, some librarians in the library, namely; the reference librarian, special collections librarian, circulation and library automation librarians, cataloguers and typists for data entering. The committee would then evaluate the collection. They would do this by weeding the collections for example, examine the entire collection and select items to be withdrawn owing to being outdated or damaged beyond repair. Multiple copies of a title can be reduced. Cards of such titles should also be withdrawn from the catalogue cabinet. If it is a book catalogue, the classification number and the shelf list cards of multiple copies of a title should also be removed. Then a decision can be taken on the method to be used for the retrospective conversion such as, in-house, contract and others.

There are several tools available that can be deployed to enhance retrospective conversion of bibliographic records in academic libraries in Nigeria, for example OCLC are using Cooperative Online Resource Cataloguing (CORC) software to catalogue websites. The university of Lagos main library is using it also, while Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria started with Alice for Windows (Alice Demo) and later migrated to VTLS. Micro CDs for windows (software) is used for small libraries while cooperative online resources cataloguing (CORC) software to catalogue website which later became World cat Database is used for bigger libraries and others such as TINLIB and ENSYTHEE.

Susan (2002) reported cataloguers experience at Redeemer's University Library using the Library of Congress online catalogue for cataloguing and classifying library resources to facilitate easy retrieval and exploitation by users. The paper noted high efficiency for using the technique because, on the average, about 50 books per day were processed by two cataloguers.

Moreover, Paker (2007), while presenting a paper on "Cataloguing and Classification of Library Materials: The Internet As A Tool" during the Cataloguing, Classification and Indexing Section of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) held at Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria, enunciated a number of web driven facilities that cataloguers can adopt to make their work easier, more interesting and efficient. These include Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) worldcat, library of Congress Online Catalog, Dewey Online Catalog. She described the functionalities of these tools as appropriate with the view to familiarize and fascinate her audience to using them.

Olson (1997) highlighted other online cataloguing tools available to cataloguers and classifiers namely Library of Congress Classification web and 'the cataloguing calculator'. The LC classification web is the online version of the Library of Congress classification schedules. It is an online bibliographic services tool with many potentials and benefits. Its features include:

Full text schedule of what the manual contains
Access to data anywhere you have a world wide web connection
Correlations between the LC classification numbers and subject headings

All files updated everyday

Automatic calculation of classification table numbers

PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF RETROSPECTIVE CONVERSION

Retrospective conversion provides varying degrees of challenges depending on the size of the library's existing collection prior to computerization. Academic libraries in Nigeria computerizing their records from the scratch have little to worry about. Also, those with relatively small collections can convert existing bibliographic records with minimum effort. However, the burden of the program is usually very heavy on libraries with long history and an enormous collection size. A typical example of such a library is the University of Oregon Library in the United States, established in 1883. The library did all cataloguing on cards till 1975. From 1975, it started to produce the catalogue records on cards but also stored some on machine-readable tapes. In 1988, the machine-readable tapes were used to create the first online catalogue. These are applicable to some academic libraries in Nigeria.

In 1991, the libraries in the system estimated that they had 460,000 titles in the collections that were represented only by cards in the card catalogue. Approximately 230,000 0f those titles were classified in Dewey. In 1994, with some special funding, the libraries completed a major project to add 231,000 other titles to the online catalogue including 80,000 Dewey titles that were reclassified to the Library of Congress Classification System (LC). In July, 2000, without the benefit of any additional funding, the libraries entered the final phase of retrospective conversion. At that time, there were approximately 200,000 older titles that were catalogued only on cards and that still needed to be represented in the online catalogue. Between July 2000 and November 2004, approximately 87,500 of those older titles were converted and added to the online catalogue. As of December, 2004, approximately 7% of the libraries records for its catalogued collections still needed to be converted to machine-readable records.

Academic libraries such as Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, Ibadan and Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library (Obafemi Awolowo University Library), Ile-Ife, therefore, call for careful planning, meticulous implementation and periodic evaluation. According to Ola (2001) planning for retrospective conversion would involve:

Identification of Records: The first step in the planning process entails identification of catalogue records to be converted. Libraries keep various types of catalogues including the public catalogue, shelf-list catalogue, union catalogue and catalogues of special collections. A decision must be taken on which records to be converted and the extent of the conversion. Having identified the number of records to be converted, the library will have to estimate for the number of such records as this would have implication for funding, approach to the exercise and duration of the project.

