HIGHLIGHTS OF INFORMATION ACTIVITIES
IN THE SOUTHERN ONTARIO REGION

Sally Grand
Infomart
One Yonge Street
Toronto
M5E 1E5

ABSTRACT

Parallel to the 1979 CAIS conference theme of
"Sharing Resources - Sharing Costs", the infor-
mation "events" selected to describe some direc-
tions in the industry as a whole apply to academic,
public and private sectors of Southern Ontario. The
strongest theme in the academic sector is that of
innovative networking while, in the private sector,
the dominating theme is the startling emergence of
services/products/experiments resulting from the
pooled resources of larger corporate entities.

LES ACTIVITES INFORMATIQUES DE LA REGION
DU SUD DE L'ONTARIO

RESUME

Nous offrons un parallèle aux thèmes de la conférence
de ACSI, 1979, "Le Partage Des Ressources - La Partici-
pation aux Frais" dans l'industrie de l'information
s'appliquant aux secteurs privés, publics et académiques.
Le thème principal du secteur académique est un nouveau
système de réseaux tandis que dans le secteur privé, le
thème principal est celui du partage des ressources à
partir des grandes compagnies résultant en une améliora-
tion dans les services, les produits et les expérimenta-
tions.

HIGHLIGHTS OF INFORMATION ACTIVITIES
IN THE SOUTHERN ONTARIO REGION

The 1979 CAIS conference theme of "Sharing Resources-Sharing Costs" aptly describes many of the information events which have been selected to highlight information activities in Southern Ontario during the past year.

ACADEMIC SECTOR

BRS Consortium

Canada's first BRS Consortium completed its first seven months of operation this spring. Details of this joint project undertaken by four Southern Ontario universities, Guelph. Queen's, Robarts of U. of Toronto, and University of Western Ontario, (and the University of Ottawa) are featured in another paper to be presented by a representative of the Consortium itself.

"BRS", Bibliographic Retrieval Services, Inc. sprang from the SUNY (State University of New York) in-house systems three years ago. Offering many of the popular, large data bases, in a partially online and partially batch mode and requiring minimum usage commitments from subscribers, BRS has been able to offer these academic users in Canada their basic menu of files at considerably reduced rates. The BRS experience in Canada has led other institutions who share the problem of dealing with large demand for online searching with diminishing budgets, to explore the alternatives of [1] attempting to secure larger discounts from their current vendors, or [2] enlisting the services of BRS.

Other interesting results of the trial period for BRS have proven that data base usage patterns differ strongly between universities, for example, between Guelph and Western. Guelph, with its strong life sciences programs, requires more in-depth coverage of agriculture and food technology that is available at present only on the two larger, international systems, SDC and Lockheed. It will be interesting to follow the development of other such online consortiums who may opt for the large discount patterns of BRS.

DOBIS in Ontario Community Colleges

The Bibliocentre. Situated on the Scarborough campus of Centennial College, the Bibliocentre serves 22 community colleges on 101 campuses throughout Ontario. As the hub of the community college information network, the Bibliocentre processes all cataloguing for the 22 participating insitutions and indeed, technical services efficiency remains a high priority for the Bibliocentre's 7 librarians and support staff of 40

Implementation. During the last year the Bibliocentre staff, while having been UTLAS users, had the opportunity to evaluate DOBIS (Dortmunder Online Bibliothekssystem)and witnessed the system in operation at

the University of Luven in Belgium. With a view to improving authority file maintenance and providing ease of access, the decision was made to adapt the DOBIS package to the Bibliocentre's needs. As of March 1979 the Bibliocentre had already achieved parallel cataloguing operation.

LIBUS. The circulation package of DOBIS, called LIBUS, is targeted for September '79 startup and is to be based at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute in downtown Toronto. A third college, Georgian, also figures in these procedures, since Georgian, located in Barrie (50 miles from Toronto) will test the long-distance communications capabilities of the network.

CAIS Toronto members look forward to enjoying a closer look at this joint venture after next September.

North York Board of Education

The North York Board of Education has built, over the years, one of the strongest professional libraries in the province - the F. W. Minkler Library which, since 1971, has been a full ERIC depository.

Impact of Declining Enrollement. Beginning in 1972 the North York Board experienced a decline in enrolement from 106,000 to 86,000, and, since income relates directly to the number of students enrolled statistics reveal that North York's experience is perhaps the most drastic example of slashing revenues in Ontario if not the entire country. With 3 full-time and one part-time librarians, a support staff of 4 and a host of students, the F. W. Minkler Library is faced with not only justifying its existence but striving to continue the high level of services which, since 1976, has also included online data base searching.

