



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF APPLIED TECHNOLOGIES IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Manuscript Number: JATLIM - 01.01/4/2015-002

International Journal of Applied Technologies in Library and Information Management 1 (1) 2-007 - 012
© 2015 CREW - Colleagues of Researchers, Educators & Writers

Retrospective Conversion of Special Libraries in Nigeria: Status, Barriers and Prospects

Millie Horsfall

Information Services Unit
University of PortHarcourt
Library, PortHarcourt
milliehorsfall@yahoo.com

Fagbemi, Victoria Yemi

Department of Library &
Information Science,
University of Nigeria Nsukka
yemimiequeen1@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper attempts to assess the status of, point out the need for, recounts the procedures involved, identify the difficulties encountered and propose factors for effective retrospective conversion of resources from manual to computer format in Special Libraries in Nigeria. Descriptive Survey method was employed in this study. By this method the extent of retrospective conversion in Nigerian special libraries and the future prospects were observed. The findings show that most libraries of the developing world like their counterparts in developed countries have increasingly developed plans to automate their services to bring about improved services to library users. However, certain factors like funding, staffing, the systems, electricity, and retrieval problems were identified as inhibitors. By implication, the libraries cannot realize the full benefits of the use of computers unless large stores of bibliographic information are available in machine readable form. The origin and value of this paper is predicated upon the fact that unlike their developed countries counterparts, most Nigerian special libraries are yet to convert their library resources into online database. This paper however proffers solution to the identified challenges to effective retrospective conversion procedures which give room for future prospects.

Keywords: Retrospective conversion, automation, bibliographic Information, Machine Readable Catalogue.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Concept Clarification

Retrospective Conversion (RC) is a method of providing library records (past and present) on-line. It is the conversion to machine-readable form, of records which predate the automation of library records. It is also the adding to automated catalogues,

records of items that were originally catalogued manually. Archive-Skills Consultancy (2003) defines retrospective conversion as the process by which existing hard-copy catalogues and lists, whether on paper or cards are converted to machine-readable form. It is note-worthy that in the library context it can also be the capture and manipulation of records from an existing

automated system.

Retrospective conversion is one of the popular projects that can be carried out by information brokers or librarians. Retrospective conversion merely means the conversion of a library's existing bibliographic records (data in catalogue cards, book catalogues, etc) from manual to machine readable format according to specified policies and standards. Thus, retrospective conversion is therefore, a method of providing library records (present and past) online (Igbeka, 2008). It is important to note that retrospective conversion can also connote the conversion of existing cataloguing records from one classification system to another, for example, Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme (DDC) to Library of Congress (LC) Classification Scheme. This is irrespective of whether the records are manual or digitized. The study is necessitated in order to review the status, procedures, challenges and prospects of retrospective conversion of library resources in special libraries in Nigeria.

1.2 Objectives of the study

This purpose of this study is to:

1. Point out the need for retrospective conversion of library resources generally
2. Recount the procedures involved converting manual library operations to computerized processes
3. Assess the status of retrospective conversion in Nigerian special libraries
4. Identify the difficulties encountered and
5. Propose factors for effective retrospective conversion of special library resources.

2.0 Literature Review

Retrospective conversion has to do with change from manual to automated or computerized system. In consideration of the inefficiency, slow and inadequacy of the existing library manual processes, libraries all

over the world are resorting to automation as a means of coping with enormous literature output and greater demand on their services in this era of information explosion (Okoroma, 2010).

2.1 Need for retrospective conversion in Libraries

It is important to note that libraries cannot base their products and services solely upon records to be created from the day the library commenced automation and onwards. The bibliographic responsibilities of libraries extend to the past as well as to the future. Therefore, retrospective machine-readable database will be needed to service these responsibilities. Automation of library services will be inconclusive without the conversion of the backlog of library materials which had hitherto been manually processed. This is so as to enable library users have access to broader array of materials to satisfy their information needs. Besides, as part of library collection, materials acquired prior to the automation of library services need to be converted into MARC to enhance the automation process aimed at satisfying user's needs. In consideration of the inadequacies and dissatisfactions associated with manual system, it is obvious that retrospective conversion is a need that should be embraced by every library. Nwalo (2003) noted that computerization of libraries in Africa will permit the acquisition and use of literature on CD–Rom, which has immense benefit both in terms of cost and durability. It collapses time, space as well as reduces the incidence of mutilation, defacing and theft of library materials. Manjunath (2004) added that automation eliminates cumbersome job of printing the cards, enhance simultaneous access to the same database as well as quick and remote access to information on the network. According to Okoroma (2010),

retrospective conversion is simply “a need not a luxury”, hence libraries are really about providing quick and easy access to information. Ola, (2000) also asserts that proper planning is imperative in retrospective conversion, to spell out quite clearly the focus of the exercise and how to make funds available.

