ELECTRONIC LINKS: TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

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This paper illustrates the influence of e-mail/Internet on the acquisition of Slavonic publications. It examines recent possibilities for inter-library co-operation and the new dimension of speed which have been found most useful for acquisitions librarians in a traditionally difficult area.

After mention of the political and social changes which have occurred, reference is made to the aid programmes, eg Soros and VTLS, which have helped the new electronic systems to proliferate. E-mail forums such as Slavlibs and Russian studies illustrate the extent of global communication possibilities. Direct access to electronic journals is becoming increasingly possible. In a broader context the use of the Internet to establish links with libraries and agents is mentioned.

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Since 1990, in the countries of the Former Soviet Union (FSU) and Central Eastern Europe (CEE), there has been considerable confusion as the communist system moves towards a market economy. In publishing and information provision, as in all other aspects of the economy, this brought difficulties while new policies were strived for. In many cases these difficulties have still not been resolved.

Aid

New technology has been a major tool in initiating change quickly. At the risk of seeming over simplistic it should be said that, before new technology can be applied, the basic hardware and software in compatible forms have to be available to both the user and the provider of the information. In this respect advances which have taken place have been helped by Western concerns anxious to bring about economic and social change in the former communist countries.

Aid agencies in the West were keen to help with existing problems and money was pumped into most ex-communist countries to fund a variety of programmes. The philanthropist Soros in particular was anxious to give aid to CEE. This financial help was often used to install electronic communications systems. Details of the work of the Soros Foundation can be found on URL http://www.soros.org

Other countries have received money from different sources and purchased electronic systems. VTLS, an American based library systems company, donated hardware and software to many Polish Libraries. This donation was no doubt backed by the business reasoning that subsequent updating would have to be paid for and, once installed, equipment is unlikely to be easily replaced.

Self-funded systems

Some institutions have however managed to install sophisticated electronic systems funded from within the country. A very good example is IZUM in Slovenia (formerly part of Jugoslavia). Their WWW page at http:// www.izum.si is very fast loading and gives access to information about the institution and its efforts to be included in information trends in the developed world.

E-mail forums and discussion lists

The value of electronic forums cannot be overstated. Slavonic librarians are most fortunate to have the US based e-mail forum *Slavlibs*, as a meeting place of ideas and collaboration between librarians of the USA, UK and increasingly the FSU and CEE. Allan Urbanic is the manager who monitors members and contents. While being of great value to librarians in the US at times of their conferences and meetings, it is also a valuable source of information for those in other countries and allows them to participate in electronic conversations. Ideas, generated by people with similar interests and working backgrounds, can be circulated at great speed from within forum, so that what would have taken weeks or months to be realised is now available in minutes or days.

Russian Studies in the UK is a forum with a wide base but, although it includes occasional items of value to librarians, it lacks the constant vitality of the American *Slavlibs* forum. Perhaps the recently established forum for the Council of Slavonic and Eastern Europe Libraries and Information Services (COSEELIS) will fill the gap.

Cenasia is a useful discussion list which links academics in the Central Asian Republics with the West in far reaching debates on topical matters.

Such forums have practical uses. An example at the BLDSC concerned a librarian in Prague, at the Narodni Knihovna, who was interested in providing publications by exchange or for purchase. Our main supplier of materials from Czechoslovakia, Collets, had ceased business in 1993 and the successor, the Czech based Artia, followed the same fate in 1996. Normally it would have taken months to set up new arrangements, but in this case it was possible to pass all titles obtained from Artia over to Narodni Knihovna and to extend the exchange agreement in a matter of three days. This exchange will now be carried out on a fixed price rate where BLDSC will obtain serials and in exchange supply requested monograph titles to Narodni Knihovna.

In a similar way the exponential growth of possible sources can be continually renewed and developed. As a result of a correspondence over the e-mail a list of e-mail addresses used by the Library of Congress was sent to BLDSC and by return the Library of Congress received e-mail addresses of publishers which are used by BLDSC.

Electronic journals

The above electronic forums sometimes supply information about electronic publications. One such title is *Physics Uspekhi On-Line* (http://ufn.ioc.ac.ru/ufn.html) which is the English translation of *Uspeki Fizicheskikh Nauk*.

Another example, *Rapid Communications* (0234-5366), the abstracts of the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research (JINR), is to be found at http://dbserv.jinr.ru/~lijak/text/abjRC.html. Here as with many such documents a problem in reading the text may be encountered. Since the original is written in Cyrillic, a software tool such as the Universal Cyrillic Converter is needed to convert ASCII to Cyrillic or transliterated form.

An evaluation of the use and cost of such publications has yet to be made.

Internet

The Internet offers unlimited chance for those wishing to advertise or retrieve information on world-wide issues. Browsing the Net using Lycos or some other search tool for keyword searching is effective. However, it is not always efficient in terms of time. To make best contact it is necessary to know a good URL and be entirely correct when transcribing it . The slightest mistake leads to an error message. It is also advisable to use the system when it is not busy. Response time is slower after midday as users in the USA start their day .

However, for those acquiring Slavonic publications it is possible to make contact with agents and obtain quite detailed information about libraries and even holdings of libraries.

The British Library's home page, http://www.portico.bl/, gives Internet users a gateway into the British Library's collections, including the Slavonic collections which are listed by country.

The main Russian agent used by BLDSC, Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga in Moscow, has a web

page where contact information is available. Another useful supplier of Russian materials is Eastview Publications in the USA who also have offices in Moscow and other countries of the FSU with a web page located at http:// www.eastview.com/. While specific publication detail is not always available on these pages, full verification can be obtained quickly by e-mail. Other smaller suppliers also have web pages eg Andrigal in Moscow - http://www.relis.ru/ Relis/ANDRIGAL/andrig-d.html.

Remoter regions of the FSU are now locatable on the web. Two interesting examples are Cyber Uzbekistan (http://www.cu-online.com/~k_a/ uzbekistan) and the Kazakhstan home page which presents a picture of the country and, of more interest to librarians, the Institutional libraries and staff who can be contacted.

As mentioned previously many libraries in Poland have been helped by the US library systems company VTLS to set up elaborate electronic systems . The Jagellonian University library in Krakow is one of them and can be found on their home page at http:// www.if.uj.edu.pl/UJ/BJ. From this page remote access to the library catalogue is possible for bibliographic checking.

At a recent conference of COSEELIS at Loughborough (September 11/12 1996), Graham Dix, of CREES, University of Birmingham presented a session on the latest URLs that he has found to be of value to users of his library. Discussion which followed mentioned a problem of dissemination and the sifting and 'subject indexing' of URLs. An ordered classification tool for the mass of information on the Internet is

something to be looked forward to. At the same meeting it was decided to create the home page for COSEELIS, mentioned above.

Internet tools

Terminology can be a barrier to understanding the Internet. A glossary of Internet terms, published in 'European Bookseller' [1], is a simple and useful guide to basic terms.

Profitable URLs for users with Slavonic interests can be found in the recently published 'East-West Links' [2] .

Summary

Although conventional mail, telephone and fax still play an important part in the process of acquiring Slavonic publications , a myriad of channels have opened up as a result of modern information technology. The pace at which changes have been implemented is remarkable. Until two years ago none of the tools discussed here were available in the Slavonic Acquisitions section at BLDSC.

References

1. Database, *European Bookseller*. August 1995, pp37-38

2. Hogg, R & Ladizesky, K. *East-West Links: Directory of information sources in the Former Soviet Union and Central Eastern Europe.* British Library Document Supply Centre, 1996. issn 1363-0113   isbn 0-7123-2143-8