Determination of the Order of Procedure for the Project: There might be need for phasing the program, indicating the order in which the conversion will proceed. For example, records of books acquired over a given period in library's history should be drawn up. This exercise was done in the academic libraries mentioned above.

Determination of the Method to be adopted for the Project: There are a number of alternative choices of methods for the retrospective conversion: program-in-house, use of agents and co-operative effort. For example, Kenneth Dike Library made use of in-house and vendors. These approaches help to eliminate errors and response to the satisfaction of OPAC. While, OAU made use of contractors and consultants in order to relieve cataloguers.

In-House Option

By this option, the library undertakes the retrospective conversion exercise by itself, deploying its human and material resources. Extra hands may be needed for data entry and specialized services and this makes additional staff recruitment inevitable. A library that adopts this option also has to brace up to the challenge of effecting retrospective conversion without any form of disruption in the usual library operations.

Contract Method

By this option, the retrospective conversion is contracted to vendors/consortiums specializing in such work. Ola (2001) has highlighted a number of international commercial vendors with experience in retrospective conversion of bibliographic records. These include; Saztec Europe Ltd, OCLC, North West Data Systems and Sabtec. There are many more. The Texas State Library has compiled a Data Conversion Vendors List to assist libraries in contacting data conversion vendors. The list can be accessed on www.tsl.static.tx.us/_pubs/conversion. It was compiled in December 1999 and updated in June 2004. Information on the vendors can also be obtained by consulting the Library of Congress MARC Records Systems and Tools page which contains a list of record services, systems and specialized tools. The address is http://www.marclink.corn

Based on the experience of UI and OAU libraries, the contract option still leaves the local libraries with certain responsibilities including:

Preparation of Project Specifications: Staff on the Cataloguing Management Team (or Retrospective Conversion Project Team) prepared project specification for the vendor. The specification contains detailed information and instruction on all aspects of the project, including cards to be skipped, records to be flagged and guidelines for matching and editing records and for recording location, call number and other copy-specific information. The project specification constituted the heart of the contract between the vendor and the library.

Conversion Schedule: The Retrospective Conversion Project Team provided work schedule for the vendor in order to meet the overall time target for the retrospective conversion project to be completed. It could, for example, be stipulated that such number of records be converted at a given time, say 50,000 records per month.

Database loads: Records produced by the vendor are loaded into the local database periodically, for example, twice monthly in the academic libraries mentioned above.

Quality Control and Problem Resolution: Staff on the Cataloguing Management Team needs to undertake a variety of quality control and problem resolution activities to ensure that;

(a) The records are in compliance with local and national standards as well as with vendor and other contractual requirements,

(b) Address problems that are specifically flagged for the attention of the local library by the vendor as well as those that are inevitable in retrospective conversion project that is complex. A given project is considered done only when this final phase of activity has been completed.

Costing and Funding: Retrospective Conversion of bibliographic records in academic libraries in Nigeria requires a special provision in the library budget. It is a very expensive venture which once commenced, should not be allowed to fail because of underfunding. Decisions have been taken on the scope of the project, method of implementation and proper costing has been done. Finally the funds were release to execute the project after all the necessary machineries were put in place.

Organizing the Records: The library staff sort out the records to be converted and systematically organized. This is very important irrespective of the method to be used.

Staffing: The in-house option is adopted for the project. A very experience cataloguer would be the leader of the team. Training and retraining of staff for the project were done.

IMPLEMENTATION

No matter how good a plan may be, its meticulous implementation can make the difference between a successful and unsuccessful plan. The library included plans for the retrospective conversion; the Project Team proceeded with the implementation, step by step. Data generated by the vendor in the course of the exercise have to be input to the local database and all necessary checks were done to ensure standardization and quality work.

The following procedure as articulated by Eguavoen and Adeyemi (2004) need to be followed for the project plan implementation. However, most Nigerian academic libraries prefer in-house method for the retrospective conversion of bibliographic records.