Retrospective conversion in libraries is a desirable programme because it facilitates the communication and sharing of bibliographic information by virtue of a common format. That is, it will allow libraries participating in co-operative groups or networks to create a common database conforming to recognized guidelines. In addition, retrospective conversion in libraries is a necessary activity as it provides a valuable database for research purposes.

3.0 Status of Retrospective Conversion in Nigeria

Libraries in Nigeria are gradually but steadily converting from manual processes to computer-based library routines. No one can say with absolute certainty the number of Nigerian libraries that have automated their operations yet.

However, the following Nigerian libraries are known to have computerized their services to varying degrees:

Library and Documentation Centre,
International Institute for Tropical
Agriculture (IITA), Ibadan;
Development Policy Centre (DPC)
Library, Bodija, Ibadan;
French Institute for Research in Africa
(IFRA) Library, University of Ibadan;
SS Peter and Paul Major Seminary,
Bodija, Ibadan;
Redemptorist Community Library,
Bodija, Ibadan;
Society Mission of Africa (SMA) Library,
Bodija Ibadan;

National Centre for Economic
Management and Administration
(NCEMA) Library, Bodija, Ibadan;

Dominican Institute Library,
Samonda, Ibadan;

Nigerian Institute for Social and
Economic Research (NISER) Library,
Ibadan;

E. Olantunde Odeku Memorial Library,
UCH, Ibadan;

Nigerian Institute for International Affairs
(NIIA) Library, Victoria Island, Lagos;

Centre for Management Development
(CMD) Library, Lagos;

Institute of Chartered Accountants of
Nigeria (ICAN) Library;

Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Library,
Lagos;

National Library of Nigeria, Lagos and
Abuja;

Administrative Staff College of Nigeria
(ASCON) Library, Badagery.

Though the foregoing list is not exhaustive, the rate of computerization of Nigerian special libraries is still very slow considering that there are over 500 functional special libraries and media resource centres in the country. There is compelling need for libraries in Nigeria to apply information technology in their services. We are in the Information Age and need to take measures that will guarantee the timely supply of quality information for national and continental development.

4.0 Procedures involved in Retrospective Conversion

Retrospective conversion activities in libraries are carried out in different ways: According to Unagha (2009:14), the various methods that could be adopted in the exercise include the following: 1. Co-operative effort: this involves the co-operation of many

libraries in the conversion exercise. That is, the centralization of both human and material resources of the co-operating libraries in order to bring about the standardization of records converted. This method is important in that it enhances exchange of information among the co-operating libraries.

2. Use of Agents: this method involves the contracting of the retrospective conversion of library's records to an outside agent with specialization in library automation. The outside agent usually works with the local committee set-up in the library contracting and the retrospective conversion exercise. 3. In-house retrospective conversion exercise: This is a process of carrying out the retrospective conversion of library records in-house. In this case, the library has to apply all necessary tools for the activities, making use of staff and materials available in the library. It is pertinent to note however that whatever method a library adopts in its retrospective programme, certain things have to be put into consideration, and these include: a) Identification of the records to be converted. Since libraries are in different sizes and having varying catalogue records, union catalogue, subject catalogue, special collection, public ordinance, etc. It suffices that such library interested in retrospective conversion should identify the initial records to be converted and progressing to other records.

b) Organizing the records: The records to be converted have to be carefully and systematically arranged in order to achieve the needed results. This could be in terms of records acquired in the library over stated period, and whether with records classified with Library of Congress, Dewey Decimal Classification, etc.

c) Funding: This is particularly important because the completion of the conversion exercise is dependent on availability of funds. Libraries embarking on

reconversion

project should therefore ensure the provision of adequate and needed funds.

d) Staffing: The reconversion team should be adequately staffed with expert hands who should be specialists to make the exercise a success.

4.1 Procedures for in-house Retrospective Conversion

When a library engages in retrospective conversion on its own and within the library, it becomes in-house. In this case, the library provides the needed fund, equipment and makes use of its staff for the reconversion exercise. When this option is adopted, various activities are expected to be carried out which include:

- Identification of records
- Editing and filing of cards the main shelf list trays
- Stock-taking, shelf reading and weeding
- Data entry

5.0 Barriers/Difficulties Involved in Retrospective Conversion

Retrospective conversion in libraries is an enormous activity requiring lots of planning and systematic execution of the project to make it a success. The conversion exercise could be faced with series of difficulties which are discussed below:

1. **Finance:** This is one major problem which affects the retrospective conversion exercise in libraries in developing countries. A lot of equipment and manpower are needed for a successful reconversion exercise. For example, functioning computer terminals are required, employment and training of staff as well as welfare of participants and purchase of stationeries. However, since libraries in Africa and Nigeria in particular, are grossly underfunded, it will be difficult to make all the human and material resources needed for the project available.

2. **Staffing:** it is essential that the right quality staffs are involved in the conversion exercise

but since libraries in Nigeria lack the staff requirement, retrospective conversion projects will be adversely affected.

