

prevention of duplicate orders by matching new orders being input with records already in the database. A potential duplicate is reported if there is a match on both the author and the title fields. It was decided at the time of implementation at Lewis and Clark that this criterion was too restrictive, and CLAS was programmed to report a duplicate if only the title fields matched. After some months of experience, it turned out that even this requirement was excessively restrictive: a slight variation in the way a title was input would prevent a duplicate from showing up. The criterion was then further relaxed to signal duplicates if either the title or the author's last name matched. This, however, was too broad a net: although no duplicates were missed, ordering a book by Wilson or Smith produced a tedious list of potential duplicates. Hence, the requirement was tightened slightly to look for a match in either the title or the author's last name and first initial. This final criterion is currently serving well the needs of the Watzek Library. What is important about this evolutionary process is that it illustrates the dynamic way in which a library can "fine-tune" an automated system that is receptive to user modifications.

Since PEAS is supposed to be a self-explanatory system, it lacks any documentation. CLAS is still a self-explanatory system, but nevertheless a manual has been produced to describe all its features and to record programming information such as the structure of the files. One version of the documentation is kept in machine-readable form so that it can be easily updated to correspond to developments in the program.

In conclusion, it can be stated that a library-application software package has been successfully transplanted from one institution to another, from one hardware environment to another, and in doing so has matured into a fuller and more flexible system, which it is hoped will, in turn, benefit other libraries contemplating the automation of their acquisitions operation.<sup>2</sup>

## REFERENCES

1. Jenko Lukac, "A No Cost Online Acquisi-

tions System for a Medium-Size Library," *Library Journal* 107:684-85 (March 15, 1980).

2. Interested libraries can request a copy of the CLAS program (\$80) or manual (\$40) directly from the author.

## The Significance of Information in the Ordinary Conduct of Life\*

Robert NEWHARD: Torrance Public Library, Torrance, California.

The information benefit provided to the general public by the developing telecommunications systems will be highly dependent upon the provider's perception of the current and potential role of information in the ordinary interests of life.

Assessing this role cannot easily be done by standard questionnaire or survey methods because information does not have a conscious function in people's lives.

Some paradigms from the past and present may, therefore, be of use in articulating the everyday importance of information.

### THE TOOL PARADIGM: INFORMATION AS A LINK BETWEEN MAN AND HIS TOOLS OR REPAIRING A LOST CONFIDENCE

Prior to the industrial revolution, most production was carried on in the home, using tools either made or repaired mainly at home. In this cottage industry, each person was very close to and secure in the use of his tools. With the advent of the industrial revolution and the factory system, the worker no longer owned his tools, but went to one place to use someone else's tools. Man and his tools began to separate. Many used the tools, fewer understood them. This process began to create the "expert."

Today most of the tools we use—the automobile, telephone, computer termi-

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nal, etc.—we cannot repair. This has led to a set of latter-day “high priests” upon whom, because of their specific knowledge, we are dependent.

I suggest that this trend toward information experts is inimical to a democratic society because of the dependency it creates and because of the pervasive hopelessness it engenders in the public mentality regarding matters as diverse as appliance repair and politics.

This process, in a milieu of rapidly developing technology, may seem irreversible.

I would suggest, however, that well-packaged and targeted information could do much to reduce frustration, restore the judgmental effectiveness and the self-confidence of the ordinary citizen (we are all ordinary for more purposes than not), and to improve citizen confidence in society.

For example: I am told I need a clutch job on my car. I can check the flat-rate manual in the library to determine the amount of time that job should take for my make, model, and year of car. The manual will even give the price, but, being a book, it is out of date. In California, each garage must post its hourly rate. Suppose the flat-rate manual indicated the clutch job should take three hours and the posted rate is \$20 per hour. If the estimate comes back at \$150 instead of \$60, I know something is wrong. Either there is more to the job than clutch repair or it is a rip-off.

In either case, even though I cannot repair my car, I can, because of information, make a rational judgment. I am effective in dealing with this problem despite my technological incompetence.

The flat-rate manual is a packaged set of information targeted on a specific range of problems, and can function as an imperfect paradigm for what information development commensurate to technological development should be.

### **THE WORD “THEY” AS A PARADIGM**

Another indicator of the “information gap” in this society, is a particular use of the word “they.” If one listens to the fre-

quency with which people say “they do this,” “they don’t care,” “they’re all politicians,” etc., one can grasp the pervasiveness of the “information gap.”

