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Things Change: The FDLP Setting and Early Partnership Efforts

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Introduction

While putting my thoughts together for today's presentation I took a short break, did some channel surfing, and came across an old favorite Don Ameche and Joe Mantegna movie called Things Change. While there aren't any insightful anecdotes from the film pertinent to today's presentation, the title, Things Change, is certainly appropriate for any discussion of the developments that have led to today's session on Web based, Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) electronic partnerships.

In the first part of my talk I will discuss developments in the information delivery environment over the past 10 to 15 years that have led GPO to consider a network of partnerships as a plausible mechanism for managing the FDLP Electronic Collection. Second, I will describe several partnership efforts I was involved in establishing while working at GPO in 1996/97. And third, I will conclude with a couple of observations on what I believe to be the greatest challenge facing the partnership program.

And boy, have things changed!

Background -- Technological Change

When I started work in documents in August 1986, we were searching the Monthly Catalog on an AutoGraphics product called MicroMax, which was a computer generated roll of fiche that contained the entire Monthly Catalog from 1976 on. At that time, all the computerized searching we did was on a 1200 baud phone connection to DIALOG, OCLC, or RLIN. The basic InfoTrac index had just started up as a laser disk product in the reference area in 1985. The library had no CD-ROM products.

In 1987, we began to experience a bit of change. We were a test site for AutoGraphics GDCS MoCat CD-ROM.

In 1988, the year the film *Things Change* was released, things really began to change. We received the first GPO electronic pilot product, a CD-ROM named *Census Test Disc #2*. How many of you remember *Test Disc #2*? And how many of you still keep it in the bottom desk drawer with all those other things you never were sure what to do with?

In all, there were five GPO electronic pilots, which really did pave the way for the use of electronic materials in our libraries. How many of you remember the Department of Commerce's Economic Bulletin Board (EBB)? As a pilot project, the EBB was the first online product made available through the FDLP (GPO Pilot Projects).

By 1994, Federal agencies were spending an estimated \$7.8 million dollars on dial-up bulletin boards and nearly \$51 million on Internet resources. By 1996, agencies were still spending in the neighborhood of \$7 million on dial-up access, but were spending some \$325 million on providing Internet-based information resources (Report to the Chairmen). I would imagine that has escalated significantly over the past three years. And, according to the 1997 Biennial Survey results, over 88% of us are providing public Web browser access to that information in our departments. How many of you provided public Internet access in 1988? Things indeed do change.

Background -- Persistent Principles

On the other hand, while some things have changed, others have stayed the same. While information technologies have changed dramatically, the mission and goals of the Federal Depository Library Program have remained relatively constant.

For example, I would guess that virtually everyone in this room would agree with such basic FDLP assumptions as:

- The public has a right to access Government information;
- The Government has an obligation to disseminate and provide broad public access to its information;
- The Government has an obligation to guarantee the authenticity and integrity of its information, and
- The Government has an obligation to preserve its information.

For the most part these remain the guiding principles for our activities as participants in the FDLP.

Over the past decade, the library community and Federal information providers, particularly the GPO, have struggled to assure these traditional public access values in an era of rapidly changing information technologies. This struggle has been particularly difficult because changes in information technology have far outpaced adjustments to Federal information policy.

The problematic policy issue has been the question of whether Federal agencies are required to cooperate with the FDLP in the dissemination of electronic information products. Simply put, the section of Title 44 U.S. Code that defines Government publications is by some interpreted to apply only to printed materials, not electronic. In fact, many agencies accept this interpretation and ignore the FDLP as an avenue for distribution of electronic publications.

As most of you know, the library community has worked valiantly over the past two years to draft, lobby, and negotiate Senate Bill 2288 (105th Congress), the Wendell H. Ford Government Publications Reform Act, through Congress. This bill would have taken great strides toward resolving the growing fugitive documents problem. Unfortunately, despite all the good work done by the library associations, GPO, and others, S. 2288 did not pass.

Given this policy vacuum and the transition to electronic distribution, it is difficult to envision how the sort of centralized coordination of access to Government information that the FDLP provided in the world of paper will translate into our new universe of electronic resources. In the old world of paper, agencies were required to print through the GPO, and with these materials in the GPO print plant, the Library Programs Service could fairly readily identify items that should be distributed through the FDLP.

In the new universe of HTML editing and Internet access, agencies often publish their information directly on the Web, cutting out the GPO as printer, Library Programs Service as coordinator, and FDLP libraries as repositories. This bypassing of the FDLP, of course, raises the critical question of how the assumptions and principles assured through the more or less centralized FDLP program in the past will play out in the significantly more scattered Internet-based information environment into which we are evolving.

