

AN ONLINE CONFERENCE DATA BASE

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ABSTRACT

For the annual meeting of CAIS/ACSI 1981, a data base was prepared with the financial assistance of the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information. Some papers were entered online to the QL System and others were submitted in typescript and entered by the QL staff. The data base was available during the conference, for online search and for the printing of hard copy. Subsequent to the meeting further papers were added to the data base and the whole edited for the preparation of camera-ready copy for publication. This facility was of major assistance to the Program Committee in the assembly of the proceedings, in that, as the papers became available, they were entered on the base in the prescribed standardized format. The base was mounted for online search from the time of the meeting to the end of the year. Limited use was made of this facility but it proved very effective when used. A machine readable tape of the base will be stored at CISTI for subsequent search and for archival storage.

UNE BASE DE DONNEES CONVERSATIONELLE DE CONFERENCE

RESUME

Pour la conférence annuelle de l'ACSI 81, une base de données a été préparée avec l'assistance de l'ICIST. Quelques communications ont été entrées dans le système QL directement selon le mode conversationnel et les autres ont été envoyées au personnel de QL qui les a entrées aussi dans le système. Cette base de données était disponible durant la conférence pour recherches dans le mode conversationnel et pour impression de copies sur papier. Subséquentement, d'autres communications ont été ajoutées dans la base des données et le tout a été édité et préparé pour fins de publication. Ceci a facilité grandement la tâche du comité du programme dans la préparation des comptes rendus de la façon suivante: aussitôt que les communications étaient disponibles, elles étaient entrées dans la base de données selon le format prescrit. La base de données était disponible pour recherches dans le mode conversationnel à partir de la conférence jusqu'à la fin de 1981. On en n'a fait qu'un usage limité, mais efficace. Un ruban magnétique informatisé sera conservé à l'ICIST pour recherches et comme archive.

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INTRODUCTION

The Ninth Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for Information Science -- l'Association Canadienne des Sciences de l'information (CAIS/ACSI) was held at Pointe-au-pic, Qué. May 27-30 1981. The Québec Chapter of the Association organized the conference under the chairmanship of Gilles Deschatelets. In considering publication of the Proceedings of the Conference, the planning committee concluded that a record of proceedings set up as a data base would not only be useful during and after the conference but would be an appropriate project considering the objectives of the society.

Preliminary investigation of means of accomplishing this lead to discussions with QL Systems Limited, Ottawa, Ontario. Cost projections indicated that the expense involved was higher than the conference budget allowed. Discussions with the Board of Directors showed strong support for the project and a recommendation that the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information be approached for financial support of it. After consultation with QL Systems Limited a cost estimate was prepared covering both the building of the data base and publication of the Proceedings.

The estimate was submitted to CISTI with a request for financial support in the amount of five thousand five hundred dollars. This amount would provide support for the innovative use of electronic services but not the publication costs which had previously been covered in the conference budget. The project was favourably received and a contract was drawn covering the creation of the data base.

DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK

This experimental project concerned the use of a currently available electronic communication system for the creation of a data base in a form available for search and dissemination. The data base could be built as input became available, edited online and used for the preparation of camera-ready copy for publication.

Manuscripts of papers for the proceedings of the conference were for the most part received in typed form by the program committee at Laval University. Here they were edited, translations of the abstracts prepared and the whole sent to QL to be entered into the data base. As originally conceived, some input would have been received through the QL Electronic Mail System. The number received in whole or in part in this way was three, namely, one complete paper from a staff member of QL and abstracts of papers from the University of Western Ontario in London, and from the Canadian Institute for Scientific and Technical Information, Ottawa, Ontario. At the time the papers were being received, the number of subscribers to the QL Electronic Mail System was about one hundred. Very few of these were at locations where papers for the proceedings originated. The two authors, apart from QL, who used the system were not regular users of QL and although familiar with word processing had to be given specific instructions to be able to transmit the text of the abstract through the QL Electronic Mail System.

At the time of the Conference about thirty of the eventual forty-five papers had been entered in the data base. These were all of the papers for which a text had been received up to the time of the conference. These constituted the file available for online manipulation, at the terminal set up by QL, at the conference. QL reported active interest in the data base of the proceedings with many attendees requesting a full demonstration of the system. Use of the system during the conference was recorded as 51 signons and 103 searches. Interest on the part of contributors was especially noted in papers on a topic similar to their own, with special curiosity and interest in seeing their work retrieved on the screen of an online system.

