THE DIGITAL MOUSETRAP

Neil Smith

In terms of national developments, the UK has several initiatives which have the use of digital information at their core. At the root of all these developments are issues of policy and economics. It seems that libraries will be faced with additional costs of services based upon digital materials while maintaining traditional services, and that the users of information will increasingly be faced with charged services to ensure sustainability. The paper reviews these developments, with a more detailed look at the British Library's plans, and attempts to identify some common threads and preoccupations as seen from the UK perspective, such as universality and access, complementarity and competition, project funding and sustainability, and the relationship between public good and charging for services.

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Introduction

Much has been written over the past five years about the impact of electronic or digital information on libraries. The literature would indicate that an enormous amount of research - in the broad sense - is going on, as the various players in the 'information food chain' find their feet. Revolution is clearly in the air but so far the barricades have not been raised. However, there are considerable hurdles for all the players, centring around the economic models of sustainable service, intellectual property rights, and access. There are now several substantial programmes in the UK which are seeking to address these broad issues, and increasingly, there is a new political context within which they will operate.

Electronic information is becoming embedded in public policy at very many levels in the UK and in the developing countries. The G7 Information Society initiatives are having some effect on domestic political agendas where these topics might have been absent before. Library and information services must fit into this new 'wired society' scenario even though librarians and information managers have been wrestling with the issues for some time. It may be ironic that, at the time that these issues surface politically, the electronic information agenda will change.

The theme of this paper is the management of electronic information in terms of the provision of access in a national context. It will: look at the broader picture of the G7 and European Union Information Society activities and how these are reflected in the Government's Information Society Initiative and 'IT for All' programmes; take a brief look at the eLib programme, the Information for All Millennium bid; the Public Library Review, *Reading the Future* and the 20-20 Vision of the Library and Information Commission; and give a detailed description of the British Library's Digital Library Programme.

The paper reviews these developments and attempts to identify some common threads and preoccupations - such as universality and access, complementarity and competition, project funding and

sustainability, and the relationship between public good and charging for services.

The broader picture

I want to examine first the broader context of how governments internationally are viewing the conjunction of electronic information, IT and networking to deliver better services to the citizen and to regenerate and revitalise industry and commerce.

For many people, the serious debate on this agenda began with the US National Information Infrastructure (NII) initiatives in 1992-3. The US administration is still firmly involved in new initiatives to make the NII a reality. The latest being the *Next Generation Internet* programme (NGI), a mixture of government seed-corn funding and regulatory framework, with private sector investment and operation to follow. The NGI vision is that:

> "In the 21st Century, the Internet will provide a powerful and versatile environment for business, education, culture, and entertainment. Sight, sound, and even touch will be integrated through powerful computers, displays, and networks. People will use this environment to shop, bank, study, entertain, work, and visit with each other. Whether at home, at the office, or on travel, the environment will be the same. Privacy, security, and reliability will be built in. The customer will be able to chose among different levels of service with varying prices. Benefits of this environment will include a more agile economy, a greater choice of places to live or work, easy access to life-long learning, and better opportunity to participate in the community, the nation, and the world."[2]

The US entrepreneurial spirit has also exported its NII vision to become the GII - the Global Information Infrastructure. These ideas have been taken up by the G7 countries and by the European Commission. The result is a series of Information Society projects which have the broad aims of making the most of IT for business, education, healthcare, and to make government more accessible to the citizen. The G7 has established a trans-national top-level group of 11 projects[3] (including the *Bibliotheca*

Universalis digital library project), plus associated national Information Society Initiatives. In the UK, the Information Society Initiative[4] was launched by the DTI in 1996 and includes a small series of other programmes such as 'IT for All'[5]. Within 'IT for All' are included both the *government.direct* programme and the Public Library Review.

The Labour Party document on their IT policy, *Communicating Britain's Future*, follows a now familiar line on the benefits for society to be gained from the presence of an information superhighway ubiquitous in terms of geographic and social reach to provide universal access. These are some key points of the document:

- The network will be provided by BT, other telephony providers and the cable TV companies. The document goes on to say that "people do not buy wires; they buy programmes, services and information"

- " *the cornerstone of this public access network will be the public library"*. Labour says it will "insist that the providers of the infrastructure automatically put a feed into every public library in the area they are covering".

