

## **The Use of Database Management Systems in Libraries**

The management, selection, administration, and design of today's library information systems is not always purview of a professional librarian. While it falls to the librarian to direct the utilization of its information systems, the extent to which the librarian is involved in selecting, administering or designing those systems varies greatly from library to library.

In smaller libraries, the librarian may well be the IT (information technology) staff: the decision as to which computer and peripherals to purchase falls to the librarian--as well as the chore of setting it up. The librarian installs software, masters the programs, and then instructs others in its uses.

In larger libraries, the librarian may have the aid of technicians--perhaps to aid in the choice of equipment, perhaps to help with setting up the software and hardware. In some libraries, the technical staff may choose which information systems are to be installed, the hardware to be used, and may even teach classes in information retrieval. In such a setting there is the chance that the librarian's views on technology may be overlooked or devalued.

To an ever increasing degree, MLS candidates are learning more and more about the design and operation of automated/computerized information systems. Working librarians are speaking up and letting the vendors know of changes needed to allow staff and patrons to access desired information more effectively. In an ever increasing number of libraries, the information technology management is handled by a systems librarian.

The systems librarian's mission is to work with constantly changing technology. Users too (both library staff and patrons) have rapidly changing information needs and technology skills; librarians must seek and help design systems to serve such a diverse population.

During the course of a day, a systems librarian might supervise or administer any number of tasks, including:

- project planning including budgeting,
- selecting hardware, software, and/or vendors,
- purchasing equipment or services including contract negotiations with vendors or service providers,
- installing hardware (including networking cables and devices) and/or software,
- maintaining, upgrading or repairing hardware,
- configuring, upgrading and/or "tweaking"/customizing software,
- troubleshooting user problems with hardware and/or software,
- training/teaching library staff or end users about hardware, software, networking, database management, Internet searching and/or any other number of subjects,
- researching and/or evaluating new technologies,
- consulting with other computing/technology personnel,
- upgrading his/her own skills and abilities,
- documenting and/or inventorying current technologies in use in the library,
- preparing reports, attending meetings and/or conferences.

The manager of the information systems in a library needs to

- have a solid understanding of basic librarianship,
- have a particularly good understanding of how all departments within his/her library function,
- have an understanding of how various technologies work and can best be harnessed to optimize the performance of his/her library,
- be a good listener,
- be an excellent communicator and patient teacher,

- possess excellent skills in managing people as well as resources,
- exhibit curiosity and tenacity,
- and be a top-notch problem solver .