Several authors wished to check the accuracy of the recording of their papers, and to suggest editorial changes to the text. Making use of the electronic mail capability, a change was relayed to Ottawa to those responsible for the data input and the editing of the data base.

An innovative use was made of the system at the conference in the printing of text for the use of translators. For the papers recorded in full text at that time on the data base, this provided an unforeseen but most helpful service.

During the summer months progress in gathering the remaining papers after the conference was slow. A long mail strike at this time was a further delaying factor. By October forty-two of forty-five possible papers had been received at Laval. As with previous papers, translations were made of the abstracts and the full paper sent to QL for entry into the system. After keyboarding these were edited for camera-ready copy and dispatched to Laval for final editing before publication. This is in progress. Publication is expected in the early months of 1982.

The processing of the papers into the QL System was efficiently handled by the Ottawa office within the original cost estimate. The use of the terminal set up by QL at the conference showed that the retrieval system was effective. Use of the data base system by others subsequent to the conference showed that search and retrieval from the data base was a straight-forward, routine procedure for users of the QL System. Others needed to learn the basics of the QL search strategy. Statistics of the use of the system are shown in Table 1

Table 1

<u>Month</u>	<u>Customer signons</u>	<u>Customer searches</u>
May	0	0
June	10	25
July	5	7
August	5	7
October	1	3

DISCUSSION

The following quotation from a letter to the Secretary of CAIS/ACSI, Ellen Pearson from Gilles Deschatelets, conference chairman, October 29, 1981 sums up the reaction of the organizing committee to the project.

"Speaking for our programme and publications committees I can safely say that it was a very worthwhile project and it proved an ideal method for publishing our conference proceedings in that it provided immediate and selective access (during the conference) to most available papers and it also provided a good standardized format for later printing. It was very popular during the Conference and QL Systems Ltd. seemed very pleased with the high attention it brought them."

The data base was prepared by the services of QL. The procedure of direct author input of text into the system was not widely used. For the most part, authors or their sponsoring organizations were not able to enter machine readable text into the QL System. Even if the text had been prepared on a word processing system, the mechanism for transferring it to the network of QL did not exist. We were fortunate that two of the authors were sufficiently motivated to try direct input even at some inconvenience to themselves.

For the direct entry of the text of papers to be successful, the composition, editing and transfer of files of text from the word processor should be a procedure that can be readily accomplished. Before wide use of this concept of publication can be realized, further technical developments in the field are required, particularly where authors are widespread geographically and the types of equipment available to them differ. In this work the QL network only was employed.

The online editing was carried out by the QL office in Ottawa. Within the QL network it is possible to edit text at other locations. Instruction followed by a period of extensive use is needed to become proficient at this procedure. While the skills of word processing are becoming more widespread, persons so trained are at this time limited in supply and are in high demand.

CONCLUSION

The Association and those concerned with this project learned much of what is involved in the general field of electronic publishing. To be used effectively from an input point of view, the authors must have access to terminals in a single or compatible word processing systems. There should be the capability of the transfer of files of text, preferably with editing capability at all locations.

Search and retrieval from the data base requires that the base be mounted on a system such as QL, which provides these capabilities. A high proportion of the potential users should have easy access to these facilities and the system should be relatively easy and economical to use. The QL System meets these criteria well.

The preparation of proof-copy for authors is a most desirable feature that will allow conventional editing by authors where electronic editing is not available. The provision of copy for translators at the conference was an interesting bonus service provided by the data base experiment.

The preparation of camera-ready copy of the text of the proceedings is a major part of the advantage of taking the electronic communication approach to the gathering and editing of the papers. As the editorial committee has pointed out, this provides a uniformity and standardization of the format which is helpful. This combined with the retrieval from the data base has made the project very worthwhile.

COLOPHON

In the spirit of the overall project, this report was prepared, edited and printed using the Text Editing and Text Processing facilities of the CDC Cyber 170 computer at Dalhousie University, Halifax, N.S.

This was the first use made of these facilities by the author. This project provided me with the incentive to learn the procedures used in these text processing facilities.