

Factors for consideration in the selection of CD-ROM products

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1. Introduction

The Librarian's role is more complex today, compared to the days when print was the only medium available for distribution of information. Today, there is a choice between print, microform, magnetic and optical media. The Librarian must therefore be conversant with their characteristics and limitations to select the right one in order to satisfy the information needs of users within the available financial resources. The microforms dominated the 1960s, online the 1970s and at present it is the turn of optical media.

Due to the fact that scientific community has become computer literate and new range of information products are available in the form of CD-ROMs (Compact Disc-Read Only Memories) allowing the retrieval in an easy way from large databases, librarians have to adapt to the changes in the publishing field.

2. CD-ROM Products

CD-ROM has emerged as the most important medium of publication since the Gutenberg press. The compact disc is a unique and powerful medium for the distribution of information of all types.

The different types of documents such as leisure literature, standard text books, rare documents, encyclopedias, dictionaries, directories, hand books, maps, business/trade literature, patents standards, news papers, magazines, journals, abstracting and indexing journals are amenable for production as CD-ROM products.

According to market research firm Frost & Sullivan, the multimedia market in US is expected to grow from \$4.9 billions in 1993 to \$22 billions by the end of the decade. The increasing R&D activities are resulting in scientific and technical advances that make sound, video and CD-ROM available at affordable prices. Many people in the industry call 1994 as the year of the CD-ROM. Thousands of CD-ROM titles are available in the market. Mr. Bill Gates, Chairman, Microsoft expects the number of titles to double in each of the next several years. Infotech, a market research firm, reports that the world wide installed base of CD-ROM drives grew to 26.9 million units, up by 137 percent from 1993. And the world wide

CD-ROM title sales were up by 161 percent in 1994, led by consumer purchases. This clearly shows that in the very near future CD-ROM products will invariably occupy prominent position in academic and special libraries collection.

3. Factors for consideration

Most of the CD-ROM products require huge investment for initial acquisition and also recurring expenditure towards renewal charges for CD-ROM products, the librarian should take into consideration a number of factors while acquiring the products.

The important factors to be considered are :

- Product Description
- Coverage
- Hardware and software Considerations
- Retrieval Software Features
- Documentation
- Publisher and Vendor
- Staff Requirement

3.1. Product Description

It covers purpose and general characteristics of the products, such as:

- Name of the product.
- Name of the publisher.
- Name of the Vendor.
- Purpose of purchasing the product.
- Actual users.
- To what extent the proposed product can fulfil the information requirements of targeted users.
- Whether the same product is available in the library in different medium or not. If the answer is 'yes', in what way the proposed product is better in utility than the existing one.
- The initial cost of the product including the current and archival disks, if any.
- The recurring expenditure for the updates.
- The impact of recurring expenditure on the budget of the library.
- Whether the same product is available in different media, if so, the cost comparison of the product.

- The different vendors from whom the product can be purchased and the terms and conditions of each vendor. For ex. discount, supply time, payment time etc.

- Display features
- Special features.

In case the product has to be imported, the procedure involved, the expenditure towards customs duty, freight charges etc.

3.2. Coverage

It includes the following aspects:

- The subject area(a) covered by the product.
- The scope of coverage.
- Accuracy of data/information.
- The intellectual level of coverage of information.
- The indexing system employed and its thoroughness for different classes of data.
- The capability of the product to satisfy basic queries and in-depth queries.
- Whether a thesaurus or subjects heading list available for the product.
- Whether the product is designed keeping in mind the target users and how they use the information currently.

3.4. Hardware and Software Considerations

Before making a decision for the purchase of the product, it has to be ascertained whether the product can run on the systems already available in the library. The compatibility of the retrieval software with the existing operating systems has to be checked. In case additional hardware and software has to be procured, The expenditure out. The indiginous availability of the required hardware and software has to be ascertained.

3.5. Software Features

One of the great advantages of CD-ROM products when compared to Online services is to develop information products incorporating software tailored to the requirements of the information and to its application. Most of the CD-ROM products contain huge amount of data and the real usefulness of the product depends on the efficient way of retrieving the data and also a powerful and efficient method of describing the subset of information required. With out the right retrieval software package and specially designed user interface, the CD-ROM product is nothing more than a very efficient storage and distribution medium. In general the software should be easy to learn easy to use and adjust to the skill level of the user. It includes the following features:

- Search features
- Browsing features

3.5.1. Search Features

It includes full text search, boolean search, proximity operators, field level search, hierarchical access, browseable indexes and truncation.