Shared Resources & Marketing. While many of the Southern Ontario professional libraries never had the opportunity to reach the level of services maintained by Minkler Library, cost recovery for survival is the highest priority. Seeking ways of generating income, Minkler's chief librarian, Harry Greaves, decided to "sell" not only the Library's services, but space, talents, etc. Mr. Greaves contributes to a Board "think-tank" called "POW" or "Peddle-Our-Wares" where revenue-producing ideas are exchanged. These ideas, ranging from renting time in the expensive TV studios to retailing online searches, may provide the added income to justify the salary of at least one librarian within the year.

East York and York Borough Boards have already concluded arrangements for services to be provided by Minkler. Mr. Greaves is positive that an agressive stand together with high quality of service will insure the continued existence of the professional library network.

HIGHLIGHTS OF SOUTHERN ONTARIO

PUBLIC SECTOR

The application of divisions by "sector" is somewhat arbitrary in that the organizations described as belonging to one sector may obtain funding or serve patrons representing other societal or economic sectors. Such is the case of the public library.

Public Libraries and Online

Sharing costs and resources is certainly one of the foremost motivations behind the move toward online bibliographic searching in most of Toronto's public library regions.

Metro Project. Perhaps most notably, the Metropolitan Toronto Library, having settled-in after moving to new, ultra-modern headquarters, initiated an experimental usage-period to assess demand and capability for offering automated bibliographic services. At present, several public libraries in the greater Toronto vicinity offer online searching on one or more systems, but to date there has been little or no consistency in the chargeback, subscription or staffing policies. In addition, some of these libraries, like North York Public, have been online for more than three years and have staff conversant in four retrieval languages.

Evaluation and Directions. During the past year representatives from each department within Metro were trained to search ORBIT, QL, and the New York Times INFOBANK. Feedback from both searchers and patrons is still undergoing evaluation. It is hoped as a result of the final evaluations, that with greater cooperation between Regions, an agreement could be reached wherein several area public libraries, which are currently unable to offer these services independently, could benefit from [1] reduced online rates; [2] standardized cost recovery schemes; and [3] more frequent, customized vendor/searcher seminars.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Perhaps the most dazzling array of new activities emanates from the private sector which, for our purposes here, will include several publishers and broadcasters and other data processing concerns.

Infoglobe

A new name in Toronto's information marketplace in recent months is "INFOGLOBE". INFOGLOBE describes all of activities surrounding the Globe & Mail's own full-text, online data base - its maintenance, growth, availability and marketing.

History. Under the management of Mr. Murray Marchant, the data base, containing the full text of the Globe & Mail since November 14, 1977, is available online in a timesharing environment provided by Datacrown. Early in 1979, the online file, which uses a modified version

of the retrieval software developed by QL Systems Ltd.(under the direction
of the Globe's librarian, David Rydwyn) underwent a test period with a
controlled user group. During this trial period, system performance, user
demand and cost structures were closely examined.

The Globe file grows at a rate of 1 million characters per day and
is roughly 1½ years old. There are no plans at present, according to Mr.
Marchant, to segment or purge any parts of the full-text file. In fact,
it was reported to CAIS-Toronto last February, that those who rely on
the newspaper and its more popular information no longer need maintain
expensive storage of hardcopy. In accordance with this, the Globe & Mail
Library itself is reported to have discontinued storage of clippings as
of April, 1979.

Access: Present & Future. Searchers interested in access to INFO-
GLOBE, which will be available via Datapac this year, may use any 30 cps
terminal at a rate of $90./per connect hour. Higher speed terminals may
also access.

Mr. Marchant forecasts that INFOGLOBE's immediate challenges
include [1] the structuring of a strong marketing and user support
staff to handle all aspects of vendor-searcher interactions and [2] the
development of software enhancements which will interface non-full-text
data bases with the present file. Intertwined with these objectives
will be a difficult juggling of future growth directions. At the moment
there appears to be two attractive target marketplaces. One market is
that of "interactive television" or "home delivery of information"
market where newspapers figure prominently. The other major marketplace
is that of the special, corporate or technical information centre where
the non-full-text, more specialized data base has already made its
impact.

Regardless of the direction or target consumer groups for which
the INFOGLOBE shall ultimately aim, the growth of information services
and user interest is undoubtedly large enough to insure the INFOGLOBE
unlimited opportunities for growth.

Home Delivery of Information

Several of the recent Toronto Chapter CAIS meetings have focused
on a fast-growing area in Toronto's data processing industries - that of
information processing in the home and small business environment. Not
only has the idea spawned several successful commercial ventures such as
the storefront distributor of timesharing terminals, programs and micro-
processing systems in downtown Toronto, but has turned the eyes of cable
stations, regulatory and public agencies and newspaper publishers to
research.

