Yuri Konovalov

CATALOGING AS A CUSTOMER SERVICE : APPLYING KNOWLEDGE TO TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

At the end of the nineteenth century, the librarian's role in the society was mostly educational. At the end of the twentieth century, it is no longer a lofty mission of enlightenment. Librarianship has become a professional information **service**. If this is true regarding any library, it is even more obvious regarding a special library. Reference librarians have always been somewhat service oriented, but what does it mean to catalogers?

In the past, our users had to come to the library first and then they searched for certain books in the catalog or browsed shelves. Today they do the opposite -- they search the online catalog first or browse our online shelflist and then come to the library (or order materials electronically). It goes without saying that the quality of their search results will greatly depend on the quality of our online catalog and authority file. Our customers do not have to come to the library anymore. Sometimes they contact us by e-mail or by telephone, but in many cases they rely entirely on their computers and all that they need to do regarding any library service is to fill out our online order form.

It has become a common mistake to think since we have keyword search capabilities, cataloging and authority control have lost their former value. We would say the opposite: the significance of both -- cataloging and authority control -- has tremendously increased in the online environment. As for subject cataloging, many people believe that keyword searches have made it totally unnecessary. Those may happen to be the same people who are very upset when they get thousands of hits searching for *mercury*. Computers do not know whether to search for a metal, a Greek deity, a car, a planet, or Queen's soloist. Computers do not know that the *iron curtain* may have nothing to do with metallurgy (or theater). They are excellent tools, but nothing more than tools. Subject headings need to be knowledgeably designed and carefully applied by professional catalogers in order to help our customers improve both precision and recall of their searches.

When our users search for a certain subject manually, they perceive *United States, USA, U.S.A., United States of America, U.S.*, etc. as the same subject without special instructions. Our clients may forgive us even for the *Unoted States*. Our machines, however, require a well-developed syndetic structure built into the software in order to retrieve all relevant documents on a certain subject. They will not smile at *Unoted States* -- they just will not retrieve the document that may be of interest to the searcher. The worst possible result of our work is a situation when our customers cannot find in our catalog any information about library materials which our library has on its shelves.

The importance of controlled vocabulary and well-developed authority files is evident. As for descriptive cataloging, AACR (Anglo-American Cataloging Rules) and MARC (Machine Readable-Cataloging) standards do not help our customers directly, but

standardized description is necessary for our machines. Our clients sometimes trust their computers more than the person on the other end of the telephone line.

A big corporation usually has many libraries scattered all over the world. Contemporary means of telecommunication make it possible for all those libraries to have a united online catalog that consolidates bibliographic information about all library materials regardless of language, type of library, and library location. It is needless to say that standardized bibliographic description and subject authority control in such environment are among the most exciting and challenging tasks for library professionals. OCLC's (Online Computer Library Center) WorldCat and LC's (Library of Congress) online Authority File are the most impressive and absolutely indispensable tools for catalogers, but each local library within the corporation also has specific requirements for cataloging. Library materials in special libraries are often so specialized, they require a lot of expensive original cataloging. However, certain documents in special libraries have only temporary value and have to be disposed or destroyed after a short period of time. Apparently, it does not make financial sense to create full MARC records for such items. Other items -- for example, expensive market research reports -- deserve extensive indexing with dozens of subject terms. Special libraries need customized cataloging to meet specific cataloging requirements of various units, sometimes as different as legal and medical libraries. Cataloging policy in a corporate library should be very flexible and open to change. This flexibility extended beyond certain limits, however, may lead to "bibliographic chaos" (Michael Gorman). The volume of the record may be different but not the standards of bibliographic description. Customized cataloging requires a very fragile balance between flexible cataloging policy and standard cataloging rules.

Cataloging as a customer service may be also understood as cataloging with the end-user in mind. When selecting subject headings and call numbers, catalogers should constantly keep in mind the specific needs of the library clientele and searching habits of the library's customers. We should constantly remember that our customers' search results will depend on what we put into the system as much as on their searching skills. One spelling mistake may cause more than one unsuccessful search. A lot of our clients start their search with very broad search terms. On the other hand, a very specific search may not produce any results. Being too specific may affect recall, being too general will affect precision. If we add a subject heading *polymers* to a book about star-shaped polymers, this book will be lost among thousands of books on polymers of different types. If we do not add a subject heading *branched polymers* to a book about *star-shaped polymers*, our recall will be minimal and many items relevant to our customers will not be retrieved. The art of customized subject cataloging is in ability to predict our customers' most probable search terms and to make a reasonable choice between general and specific subject headings.

One of the problems of a common corporate library catalog is that it has to be not only united but also unified. Application of AACR to bibliographic description of items held in Europe or Asia may cause a negative reaction. This is mainly a problem of library management. Complete unification of cataloging records produced in different countries in accordance with different standards of bibliographic description is an expensive and labor consuming project, but before all organizational and financial problems are solved, catalogers in all corporate library units worldwide can come to an agreement regarding at least one field of a full MARC record. Since the official language of all affiliations of

American companies abroad is English, using LCSH (Library of Congress Subject Headings) seems to be natural and beneficial for all our clients. Adding LC subject headings to foreign language records will improve our customers' access to foreign language materials which otherwise are lost for people who cannot read in these languages. Many local divisions in corporate libraries use their own lists of indexing terms or subject headings. These homemade lists of terms rarely have elaborated syndetic structure, the latter is one of the greatest advantages of LC Authority File. A system of BT, NT, RT, SA, etc. references, as they are defined in LCSH and reflected in USMARC Authority records help our customers find the item they are looking for even if they do not know authorized terms for a particular subject. Using LCSH also makes conversion to a different automation system smooth and easy. Locally produced lists of indexing terms are usually more specific than LCSH and may include unofficial scientific jargon and non-standard abbreviations. If we constantly keep in mind the needs of our clientele, we have to find a reasonable balance between the standards of LCSH and flexibility of locally produced lists of indexing terms.

The best possible result of our work seems to be a situation when our customers can easily find their needles in the haystack of our collection. The next step is to make available to our customers even those materials which we do not have in our collection. Catalogers usually know how to use OCLC or other impressive bibliographic utilities and how to search numerous online library catalogs available through the Internet. These qualifications of cataloging librarians can be successfully used for Document Delivery and Acquisitions, whenever bibliographic verification is necessary. Another exciting direction of catalogers' professional development is customized selection and cataloging of the most stable resources available through the Internet. A traditional image of a cataloger as a person sitting in a far, dusty corner of the library labyrinth is going away to the past. Our customers' needs and service orientation of contemporary library work will lead to better use of catalogers' diverse professional qualifications and higher appreciation of their "background" work.

Yuri Konovalov has an MA, MLIS from Wayne State University. He is employed by GCI Information Services at Dow Chemical Company as a cataloging librarian. He may be reached at ygkonovalov@dow.com