Identifying of Records: Many library systems operate departmental or branch libraries with different catalogues. The first step that was taken in project implementation was; identification of records that were to be converted in the order of priority. The Project Team commences work with the shelf-list trays containing the records of materials on the affected shelves.

Editing and Filing of Cards in the Shelf-list Trays: The shelf-list trays were edited to ensure their relevance in the conversion process. Editing at this point would entail:

(a) Erasing all inscriptions on the shelf-list cards except the bibliographic information of the books they represent.
(b) Withdrawing cards for titles in branch libraries which should be collated and sent to the branch libraries.
(c) Withdrawing cards for titles in branch libraries which should be filed in trays meant for such cards.
(d) Withdrawing all duplicate cards in the trays to avoid confusion.

Shelf-reading and Stock Taking: The Project Team:

1. Ensures that all books on the shelves are in their proper position.
2. Crosschecks records in the shelf-list tray with the actual books on the shelves.
3. Checks the bibliographic information on each shelf to ensure that the book is not missing.
4. Finds books and if they need repairs, it is noted on the card and on the book.
5. Make an original card entry for a book found on the shelf but which has no record in the shelf-list catalogue (the original entry for such a book may have been missing at the time of filing).
6. Identify the missing can title and take the records to the circulation desk to determine the status: is it on loan? If so, when is it due for return? Is it overdue? If the record cannot be traced at the circulation desk, the next place to check is the binding unit in case it is being repaired. If a book still not be traced at this point, it should be assumed missing.

Weeding: Weeding is a very difficult exercise in these academic libraries but it should be done successfully. The materials to be weeded should include:

1. Volumes that have deteriorated beyond repairs
2. Older editions in the sciences and technology of which new editions have already been acquired by the library.
3. Very old titles
4. Titles in foreign languages not commonly used by readers
5. Titles that are found not to have been borrowed in the past ten (10) years.

Data-Entry: At the end of the stocktaking, the records in the shelf-list tray were passed on to the data entry staff for entry into the database. There may be need to the catalogue records to be modified to conform to the new database format and standard. The records were either keyed in by the data entry staff or scanned depending on the facilities available for the project.

Editing the Database: A periodic print out of the most recent records are entered into the database, edited by competent library staff of the Project Team before they are finally integrated into the database for online access by library users.

PROJECT EVALUATION

The retrospective conversion programs are periodically evaluated by the team. These important management activities are necessary to:

(i) Ensure that the project plan is faithfully implemented
(ii) Ensure that the set targets for records conversion are met
(iii) Ensure that problems not initially envisaged are taken care of for the success of the retrospective conversion project
(iv) Ensure that every member of the team is properly playing his or her role and that there is the necessary of cohesion by the team members.
(v) Ensure that standards are adhered to by the retrospective conversion program
(vi) Ensure cost control. It is important to ensure that the program is run within the approved budget

Lancaster (1993) said that, evaluation is the control function in management. Without a periodic project evaluation of the retrospective conversion project, it will be difficult to know whether progress is being made in realizing project objectives. Evaluation and reports assures the library management and external funding agencies that the huge financial commitment made so far is worthwhile thereby encouraging further funding.

CONCLUSION

Retrospective conversion of bibliographic records in academic libraries in Nigeria is very important, serious and painstaking activities which require careful planning, meticulous implementation and periodical evaluation, though retrospective conversion can be very expensive. The full fit of the library's computerization program especially in terms of access to library materials.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are made:

1. Institution using the same software should form a consortium that is well coordinated, so that they can be exchanging records. Professionals using the software should endeavor to master the software.
2. Heads of libraries should involve other professional librarians in decision making to buy particular software, and demonstration sessions should be arranged in which critics will be made of the software to determine its suitability for the need of the library.
3. Reputable vendor must be patronized and be made to sign undertaking of service after delivery.
4. There should be the re-orientation of students in the library school towards cataloguing processes such that it would not be seen as a very difficult subject. More so, professional staff on the field should also be re-orientated towards automation in the library.

5. Training and retraining of staff are necessary for efficient and effective cataloguing automation in the library.
6. Sourcing for additional funds to be used for this project for its sustainability.

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