
Cataloging Using Internet-Accessible Library Catalogs

by
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You are an original cataloger sitting down to catalog your day's work. Before you is a ten-year old dissertation. There is no cataloging copy for it on the bibliographic utility your library uses. As you begin to complete the online workform, a nagging question keeps bothering you: What if a cataloger elsewhere already cataloged this? And if they have, why doesn't the copy exist in a place where I can get easy access to it?

Another scenario: You are a copy cataloger faced with a problem. There is copy for the book you are cataloging, and the copy is good. But your piece has an accompanying text—in Japanese—not mentioned in the MARC record you found. You wish you could read Japanese so you could describe the text in a note and perhaps give a transliteration of its title. Unfortunately, you don't read Japanese and neither does anyone else in your library. You wish you could check the catalogs of other libraries holding this item, to see if they included the notes you are looking for.

Both of the above examples are taken from real life. And both have a possible solution. Cataloging copy for the various books mentioned is available, but not on a bibliographic utility. The copy only exists in local catalogs. This information, however, is not necessarily lost to all catalogers. It may be possible to get at this information via Internet-accessible library cata-

logs. Below is a description of how these catalogs can be accessed and how they can be useful to catalogers.

The Internet

The Internet is a computer network that provides a means of data transfer between tens of thousands of interconnected computer systems worldwide. These computers reside at universities and colleges, research centers, businesses, and government agencies. The network provides three basic services: electronic mail, file transfer, and remote logon. Access to this network is generally granted only to employees of the organization maintaining the local computer system, or node. Most major academic and research universities in the United States provide access to the Internet for their faculty.

In the past few years, over 100 library catalogs have become accessible to remote users via the Internet. When logging on as a remote user, one has nearly the same capabilities as a user site though some local databases may not be accessible.

For an academic librarian, using these catalogs can be fairly straightforward. With a terminal at her desk, she logs on to her school's mainframe computer, then enters a command indicating the electronic address of the remote database that she wishes to

search, in this case another library's catalog. Assuming that her terminal and the remote catalog's computer can interface successfully, she should be able to log on to the remote computer in a few seconds and conduct her search. Information found may be downloaded or printed. When the search session is over, she logs off of the remote catalog, then logs off of her home mainframe.

To find the electronic address for the remote catalogs, look in *Internet-Accessible Library Catalogs and Databases*. This publication is available by sending electronic mail to `LISTSERV@UNMVM.BITNET` with the message "GET LIBRARY PACKAGE." Other directories of Internet-accessible library catalogs have recently been published (see list of references at end of this article).

An important factor in this whole process is the ability of the remote user to interface successfully with the catalog's computer. Some local systems are capable of handling a wide variety of terminal types, but require that the specific variety be identified at the time of logon. If the interface is not very good, the remote user may not be able to logon at all, or may get the transmitted information garbled and with extraneous characters. Also, when accessing a catalog in other countries or on the other side of the continent, it is quite possible that a bad connection on the telecommunication lines may end a search session suddenly, or prevent you from logging on.

How Useful Is It, Anyway?

The examples given at the beginning of this article illustrate the usefulness as well as the pitfalls of using Internet-accessible catalogs to solve cataloging problems.

In the first scenario, the doctoral thesis was from Colorado State University (CSU) for which there was no copy available on OCLC. Knowing that CSU's catalog is available through CARL (Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries), I was able to log on to their catalog fairly rapidly to check if they had

cataloged the piece locally. They had, and I was able to use the subject headings and the call number.

In the second example, a recently published book, *Photometric Atlas of Northern Bright Galaxies*, was cataloged by the Library of Congress and loaded into OCLC's Online Union Catalog on February 20, 1991. The bibliographic record, #23210700, did not make mention of a supplement in Japanese that accompanied the atlas received at my library. (The record has since been enhanced to include this information.) Searching OCLC for holdings produced a list of about 20 libraries that had a copy of the atlas. Comparing this list with that of Internet-accessible catalogs showed that four such catalogs could be consulted to determine if anyone else had received the Japanese supplement and included it in their local record. The University of Oregon Library had done just this, and it was possible to use their transliteration of the Japanese title and their note stating that the supplement was a translation of the book's English introduction. It should be added that the display was somewhat garbled because of some incompatibility between the remote computer and the home terminal, though it was still possible to read the information.

Of the other three libraries, it proved impossible to log onto two of them. The third catalog only contained circulation information, not complete bibliographic records.

For these two successes, there have been many failures. I have searched several catalogs looking for copy for something I thought someone else must have cataloged already, but to no avail. For those considering experimenting with this type of copy-hunting, I would give the following suggestions: If a publication is fairly recent and there is no copy available on your bibliographic utility, either copy will be created "soon" if the material is important and should show up on the utility in a few months; or, if the material is unimportant (e.g.,

on a narrow topic and published by a small non-commercial publisher in a foreign country and/or language), it might never be cataloged until you do it yourself. Don't waste time looking for copy that just isn't there.

It is worthwhile to look for copy if you think you know where it might be. For example, if you are cataloging a thesis, it makes a lot of sense to search the catalog for the university where the degree was granted, as in the example above. It also might be worthwhile looking for older materials at a library that has a special collection of a particular type of material, or that has a strength in a particular subject area. To be successful at this would require that you know the subject strengths and special collections of the Internet-accessible libraries, and that those libraries have cataloged their materials on their own catalog but not added them to their holdings on the bibliographical utility.

This is not a simple process, at least not right now. If one has an item requiring a call number, subject headings, and/or extensive or unusual notes, and there is some copy available on a bibliographic utility, one must first compare the list of holdings from the bibliographic utility with the list of libraries listed in Internet-Accessible Library Catalogs & Databases. To do this quickly, it helps to make up a directory to the information in that publication. Then there is the choice of which university's catalog to access, as several may appear on both lists. With experience, one learns which have detailed information and are also compatible with one's terminal. Foreign catalogs can be difficult to access.

Is it worthwhile? In the two examples above, the information provided was useful and accessible in a matter of a few minutes. But it is possible to go through a list of ten catalogs and have problems either logging onto them or just not finding the information sought. With experience, it may be possible to know which catalogs to look in, and which ones subscribe

to the same standards as your library. At this stage, the usefulness of this new tool is decidedly questionable, but may at a future date be a useful source of cataloging information.

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