

CD-ROM ENDUSERS IN THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY. WHAT TO DO?

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Abstract: The need to instruct CD-ROM endusers at a new university library becomes difficult due to the different levels of knowledge of the users. Easy menu search interface, training endusers to be self searchers and training librarians to be trainers of endusers searching are the main objectives of the CD-ROM enduser instruction department in a brand new University.

Introduction

The fact of getting started with a completely new information system like CD-ROM, becomes more attractive if that happens in a brand new library at a new university.

University Carlos III de Madrid is a public institution founded in 1989. Settled in two campus sites, one devoted to Social Sciences and the other to Science and Technology.

There is a single information system distributed between the two campuses with a centralized library in each campus but with a single coordination and centralized management.

The University works within an Ethernet network and holds a point to point link between the two campuses.

From the beginning one of the library's goals was to put information at the hand of the users, no matter in which campus or office they were. That means to have the right answer at the right time for the right person at the right place for the right cost.

We hold a single database for both libraries and the users can access to the database from their offices or from any of the libraries.

Our next objective was to do the same with CD-ROM databases. We started with a single drive and at this point we have a CD-NET that holds a 386 processor with 14 drives and Novell Network software.

By this time it is possible to access to the CD-ROM databases from any University Department, although it is not possible to access from any office. That will be the fourth step in our project.

So, right now, we do have 7.000 students and 500 teachers as potential users of a new service. How can we instruct them in the use of a technology? First of all is worth to say how fast libraries development has arrived to the spanish life. We are going through a big revolution in a very short period of time and it is becoming very difficult to get adapted not only for users even for librarians. Lets say more, it is even more difficult depending on the type of user: young students find it easier than librarians or teachers. They were born in the new technologies era! If we want to go one step further not all the students show the same attitude towards innovation. Science and technology and information science students are more eager to learn and use them than the law of business administration ones.

Why instruction?

Accepting that end users are those people who will actually use the information sought and that end users are everyone except professional intermediaries, we can assume what a big task we have to perform to get our inexperienced users instructed to get the best and more accurate information.

Nevertheless, as long as they leave the library or the database department we will only be aware of "what" they take with them but, we will never know "how" the individual finds the information useful. The information chain "breaks" at that point.

Librarians have an ethical obligation with users:

- They have to explain to end users, parameters, limitations and hazards of searching.
- They have to have end users become aware of their limitations in achieving results.
- They have to teach them "how" to evaluate results.
- They have to teach them "when" to defer to mediated searching.

End users instruction can help not only the fact of searching but all the parameters pointed above. That would lead in a better understanding of everyone's capability and limitations.

Another point to be considered is the different behaviour of CD-ROM users versus on line users. CD-ROM users are willing in doing their own searches due to the

driven menu interfaces, in the meanwhile on line users look for an intermediate due to the complexity of command on line searching.

We want to focus our objectives in user education in three major points:

- Developing an easy menu search interface
- Training end users to be self searchers
- Training librarians to be trainers of end user searching

Menu Search Interface

If we want users capable of doing their own searches it is absolutely necessary to easy the way. CD-ROM producers have promoted them as user-friendly, self instructional systems that require little on site assistance for use. Libraries have found this assumption questionable. Everydays work shows how many difficulties the user has every time he wants to approach information.

At our library, as I pointed above, we have a 386 processor with 14 drives and Novell network software. The databases are searchable from the library and the faculty departments.

A first step to develop was the possibility to accede to any database in the drive we developped a menu that allows the user to go to any database he is interested in just pressing the number that matches the database name.

Following one of the EEC action lines for libraries, devoted to research in menu interfaces and, with the collaboration of our Librarianship school, we plan to develop this winter, a menu search interface, at least for the most used databases: Abi Inform, Econlit, Sociofile, Colex Data, Aranzadi, Lisa ...

Even knowing that our users belong to different levels of knowledge and instruction, except for the librarianship teachers and students, when we talk of CD-ROM users, almost 85% stand at a very low level. It is so that we are starting our instruction from the very beginning and want to make it absolutely friendly for them. We don't want them to run away when they face what they consider a "difficult information tool".

End users as self searchers

We really believe in the teaching task librarians have. We want to teach users "how to fish", not to give them a "fish everyday". Sometimes is difficult for some librarians to understand what their role is. They are not nurses to stay at the bedside during all the search process. We think our task is to instruct people and to be around improving tools that make information accessible to them.

Up to now, we have made some shy approaches: individual teaching for frequent users, demonstration of new products, etc.

For the coming academic year, October 1993-June 1994 our schedule is more accurate.

- Edition of Guides of use for every CD-ROM database
- Courses (4 hours) to groups no more than 10 users. The courses will be held out of the library in a class equipped with all kind of audiovisual aids that would help with the method. We will teach an introductory course or two for every database. We will conduct a simple search, step by step, and users will be able to follow the search through a big common screen, being able to participate in the search at any time.
- Commercial demonstrations of new products for any kind of users: Librarians, teachers, librarianship students...

Training librarians to be trainers

Our university is a new university and there are so many things to do. But continuous training is one of our university goals. At the library we try to specialize librarians in its own field, with special attention to new technologies. At the library work 9 professional librarians and up to 25 paraprofessionals and scholarship holders. Training professional or paraprofessionals to be trainers of end user, in general, and CD-ROM end users is vital for us.

Our plan will be to develop a computer aided training package that could be useful even for end users in the long range time.

This package would have this four key design criteria:

- Modularisation
- Navigation
- Representation
- Interaction

MODULARISATION, that is reducing a whole into a series of smaller sections or modules will focused the learning experience and progress will become easier to monitor. This kind of package must be capable of adaption to individual circumstances.

NAVIGATION. Through hypermedia systems will have the advantage of being a non serial approach that enables users to create their own links between subjects and follow pathways of particular interest.

REPRESENTATION. Means the integration of moving images, still graphics, colour, sound, text, etc.

INTERACTION. Is essential when we talk about multimedia. We are not talking of total freedom of response at certain points and to see the effects of these responses. We talk about a limited number of defined choices which are intended to reduce the infinite variety of situations to a optimum number of generic possibilities. Careful design of these choices and the results, will hopefully ensure that key points are learnt by the trainee.

Next step will be to make these tool available to end users after some kind of adaptation to their real needs.

Conclusion

Libraries only get their real meaning through a strong interaction with users. Is our task to improve their knowledge about how to use new tools in the information process. But, first of all, we have to teach them how to be self searchers. Librarians should be around without being noticed by the users, only their professionality should show between tools, information and users. There is a long way to go in this direction and technology goes much faster than we never expected, so our updating must follow the same rythm of innovation.

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