Report to Congress

In August 1995, GPO managers were given the opportunity to collect their thoughts on how to adapt the "Program" to the new information environment. Responding to changes in technology, to efforts to trim the budget, and to Al Gore's efforts to re-invent the Federal Government, Congress instructed the GPO to undertake a Report to Congress, Study to Identify Measures Necessary for a Successful Transition to a More Electronic Federal Depository Library Program. The final report from this study (hereafter the Study) was issued in June, 1996, and has provided a framework for many FDLP efforts over the past several years.

One basic assumption of the Study is that the scope and volume of Government information made available in electronic formats has become so vast that no one entity will be able to manage it and that a new FDLP model will develop to accommodate the increasingly new information environment.

- Several quotes from the Study demonstrate the extent to which the Study envisions partnerships to be an integral component of this new model FDLP:
- The Strategic Plan proposes a new FDLP model that allows the traditional partners in the program to interact in new ways and which defines the various partners in the process by the services they provide rather than by the actions they perform (p. 20).
- GPO also may establish partnerships with depository libraries to retain and provide permanent public access to certain types of information (p. 24).
- An enhanced system is needed to ensure permanent public access to electronic Government information products through the FDLP. Such a system must include all of the institutional program stakeholders: information producing agencies, GPO, depository libraries and NARA (p. E-v).

In the new FDLP model, forward movement of information products can stop at any one of the points in the dissemination process: the point of creation (the issuing agency), the point of coordination (GPO), or the point of local access (depository library). Nor will Government information products always reside at the same location both for immediate and permanent access.

Some agencies may decide to fulfill their obligations for public and depository access through their own electronic information services for the short term, only to pass responsibility for the information on to GPO for permanent access through the FDLP. Under other partnering arrangements, depository libraries may accept responsibility for permanent public access to some types of Government information products. The party that retains physical custody of the information for on demand depository access will be responsible for the information's authenticity, storage and maintenance (pp. 20-21).

Significantly, the Study vests in GPO the responsibility for coordinating this new model. Quoting again:

- GPO, as administrator of the FDLP, will coordinate a distributed system that provides continuous, permanent public access, involving the publishing agencies, the National Archives and Records Administration, and regional and other depository libraries (p. E-7).

While these statements outlined a substantial responsibility for GPO as administrator of the FDLP to oversee some sort of network of partners to provide access to the burgeoning mass of electronic Government information, there was little beyond these statements of principle and general responsibility to provide guidance to the GPO employees given responsibility for implementing the strategic plan. They provide little in the way of concrete suggestions on how this system of partnerships would be implemented.

Implementing the Study's "Strategic Plan"

Defining what partnerships would be and how they would work would need to be worked out as GPO staff began to implement the Study's "Strategic Plan." Of that I became intimately aware when I started working for GPO as a consultant in June 1996, less than a month after the "Strategic Plan" was published. The partnership question was assigned as one of my primary responsibilities.

Sandy Morton-Schwalb, also a consultant at that time, and I set out with various GPO staff to try to establish one or more prototype partnerships. Because there were no FDLP partnerships, it was our hope that by actually establishing prototypes we could work through some of the details that would define partnerships.

The projects on which Sandy and I worked took dramatically different directions, defining a sort of dichotomy in the way partnerships are organized. Sandy looked toward establishing partnership agreements in which GPO would work directly with agencies. In effect, she worked to establish partnerships as Interagency agreements between GPO and other Federal agencies.

Early on Sandy's main effort was to establish an arrangement with the Department of Energy, which led ultimately to the DOE Information Bridge partnership of which you heard Dr. Warnick speak on Tuesday morning. Sandy also worked on the Interagency Agreement which formalized the NTIS/FDLP pilot partnership.

My focus was on partnerships looking in the other direction, toward libraries as potential partners. This immediately suggested two possible types of library partnerships: one in which there was a two way partnership between GPO and the library, and one in which there was a three way relationship between the GPO, the library, and the Federal agency producing the information. The latter scenario seemed the more interesting and desirable because it would lead to new and unusual relationships among the three partners.

I will confess that I took the path of least resistance in my efforts to identify potential prototype library partners. Rather than start from scratch I identified a couple of libraries that were already working with agencies and tried to negotiate partnerships with them. I contacted two colleagues whom I knew and who were involved in existing arrangements with agencies:

- John Shuler at the University of Illinois, Chicago (UIC), who was working under contract with the Department of State to manage the DOSFAN Internet site, and
- Greg Lawrence at Cornell, who was similarly under contract to manage USDA Economic and Statistics Service Internet resources.