3. Problems of the systems: The computer systems in virtually all libraries in the country occasionally break down and often take several days and sometimes, few weeks before repairs are effected on them. The time lag resulting from system breakdown affects the reconversion exercise since there will be a halt in data entry as well as editing of records in the database.

4. Electricity problem: Most times in the country, there is epileptic power supply and when this situation persists, it goes a long way to adversely affect retrospective conversion activities in libraries.

5. Keying Manually: Keying or key boarding is the most effective and accurate way of getting a library's catalogue into machine-readable form. It must be stated however that beautiful as the procedure may be, it is tasking and time consuming. This also has its adverse effect on the conversion exercise.

6. Retrieval Difficulties: Difficulties could be encountered in retrieving needed records from the database. This will be the case when data entry is not adequately supervised. The implication of this is that records will be inadequately entered into the database. For example, when a space is given before a record is entered into the database, the computer will automatically store the affected record in a different place rather than in the alphabetical position. This hinders retrieval of such record when needed and further affects retrospective conversion exercise in libraries.

6.0 Prospects of Retrospective Conversion in Nigerian Special Libraries

It is hoped that many more Nigeria libraries will be converting from manual to computerized routines in the near future. There is significant improvement in the

supply of electricity and telecommunications in recent times due to invigorated government's effort to improve the sectors. Hitherto, epileptic power supply and unreliable telephone services have been the major hindrances to sustainable library automation in Nigeria. The new energy and telecommunications climate in the country will no doubt encourage the computerization of library services and formation of on-line networks.

The ideal way of converting existing cards or other printed catalogues would be to put them through a machine that would read them and convert them into MARC format (Unagha, 2009). In the library context it can also be the capture and manipulation of records from an existing automated system. Access to Archives (2009) identifies how it is done as follows:

Scanning the existing finding aids – this can only be done if the existing finding aids are good quality typescript; the resulting images will need to be run through optical character recognition software to produce “live” documents which can then be imported to the automated system.

Re-keying the existing finding aids – this is becoming more usual method because it allows almost any type of existing finding aid, including hand-written cards and lists, to be converted;

Also the-keying can be done to meet standards. (UKOLN, 1999).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Retrospective conversion could be seen to be the conversion of a library's existing bibliographic records from manual to machine readable format according to specified policies and standards. The essence of retrospective conversion is to make use of existing archival descriptions, known as legacy data, in automated and networked systems without having to re-do the

description work.

For effective result in retrospective conversion in special libraries, the following recommendations are worthy of consideration:

Co-operation with the owner of the library (if private) or the establishment (if public) library is an important starting point by librarians so as to be informed of the particular fields they really want on the computer.

It is necessary for the librarian to know the software to use. Very small collections need a different type of software, compared with large collections.

A committee within the library, whom you will work with, preferably among the cataloguers and typists for data entry, that is, if is a public or institutional library.

A successful retrospective conversion project requires a great deal of time, money, staff and problem solving.

The contractor would create MARC records for the number of items. As part of the planning stage, you could create some pages of data conversion specification document giving specific instructions for lagging and keeping the records. The library staff would then review and respond to the document.

References

- Access to Archives (A2A) (2009). *National Retrospective Cataloguing Programme*. Accessed 12/6/2009 from: <http://www.pro.gov.uk/archives/a2a/default.htm>
- Igbeka, J.U. (2008). *Entrepreneurship in Library and Information Services*. Ibadan. Stirling-Horden Publishers Ltd. 38-39.
- Manjunath, G.K. (2004). *Library Automation: Why and How?* Retrieved 13/4/2012 from: <http://www.igidr.ac.in/lib/paper/htm>.
- Nwalo, K.I.N. (2003) *Managing Information for Development in the 21st Century: Prospects for African Libraries, Challenges to the world*. Retrieved July,2009, from <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla66/papers/012-114e.htm>.
- Okoroma, F. (2010) *Retrospective Conversion in Two Nigerian University Libraries: A Comparative Study of Kenneth Dike Library and Obafemi Awolowo University Library*. *Library Philosophy and Practice* Retrieved on 23/5/2014 from: <http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~mbolin/okoroma.htm>
- Ola, C.O. (2000) *Retrospective Conversion of Catalogue Records to Machine-Readable form: Pragmatic Alternatives*. *Journal of Nigerian Library Association Cataloguing, Classification and Indexing Section*: 41-48.
- The Archive-Skills Consultancy (2003). Retrieved 23/7/2012 from: <http://www.archive-skills.com>
- United Kingdom Office for Library & Information Networking (UKOLN) (1999). *Full Disclosure: Releasing the Value of Library and Archive Collections*. Retrieved 3/6/2013 from: <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/lic/fulldisclosure/report.pdf>
- Unagha, A.O. (2009). *Automation in Libraries: Uturu. Unpublished MLS Lecture Note; Department of Library & Information Science, Abia State University*, 13-19