- The document sees that "protection of copyright will be essential to facilitate content provision on the new networks" and that there *"must be a proper legal mechanism for securing copyright to electronic material, and charging for its use"*. There is a recognition that as with current 'fair use', *"there must be some provision for a right to copy under similar terms across the electronic media"*.   •

- On content, the document encourages Lottery funding for a "Millennium Archive" to put into digital form - *"initially on CD-ROM"* - material from *"our great collections of national significance"*, including the British Library. A mix of Lottery funding and private sector money is envisaged in order to *achieve "free supply to every school and public library in the country"*

Whatever one's view of these global activities, it is clear that they will not go away and that the climate they are setting will impact on libraries. The library and information

community, therefore, has a new opportunity to both benefit from and influence developing policy.

Public libraries

I would now like to briefly look at two major recent initiatives in the area of making information in electronic form available to users of public libraries: the *Information for All* Millennium Fund bid and *Reading the future*, the DNH Public Library Review.

I have already referred to the last government's Information Society Initiative; the following is a quote at its launch from Virginia Bottomley:

> "New technology provides unprecedented opportunities to increase access for all to the wealth of material in our museums, galleries and libraries. IT can link our heritage to our future."

Reading the Future does indeed posit a central role for IT - it is after all part of the Information Society Initiative and IT for All. Among its 20 key points are:

> "[6] Public libraries can deliver the benefits of new technology to the wider population. The digitisation of material is already under way for many texts."

> "[5] Public libraries will benefit from that part of the £300 million a year of National Lottery funding that the Government plans to direct towards the wider introduction of information and communication technology after the Millennium."

> "[15] Public libraries should increase financial and other support from outside the public sector."

The basis of public library funding from the public purse will not change. Local authorities will still determine the level of library service funding from their block grant. As we all know, the Millennium Commission rejected the *Information for All* bid - partly on the grounds that it was not distinctive enough. The rejection does, of course, get to the real point - funding. The estimate for connecting all public libraries was around £100 million; many of the players agree on the need for such a network, but there is no agreement on how to pay for it. In the

Public Library Review, DNH asked the Library and Information Commission to report in July this year on ways in which the funding might be found and on a great many other issues concerning the use of digital information in libraries. *Reading the Future* raises the post-Millennium possibility of a new IT fund from which "public libraries could benefit". This seems to put building the public library network off the agenda (of at least the current Government) until the year 2000 and after.

The Library and Information Commission's 20-20 Vision statement articulates its view of the value of library and information services and sets an agenda for the Commission to pursue with the library and information community and with Government. In the context of digital information services, two statements seem to me to be significant:

> "a holistic rather than sectoral approach is necessary in order to realise fully the potential value of library and information services in society."

> "there will be a digital library collection coordinated nationally/internationally embracing the world's knowledge and creativity in which the UK's heritage of intellectual property will be globally available in digital form"

The e-Lib Programme

The history and provenance of the e-Lib Programme is well-known and documented, and so only a very brief overview is presented here. eLib was established in 1994 under the auspices of the Higher Education Funding Councils' (HEFC) Joint Information Systems Committee to implement many of the information technology recommendations of the Libraries Review Group chaired by Sir Brian Follett. The programme has a full time Programme Director, funding of £15m, consists of sixty projects and a number of additional supporting studies, and is due to end in 1998.

The recent Tavistock Institute evaluation of e-Lib gives the Programme's characteristics as:

- an emphasis on learning, mobilisation and catalytic effects,
- a management strategy which is both directive and consultative, and

- a conception of electronic information which goes beyond library provision to include elements of scholarly communication, teaching and learning.

The e-Lib programme, with 60 projects, is a broad one and one that could be characterised as 'let a 1000 flowers bloom' - as indeed was the British Library's *Initiatives for Access* programme of networking and digitisation pilots and demonstrators. As with the Library's *Initiatives for Access* programme, e-Lib is looking for sustainability of services and transferability of findings, and all projects need to develop business plans and exit strategies to move on from the fixed-period project funding regime. It would seem - as an outsider to e-Lib - that there might be three options for the projects:

- some will come to an end, and their findings will be disseminated for future reference;

- JISC may take on the support of some of the projects as ongoing services for the UK HE community;

- some might develop into charged services and could be accessible to other sectors.

It is very likely that some of the services emerging from the eLib project funding phase will be significant services for the whole HE community. It also seems likely that these services will wish to play a part in the wider national picture, such as in document supply. One key issue here is the extent to which JISC might continue to underwrite services which aim to develop on a charged basis. The assumption could be that JISC would not see its remit extending to what would be the subsidising of those services to, for example, the public library sector. Clearly, if JISC did not underwrite these services, then we could look forward to those services being available, priced on a true cost recovery basis, to the users of the public libraries and others.

