PERCEPTIONS OF LIBRARY AUTOMATED SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

The development of computing and information processing technologies is remarkable and a new stage has been setting very often. New generation hardware, operating systems, programing language are forging and reliable systems are staging. Price structures of mainframe computers and minicomputers have substantially reduced owing to change in import policy. Microprocessors with higher and powerful capacities entered the market. Networks of various databases stormed into the users area. A new synergistic development has been formed with the new technological process and network of library and information automation. The traditional way of information dissemination is disappearing and the librarians are forced to develop creative work in the ever challenging world. The relative automation activity is revitalizing many libraries. The contribution of the new generation automated systems augments and supplements the efforts of enthusiastic library professionals. The usage of personal computers forms the base tool for information automation functions and activities in the large integrated systems. The traditional librarians are being transformed into systems librarians and learn the knowledge with the tools in their arms and develop themselves into new generation library and information professionals duly integrating into the processing systems.

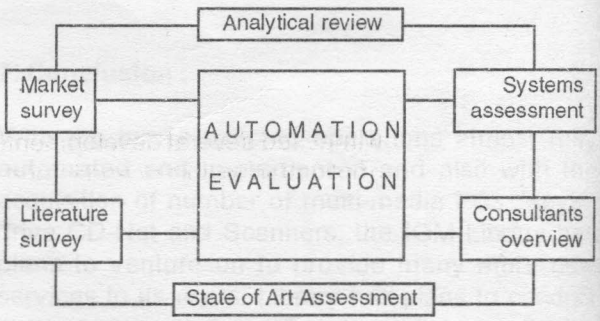
INTRODUCTION

Library automation systems are advanced and how they are going to be better in the next couple of years ? Selection of a system and its installation that best fits into the users needs value assessment of the users urge. Integrated systems assessment help many librarians what is offered in the market and what exactly meets the demands of present time and future. Many a librarian in the Indian academic institutions, special scientific libraries, public libraries seldom and any training on the computers usage and the present environment demands working experience to manage the modern information systems. It is not just learning, the evaluation for selection of systems and equipment needs in depth knowledge which ultimately help in the managerial process of the institutional services. Many librarians have the feeling that they are left behind in the current rush towards library automation, online catalogs and integrated online systems. The state of art of these systems is much farther advanced than what really it is in India. Every one should start thinking at the available systems with a view to actually buying them to meet the users' basic information requirements.

EVALUATION

Integrated library systems development essentially depends on the size of library. The promises of vendors depends on the librarians evaluation process of the state of art of structures and availability. The capabilities and functions of a system qualifies its appropriateness to a library.

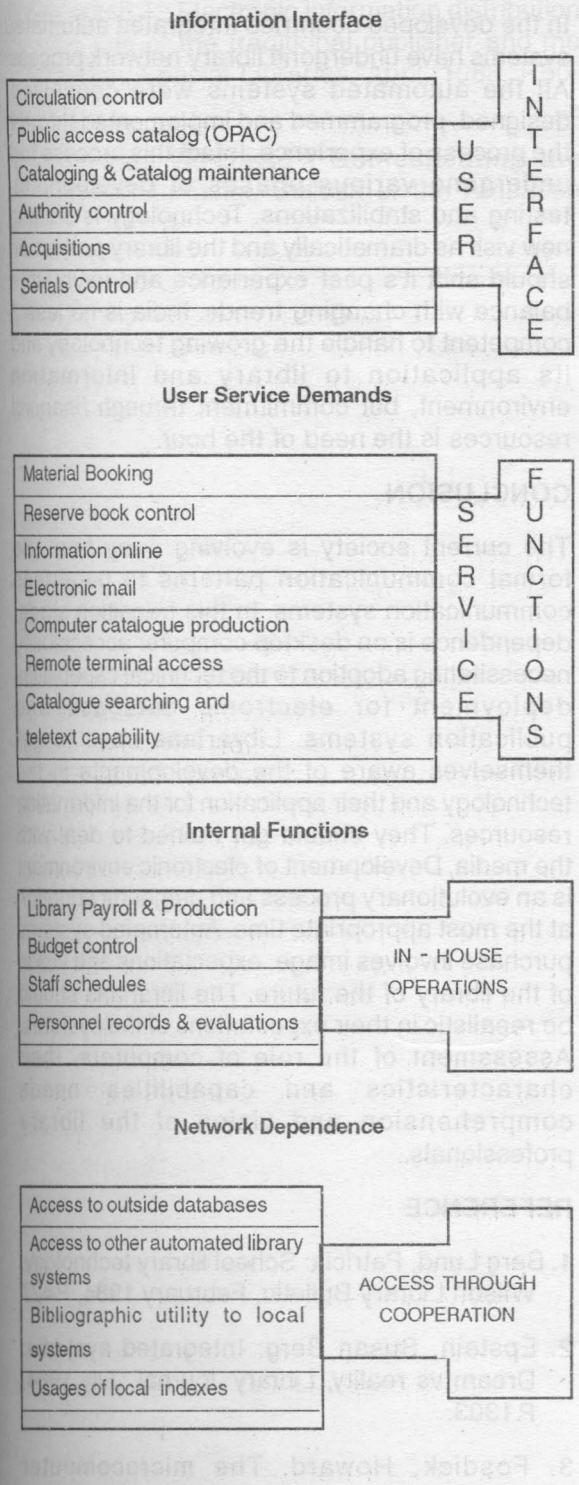
The basis requirement in this evaluation process of automation is :



The integrated systems are moving targets and what might have been acceptable five years ago is inadequate today. The market products environment looks advanced today will seen primitive in five years. As technology improves, the costs go down. Librarians many a time demand additional functions and capabilities and library requirements and expectations always exceed the offerings.