Owing to various factors, the discussions with UIC advanced more quickly and provided the opportunity to work through a prototype Memorandum of Understanding (or MOU)

which was signed by UIC, the Department of State, and the GPO. The MOU outlined responsibilities of the three partners, and, at base, assured that the information UIC maintained on DOSFAN would remain permanently accessible through the FDLP. If UIC were to have difficulties in the future that would preclude them from operating DOSFAN, GPO assured that they, or a new partner, would absorb the responsibility for making these Department of State products available for FDLP access. I will confess that what I saw as the most significant outcome of establishing the DOSFAN partnership had more to do with having successfully gotten the MOU through the GPO legal review process than with folding some excellent information resources into the program.

Discussions with Cornell regarding a partnership bogged down. Cornell has a unique arrangement with the Department of Agriculture and the issue of a partnership assuring permanent access raised questions that could not be resolved at that time. However, being at the table with Cornell did provide GPO with some exciting opportunities, including participation in the national conference on the preservation of digital agriculture information, about which Pam Andre spoke yesterday.

Participation in this conference, one of only a handful of efforts addressing the electronic preservation issue at that time, provided GPO the opportunity to interact with others interested in providing permanent access to a specific subset of Government publications.

Because the basic underpinning of partnerships as we perceived them at that time was permanent access, discussions with Cornell pretty much ended there and a partnership was not established. However, during our discussion Greg did make some interesting suggestions for possibly forming a reference oriented partnership which would be based on the value added bibliographic and reference assistance that Cornell had built into the site. While no partnership was developed, I did think his idea was intriguing. In fact, a substantial portion of the value of the FDLP partnership with University of North Texas on ACIR (Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations) products, and DOSFAN's Electronic Reference Service, of which John will speak shortly, is the librarian-enhanced access they incorporate into their Web sites.

Another interesting possibility for identifying partnerships I explored beyond turning to UIC and Cornell is what George Barnum calls the dead agency partnership. That is, identify an agency that has recently been eliminated and then find a library willing to partner on those materials. I made my initial contacts with Cathy Hartman in this light on ACIR materials. What makes the dead agency scenario easier is that only GPO and the library need to sign off on the MOU -- there is no agency.

I don't have time to talk of all the partnership angles I tried to work, and in fact have probably forgotten many. One that was interesting was establishing a "pilot" partnership with OCLC on ERIC documents. OCLC was interesting as a potential partner owing to

their huge digital storage capacity and their familiarity with the library community. The duration of that partnership is over and the results are being assessed.

With these accomplishments and near accomplishments under my belt, I left GPO to return to the university library. I couldn't help but feel that what I had done was the easy part. Sure, we had worked out some details and come up with some models as called for in the Council recommendation. But the real work of making these partnerships lay ahead. The real daily operational details had yet to be worked out.

Concluding Observations

I also exited the doors of GPO with several big questions that I knew would need to be resolved, yet were hardly at that time even on the table. I will conclude my comments with a three part summary of what I believe is the biggest challenge facing the partnership program.

1. Agency non-compliance:

I believe that unless Title 44 is revised, Federal agencies will tend to deliberately not use the FDLP as a channel for distribution of their electronic information products. This is partly owing to a lack of knowledge within agencies of either the extent to which their information products are available through depository libraries or the degree to which GPO catalogs and provides access to their publications.

Agencies tend to see their responsibility as getting information to targeted audiences, then preserving the few publications having historical value in the National Archives and Records Administration. Their basic awareness of GPO is as Federal printer, not as the coordinator of the library program. Agencies are probably unaware that the positive efforts they are making to save resources and provide timely, ubiquitous access by making their current information available via the Web are potentially undermining future access to Federal information through the library program.

2. Active Model:

Assuming that agencies avoid (deliberately or unintentionally) using the FDLP, new energies will be necessary for the FDLP to function as a more or less central source for accessing Federal Government information. The old paper model of FDLP distribution was relatively passive. The stuff simply came to GPO and GPO distributed it; agencies were required to use GPO for printing. Some mechanism will need to be established in the Web model for the discovery, capture, and preservation of agency information products.

3. Matchmaker:

Someone needs to take the lead in linking potential partners together. In my opinion, all players have some responsibility and must contribute some level of energy toward this end, but I believe equally that it is critical that GPO take the most active role, essentially to establish a mechanism whereby GPO functions as matchmaker between agencies and libraries. My impression is that the sort of relationships that Greg Lawrence has arranged with the Department of Agriculture and John Shuler has made with the Department of State are praiseworthy exceptions to the norm, but they are exceptions and I don't believe that there are many libraries that will follow their lead. Someone needs to be there to lubricate or facilitate the process.

If the FDLP is going to effectively tame the electronic information beast through partnerships, my opinion is that GPO is going to have to be that middleman. I know staffing is tight given other responsibilities, but the advantages GPO has are 1) they are local to many agencies, 2) they have the auspices of being a major Federal agency, and 3) they have existing contacts and outreach to agencies. It makes sense that GPO take advantage of these existing advantages rather than having multiple libraries work from scratch.

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