Library Systems: Keeping Up Our Images

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April 1996

The Systems Librarian
Library Systems: Keeping Up Our Images

Conversion from "fiber-based" to electronic format is not a pretty picture forward. Not coincidentally, this is the time period when publishers started keeping their bibliographic data on computer files before printing them on "fiber-based information systems," also known as books. We all know that someday we will have a Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature online back to 1900. On the other hand, we are still waiting for retrospective information in most cases.

Studies in Scarlet

Addressing this challenge, the Research Libraries Group instituted a major project in 1995 to digitize a collection of 19th century documents in the field of family law and domestic relationships. This project, known as "Studies in Scarlet," will bring together the collection resources from seven member institutions. They are Harvard University Law School, Princeton University, University of Pennsylvania Law School, New York Public Library, North Carolina State Archives, University of Leeds, and my own New York University School of Law. I was notified that we were selected to participate a week before I took the job.

The phrase '90 percent accurate' sounds good until you see a converted document that is 90 percent accurate.

SIRS Mandarin

Launches

SIRS Mandarin, a new SIRS Mandarinet, Version 2.71. This integrated library unit offers several software elements that guide the user as they search topics.

Launches

The Mandarin Library Automation Coordinator at the school. From the first day, I have been involved in learning about the issues of scanning, OCR (Optical Character Recognition), marking up, and systematic data storage. I have sat through a number of demonstrations where a vendor will take a microfiche card, put it into a viewer that is tied to a computer, and—ZAP!—capture a perfect image into a TIFF file. It looks beautiful, and you can call up the words at any time you want to look at it after storing it on your hard disk. The problem is that the image is just a picture. Even though the words and looks like text, it might as well be a picture of Staten Island. Furthermore, TIFF files cannot be read by Web browsers; you need special software.

To make these images into easily readable files you may need to run OCR software. Vendors do not like to show you this process because the results are not as pretty. The best of these programs, using the clearest of type, will still leave unresolved patches to clear up manually. The phrase '90 percent accurate' sounds good until you see a converted document that is 90 percent accurate.
THE EVOLVING VIRTUAL LIBRARY:
Visions and Case Studies
Edited by Laverna M. Saunders

A transformation is taking place in all types of libraries. Just a few years ago, libraries were occupied primarily with developing local automated systems and collections of print materials. Although these functions are still being performed, external forces have created the need for change. Budget cutbacks and the escalating cost of materials, especially scholarly journals, have caused librarians to examine more carefully the collection needs of their users. The concept of access to remote resources which supplement or substitute for items owned locally has become more acceptable due to the availability of worldwide telecommunications networks, appropriate hardware and software, and machine-readable databases. The "virtual library" allows a user at a computer terminal to search bibliographic citations, databases, electronic publications, and other types of information in digital format. And as the technology changes and evolves, so does the virtual library.

This book addresses many of the practical issues involved in developing the virtual library. It provides background on the growth and development of electronic resources and also examines innovative pilot projects that are occurring in all different types of library environments. There is no doubt that a dramatic change is taking place. This book will help you deal with that change and position you and your organization for the future.


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