TECHNOLOGY AND FUNCTIONS

The bibliographic functions of an integrated technology system are :-



Some vendors to offer systems with word processing and spread sheet capabilities and these largely depend on the software usage. Library systems vendors never keep pace with the software market. It is always desirable for librarians to buy standard commercial software programmes to run them on the microcomputers. The most preferable integrated technology system should include bibliographic functions such as (1) Public access catalog (2) Cataloging and catalog maintenance (3) Authority control (4) Acquisitions (5) Serials check and (6) Circulation control. The system should also have expandability for handling other bibliographic functions such as title pages, indexes and full text. There is a marked difference between hardware and software requirements for online catalog and circulation system.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

It is a basic understanding of any librarian to buy any system to make use that the system will handle now many terminals and the size of the database. It is absolutely prerogative on the part of manager to pay a visit to a library, equivalent to his library size or marginally larger size-which has equivalent database and number of terminals. One should judge the system by its performance in a demonstration mode with a small database and a limited number of terminals. The other basic judgement should be about the vendors' capabilities. One should see whether the vendor is a pioneer in marketing the system or he has limited customers. The visit will help in the assessment of the working environment of the system. The pains, pleasures and hardships of the system's user will be a guidance in the selection process.

CHOOSING DILEMMA

The Indian academic library management scenario shows that there is hardly any exposure to the technology and products applied on to the information environment. Invariably the librarians need to depend on the computer hardware specialist, who in due course pose administrative problems in the systems organization with the advance in technology. Every one will have a dilemma in choosing various components for an integrated system. If one has to choose on the basis other's experiences of working equipment, the option will lead to obsolete model which may not be operative for longer duration. On the other hand choosing a latest sophisticated designed equipment with wider capabilities, one will be doing so relatively untested and may be subjected to problems. One should foresee the long term dependence on the vendor for troubles and failures. No library around the world escaped bitter experiences with the vendor's services. The western experiences shows that most new companies brought out latest microprocessor based system in a three year time. Many a vendor offer special prices and special deals for various reasons but one should not be carried away by them and should judge on the basis of good reasons. The question of prestige of an institutional library should in no case arise at any point of time in the selection process.

SELECTION ESSENTIALS

Minicomputer based systems are economical and more easily manageable than mainframe based systems-which are expensive and complicated. The traditional distinction between micros, minis and mainframes rapidly losing their meaning as the systems capabilities are expanding and the prices are declining substantially. The preference for any selection should be valid on the basis of reliability, processing capability of data storage. Some libraries have been opting for small systems and when the expansions are planned, the vendors readily join several other minicomputers in a series, but this makes the system very complex and its maintenance becomes very expensive and gigantic task. It is unwise to purchase very complex system as it may be equivalent to mainframe maintenance. The most appropriate criteria for preference of a system should be cost effective configuration of hardware and software for the library jobs on hand. The magnitude of a library squarely depends on the circulation system and related transactions. Selection and implementation of a computer system forms the main core of the day to day library job. Retrospective conversion of catalogue records, creation and maintenance of online database becomes the crux of the library environment. It is obvious the computer systems become obsolete and replacements becomes essential as time passes along with the technological advance. But catalogue database becomes a permanent asset and in no case, it should become a liability for creation and maintenance.

CHANGING TRENDS

Three decades of library automation elsewhere witnessed several developments in the technology application to library and information world. Indian academic environment is just processing automated circulation system in a very few identified universities and institutions of higher learning. The market for library automation software is just limited, as it develops very slowly. Even the available circulation system software are not complete and reliable. Development of online catalogues and other related functions are on the planning anvil rather than a reality as compared to the European library automated systems. Routine systems installation and operations in academic libraries are yet to be long cherished wish of the user community. The goal of library automation is to provide better access to the resources within the library. The automation development since not matched with the pace of information explosion.

In the developed countries integrated automated systems have undergone library network process. All the automated systems were conceived, designed, programmed and implemented through the process of experience. Infact this process has undergone various phases of development, testing and stabilizations. Technology is shifting new visit as dramatically and the library profession should shift it's past experience and maintain a balance with changing trends. India is no less a competent to handle the growing technology and its application to library and information environment, but commitment through financial resources is the need of the hour.

CONCLUSION

The current society is evolving away from the formal communication patterns to paperless communication systems. In this transition stage, dependence is on desktop computer accessibility necessitating adoption to the technical capabilities deployment for electronic database and publication systems. Librarians have to get themselves aware of the developments in the technology and their application for the information resources. They should get trained to deal with the media. Development of electronic environment is an evolutionary process and demands adoption at the most appropriate time. Automated systems purchase involves image, expectations and vision of the library of the future. The librarians should be reealistic in their expectations of the systems. Assessment of the role of computers, their characteristics and capabilities needs comprehension and vision of the library professionals.

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