

INTERNET AND LIBRARY II

Since my last article, there has been tremendous growth in the use of Internet by various libraries all over the world. I will briefly mention three areas of growth. First, I have discussed previously the Z39.50 standard, which allows users to use just their local search syntax to search items in other library systems. This standard is now utilized by the local academic libraries. For example, from the catalogue in the University of Science and Technology, one can search simultaneously the holdings of Chinese University, Brown University, University of Toronto and University of California, Melvyl. These libraries are geographically diverse but are linked by Internet. They can "talk" to each other using Z39.50. You can try this out by telnetting to ustlib.hkust.hk.

With Z39.50, it is now possible for a library system that is connected to Internet to set up a pseudo union catalogue. This will greatly reduce the time to locate items from various sources. It is my dream and prayer that one day, many of the local theological libraries can utilize this technology so that a union catalogue for theological research and education can be accessed by Christian scholars, educators, pastors, seminary students and all Christians.

Second, libraries see the importance and the popularity of World Wide Web technology. Many of them have set up WWW interface to their library systems. There are many names for this kind of interface such as WebCat, NetPac etc. From a very friendly web page, a patron (user) can search the library catalogue using general keywords. For example, If he is interested in Christianity in China, he can type "Christianity China" in a text box and click the mouse on the search button. A page with search results will come up quickly. On this page, he can see all the books whose titles contains either "Christianity" or "China" or both. Moreover, all the subject headings with these two words will be displayed. By clicking on any line he wants, the detailed information on that item will be displayed. The user is no longer hindered by the difficult search syntax of various libraries' systems. Using the simple and standard "point and click" method, he can locate the books he needs. In a way, surfing the net and searching a library catalogue will always be the same. In <http://library.usask.ca/hywebcat/>, you can find a list of libraries where WWW interface is available.

Third, locally in Hong Kong, five institutions have joined in the computerization of their libraries. They formed a network called Ecumenical Information Network (教會資訊網). Members of this network include

Baptist Theological Seminary, Holy Spirit Seminary, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre and Youth For Christ (Hong Kong). Moreover with the co-operation from the Alliance Bible Seminary, their entire catalogue has been loaded into the EIN union catalogue. When most of the cataloguing work is finished, there will be more than 200,000 volumes available for search in the union catalogue.

Utilizing the Dynix library system, EIN has set up a union catalogue and four independent local catalogues. At this stage, via a wide area network, member libraries can access the union catalogue. By sharing cataloguing effort, these libraries are able to speed up their cataloguing process and to improve the quality of their catalogues. Since Dynix, like other commercial systems, has developed the webcat and Z39.50 interface, it is expected, according to their computer vendor, that by the end of 1997, when the next upgrade of the bilingual Dynix is ready, EIN will be able to install these two facilities. These facilities will be available via Internet to the public when EIN's Internet connectivity is ready. Then, EIN will be the world's largest library catalogue of Chinese theological works. The dream and prayer that I have mentioned in the first point may be partially realized.

As information technology advances in leaps and bounds, we should strive to utilize them in the advancement not only in our theological research but the expansion of his kingdom.

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