Canadian Cable Systems. During the last year, OECA (Ontario Educa-
tional Communications Authority) and Canadian Cable Systems spoke to
CAIS members in Toronto. The Grand River Cable TV Station (Canadian
Cable Systems) described their experiment as an offshoot of CeeFax
technology, a one-way, broadcast medium transmission utilizing the

vertical broadcast interval. In sharp contrast to Department of Communication's "TELEDON" or Bell's "VISTA", both which use more complex technologies, the Grand River version could be made available to the public immediately through renting a small device at a cost between $5 and $10 per month. Grand River's CeeFax-based project is under the auspices of Mr. Glenn Terrell and is located in Kitchener, Ontario.

Vista. Bell Canada, in cooperation with Southam Inc., and Torstar Corporation, launched last February a pilot trial of a new two-way communications service to be known as "VISTA".

The VISTA System uses the existing public telephone network to provide immidiate and on-demand access to a wide range of visual information and communications services. The pilot demonstration of this new concept, known generically as Teletext, comprises 25 user terminals located in the Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa-Hull areas. Given satisfactory results, it may be possible that a commercial VISTA could be available from Bell as early as 1981.

The bulk of the information currently stored for the pilot has been compiled by Southam and Torstar, both of Toronto. Since mid-1978 they have been partners in preparing information packages for VISTA. In the future, VISTA could be extended to such applications as mortgage payment calculations, how-to-do-it instructions, and, in addition to the conventional computer game, even bibliographic data bases have been considered.

The current system stores some 2000 pages of information and this number will increase throughout the year. The system can display in seven colours and information may be shown in English or French.

Micromedia Limited

MICROMEDIA undertook a number of new initiatives and, acquiring new facilities and new staff, expanded in the areas of micro-publishing, document delivery, database publishing, and online services.

Financial Post Information Centre. This information-on-demand facility was acquired by Micromedia early in 1979. The centre, which operates under the name INFORMATION ACCESS and is affiliated with the worldwide SVP network, provides to a business, government or professional clientele a retail information service -- answering questions and carrying out research projects that are beyond the client's particular skills or resources.

Microlog. In 1979, MICROMEDIA's government document delivery services, Publicat, ProFile and Urban Canada, were consolidated into one single service -- MICROLOG -- and broadened to cover scientific and technical publications and Canadian report literature in general. The significant enhancement of MICROLOG is the availability of MARC

records for every title included in the microfiche service. These catalogue records are created through UTLAS and are structured according to the new AACR II cataloguing rules.

Canadian Legislative Report/Rapport Legislatif Canadien. Commencing in 1979, the CLR/RLC system is a combined document delivery and current awareness service in monitoring Bills and Regulations issued by the federal government and the provincial governments of Alberta, Ontario and Quebec on a bi-weekly basis.

Corporate Report Service. Through its relationship with Disclosure Inc. and liason with other Canadian sources, MICROMEDIA has assembled a database of 15,000 current corporate reports on Canadian and U.S. firms which are available for immediate delivery to users in microfiche or paper form.

Lockheed Information Services. In early 1979 MICROMEDIA was appointed exclusive Canadian agent for Lockheed's DIALOG information retrieval package. The function of agent includes carrying out user training and providing general customer support functions.

Infomart and Canadian Data Bases

During the past year, INFOMART Search Service, purveyors of ORBIT and the INFOBANK (New York Times) in Canada, prepared 2 new Canadian data bases, one to appear in published format and the other to appear online.

B & G News. Under the direction of librarian, Susan Baumann, INFOMART launched "B&G News" early in 1979 as an index with abstracts to cover Canadian business and government developments as reported in 14 news-papers on a daily basis.

Publishing is a new endeavour for INFOMART and the appearance of B&G News marks the first, entirely original data base creation effort on the part of the Southam-Torstar venture. To produce "B&G", INFOMART utilized the software developed by MICRØFØR (Quebec City) which produces a French-language newspaper index with abstracts for Quebec's major papers. Operating with Honeywell equipment in conjunction with MICRØFØR and the Torstar data centre, the project also demands the resources of 2 full-time and 7 part-time librarians and 2 full-time key-to-tape operators.

While MICRØFØR's French news file is already online via ORBIT, it is hoped that B&G News will follow later this year. The publication, which includes over 3,000 news items each month, will provide another source (offline and online) for information on all aspects of the Canadian economic and political mainstreams.

SPORT. Soon to appear on ORBIT, SPORT represents the data base of the Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC) in Ottawa and corresponds to the Sport and Recreation Index. Although produced in Ottawa and formatted in Toronto for online availability internationally, SPORT represents an international data base contributed to the health educators, administrators and researchers of the world by Canadian efforts.

In conclusion, the endeavours mentioned in these few pages examplify efforts on the part of all sectors to locate new sources of revenue or perhaps stretch the old ones a bit further. Feeling the pinch of inflation and viewing a largely untapped marketplace, the private sector especially attempts to sculpt a niche for a secure future.

For further information contact:

Sally Grand
INFOMART
One Yonge Street
Suite 1506
Toronto, Ontario
M5E 1E5
416/366-3904