British Library developments

I want to concentrate now on two major related developments at the British Library which will enable us to provide access to electronic content alongside our traditional collection materials. These are the proposal for the extension of legal deposit and the Digital Library Programme.

Extension of legal deposit

Legal deposit is the arrangement whereby publishers of UK printed publications are required under the 1911 Copyright Act to deposit one copy of every publication with the British Library and, on request, to any of the other five deposit libraries in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The purpose of legal deposit is to maintain the national archive of UK publications for posterity.

With the developemnt of new publication media, there is a severe risk that without an extension of legal deposit to publication media other than print, the comprehensive nature of the national archive will not be maintained. In the light of this, the British Library has led a national initiative for a change in the legal deposit law to cover digital media. The DNH issued a consultation paper[6] in February this year, asking for views on how deposit of digital media can work, what the implications are for publishers, and what are the costs for the publisers and the taxpayer.

The extension of legal deposit is an essential element in the British Library's digital library programme, given the Library's statutory duty to maintain a comprehansive collection of materials which forms the national published archive.

The Digital Library

What is the digital library?

The Digital Library is the widely accepted term describing the use of digital technologies to acquire, store, preserve and provide access to · information and material originally published in digital form or digitised from existing print, audio-visual and other forms.

First of all, I would like to stress the goal of our Digital Library plans. It is:

> **to improve, for all our users, access to the British Library's collection, however it might develop in the future.**

The Library sees the Digital Library development as vital to its future. We wish to make our collection more widely known and more widely accessible by exploiting the opportunities provided by the use of digital technologies and networking. We want to make

our collection available to an expanding, world-wide community of academics, business people, and other researchers of all kinds, wherever they happen to be working. In this way we might hope to perpetuate the spirit of the founders of the national collection established by the 1753 British Museum Act as "For publick use to all posterity ... by all studious and curious persons". The first 'statutes and rules' published in 1759, determined that the collection should be available "for the use of learned and studious men, both natives and foreigners, in their researches into the several parts of knowledge".

The potential these technologies hold both for improving access to the Library's holdings and for developing new services, together with the need to extend the Library's collection coverage to encompass digital media, in the interests of ensuring the continuing comprehensiveness of the collection, are of critical importance to the future of the British Library.

Our priorities

The Library's priorities for digital library developments include:

- improved access to the Library's historical holdings through services to the world-wide research community, schools and universities, and the general public;

- the expansion of its UK and international document supply services through article alerting and improved delivery from a digital store, and links to other digital stores maintained elsewhere;

- the expansion of patent services;

- the extension of legal deposit to digital media.

The achievement of the digital library will be more than a programme for delivering services to our remote users. While it is true that we will be able to provide such users with a new range of services, we also wish to enable our reading room users, in the new St Pancras building and in our other reading rooms, to have full access to the complete range of materials in the Library's collection, digital or otherwise. The digital library will also provide us with benefits in terms of the conservation and preservation of

our collection, particularly items which are fragile, of high-value, or are heavily-used, through the use of digital surrogates. It is also significant, however, that this approach will help us move towards one of our major strategic objectives - the realisation of a single collection, whether acquired through legal deposit or purchase and whether stored at Boston Spa or in London. Finally, it will provide us with the technical means to accommodate material added to our collection through the extension of the statutory deposit legislation to non-print materials.

The digital library is, therefore, an integral part of the Library's overall vision of the way it will in future fulfil its responsibilities as the national library of the United Kingdom. As Brian Lang, the Library's Chief Executive, said in his Introduction to the British Library Information Systems Strategy:

> "We do not envisage an exclusively digital library. We are aware that some people feel that digital materials will predominate in libraries of the future. Others anticipate that the impact will be slight. In the context of the British Library, printed books, manuscripts, music, sound recordings and all the other existing materials in the collection will always retain their central importance, and we are committed to continuing to provide, and to improve, access to these in our reading rooms. The importance of digital materials will, however, increase."[7]

What we are working towards

By the year 2000, we expect that the British Library will be an international centre of expertise in the use of digital materials, as well as a major component within a global digital library. We will simultaneously provide access to a wide range of electronic materials produced outside the Library and make the Library's collections and catalogues available in electronic form.

Key elements of a digital library, which we hope will be in place by the year 2000, are as follows:

- the collection of a wide variety of materials in digital form, either through purchase, licence agreements or by legal deposit;