Full text search :

The full text search feature is very powerful as it allows the user to find every occurrence of any word, combination of words or phrases in the CD-ROM database.

Boolean logic :

The traditional boolean operators AND, OR ,NOT allows the user to include or exclude specific words and their synonyms.

Proximity operators:

The user can specify the terms that should occur in the same document, in the same paragraph, next to one another, within two words of each others etc.

Field level search :

The software allows the user to search a specific field(s) such as author, title, abstract, descriptors etc.

Hierarchical Access :

It provides access to information through the structure of the information hierarchy. For example, the user can browse through the classification hierarchy to locate 'Academic Libraries' and with in that to find 'University Libraries'.

Browseable Indexes :

The user can browse up and down within the hierarchy of index terms and can select the most relevant terms of his choice. The librarian has to examine the browseable indexes provided to the product like author, subject etc., think what types of retrieval users will wish to carry out on that particular product, and also check whether the terms included in the subject index are derived either from an authority list or a thesaurus.

Truncation :

Truncation allows to locate the word root and searches for it with various suffixes.

3.5.2. Browsing Features

It includes browsing table of contents and headings browsing graphics and browsing thesauruses/terms dictionary.

Browsing Table of Contents and Headings:

The direct browse feature is most effective for short

articles by selecting a heading or sub-heading of interest from the table of contents.

Browsing Graphics :

Allows the user to browse the graphics and to manipulate them on the screen and to direct the output to a disc or printer.

Browsing Theasaurus/Terms Dictionary :

This is useful if a user is unsure of what term to use for searching or how it is spelled. It helps to redefine the search strategy by knowing the BTs, NTs and RTs.

3.5.3. Display Features

It includes the following aspects:

- WIMPs (Window, Icon, Mouse, Pointer) environment for the display of records.
- Flexibility for the user to define his own format.
- Highlighting the search term in the text.
- Facility to scroll the text.

3.5.4. Special Features

The special software features may be specific to the type of information being handled or to the needs and requirements of a specific market.

The software should have the capability to further process the retrieved information when the user wish to perform. For example, merging the retrieved information with other information sources like a bibliographic record to be imported into the library Cataloguing system, Accession List or for incorporation into a printed bibliography. In the case of full text products, there should be provision to link up with word processing software package, spreadsheet package, so that the user can extract a piece of text to incorporate it into a report or to analyse the data and represent it in graphical form. The usefulness of the software lies in the ability to minimize the number of operations to switch between information access and the programs used for subsequent processing. As far as possible the software should integrate the product in to the general PC environment.

3.6. Documentation

A helpful and well written manual to the product will act as a guide to the staff/user searching the database/text. The manual should be clear and easily understandable. The manual should clearly explain the basic procedures to be followed in order to access the database. It should provide solutions to various problems a user may encounter while using the product. Most of the products incorporate this information in the retrieval software under the head 'HELP'. If it is in the form of a hard copy, the form of a hard copy, the user can prepare himself before he

starts searching. Two different manuals, one for users and the other for library staff operating the system will be of much help.

3.7. Publisher and vendor

It includes the following aspects.

- The purpose of the publisher in developing the product.
- The Experience and field of specialization of the publisher to develop the product.
- Similar products developed by the publisher and the capability of the retrieval software packages.
- The reliability of the publisher and vendor.
- Whether the vendor is in the "approved list of suppliers" of the parent organisation.

3.8. Staff Requirement

The projected use of the product by various user groups has to be estimated and the proposed services to be rendered/introduced making use of the product are to be planned. Based on this the staff requirement has to be worked out in order to provide the proposed services, training the users, trouble shooting, etc.

4. Conclusion

Information delivery is changing from the traditional, linear text and picture on paper medium to the modern, non-linear multimedia environment. In view of the fact that in the very near future, the CD-ROM products find place in different libraries, the factors discussed above will serve as a check list to librarians who are involved in the acquisition of CD-ROM products.

5. References

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