I suggest that the word “they,” so used, almost always indicates an absence of information. This absence is frequently accompanied by suspicion and distrust.

### **THE YELLOW PAGES PARADIGM**

Another measure of the importance of information to people in general consists of imagining what would happen if the yellow pages of the telephone book were suddenly withdrawn. There would, I suggest, be a minor revolution.

### **FREEDOM AS A PARADIGM**

A final perspective on the importance of information may be found in its bearing on human freedom.

In the earlier phases of this society’s development, freedom consisted of enough space as in Horace Greeley’s “Go West, young man,” or in Frederick Turner’s observations on the frontier as a release valve for social pressure in the eastern United States, or Daniel Boone needing elbow room.

Today we live on top of each other and this aspect of freedom is rapidly diminishing.

One might view time as a delineator of freedom, as we often say: “If only I had enough time.” The absence of the time found in simpler societies, the temporal pressure cooker of today where one’s days off are filled with running one’s personal business (errands, bill paying, etc.), suggests we have lost much of this temporal freedom.

I would suggest that the basic *de facto* support of freedom now lies with information.

Information, like knowledge, as observed by Francis Bacon, is power, and distributed information is distributed power.

### **INFORMATION AWARENESS**

Contrast these indicators of the public importance of information with a lack of conscious awareness of the significance of information.

We do not have an information-prone society. When faced with a problem or interest, I suggest, we are more prone to ask, "What do I have to do?" rather than, "What do I have to know?" Part of this reaction is probably due to the fact that when we ask "What do I have to know?" we are faced with another problem in addition to the initial one; i.e., where to get the information. This added effort simply confirms in us our indifference to information, and we take our best shot at solving the problem through decision and action. I sometimes think we have made a virtue of the information incapacity by the way we laud decision making as an indicator of ability.

If the foregoing examples are reasonably accurate, we are then faced with a situation in which information is fundamentally important to societal and individual well-being, but is not perceived to be so by people in the conduct of their daily affairs.

Computer-supported telecommunications systems can be the instrument for accelerating information control by a few (this has been much of the trend, so far, as indicated by corporate, research, and technical use of these systems), or it can be used to build information confidence, use, and desire throughout society.

This option, I suggest, is central to the significance of telecommunications systems for a democratic society.

If the latter option is to be obtained, I suggest that information will have to be packaged and targeted so well on people's everyday problems and interests that it will be easier and more productive to say "What do I have to know?" before saying "What do I have to do?"

A basic approach to articulating an information service of this kind consists of the following steps:

1. Determine and prioritize the individual and societal problems and interests of a given community.
2. Ascertain the information parameters of those problems and interests.
3. Locate and obtain the information necessary to address those problems and interests.
4. Organize this information so as to optimally target the specified prob-

lem or interest to be as easily retrievable as possible. This requires an understanding of the context in which the information is used so that it is optimally relevant, and an understanding of the language and problem articulation common to the individuals in the community in order to ensure rapid retrieval.

### **A Lesson in Interactive Television Programming: The Home Book Club on QUBE**

W. Theodore BOLTON: OCLC, Inc., Columbus, Ohio.

On December 1, 1977, Warner Communications christened what has become the most publicized and talked about technological development in the field of cable television: QUBE, its two-way interactive cable system. Publicity posters claimed that this would be "a day you'll tell your grandchildren about," and broadcasters added the word "interactive" to their cocktail-party vocabulary. Academicians who ten years ago forecast a technological revolution initiated by the marriage of computer to cable television, smugly grinned and saw their dreams turn into reality.

Response to QUBE, however, has been mixed. Participatory television brings, to some, futuristic images of instant democracy; others warn of its potential demagogic power.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of your critical persuasion, there now exists what former CBS executive turned Warner Amex<sup>2</sup> consultant Mike Dann calls "a whole new utility."<sup>3</sup> This whole new utility, whether in the form of QUBE cable television, or some other combination of computer, cable television, telephone, and standard over-the-air broadcasting, will change the way we conduct our lives and interact with other people.

#### **THE HISTORY OF THE HOME BOOK CLUB**

Early in 1979, the OCLC, Inc., research staff appraised the nature and context of the QUBE facilities (located in Co-