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Permanent Access through Partnerships: University of Illinois at Chicago, U.S. Government Printing Office, U. S. Department of State

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During my one year as expert/consultant for the Government Printing Office (GPO), my primary assignment has been to work on projects that will provide for permanent public access to electronic Government information products remotely accessible through the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP). In particular, I am charged with establishing partnerships between GPO and FDLP libraries which will provide for permanent access to collections of electronic Government information products that partners maintain. My work on permanent access through partnerships is a part of GPO's overall effort to implement the Strategic Plan contained in the Study to Identify Measures Necessary for a Successful Transition to a More Electronic FDLP.

The Strategic Plan provides a very concise statement regarding partnering for permanent access:

GPO, as the 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.¹

My task has been to provide programmatic detail on how this precise but not overly prescriptive measure will be carried out.

Initial Efforts

In my initial attempts to write something down regarding partnerships, one issue I thought very important was that some sort of agreement or contract would be required to assure that access to products managed by FDLP partner libraries would indeed be permanent and

public. With this in mind I began to draft a generic memorandum of understanding (MOU) to outline issues surrounding permanency and access.

I completed the generic MOU and distributed it as a discussion draft on GOVDOC-L just before the fall Depository Library Council (DLC) meeting held in Salt Lake City. At the Council meeting I held a focus session to discuss the various obligations and responsibilities itemized in the MOU which provided some very good insight and clarification. Additionally, Council recommended several revisions to strengthen the draft MOU.

With a revised draft of the MOU done by December, 1996, it was apparent that an initial partnership was needed as a test case. To make my job easier I turned to the existing partnership between University of Illinois-Chicago (UIC) and the Department of State (DOS) on the Department of State Foreign Affairs Network (DOSFAN) Internet site. Aside from bypassing the work that would have been involved in connecting an agency to a library, working with UIC and DOS simplified my efforts because I have on several occasions worked closely with John Shuler, the government information specialist at UIC, so was working from an existing relationship on that front as well.

Memorandum of Understanding

Although all three partners agreed in principle to the MOU early in the process, it took several months to run through the process of getting approval and signatures from all parties. This was a learning experience for me, and brought home a rule of thumb Jay Young has often told me: the process is often as important as the final product. In GPO this was true, where the process led the MOU through several offices for seemingly endless consideration. But in fact the process made the draft MOU stronger, particularly the refinements to the language in the MOU suggested by the General Counsel's office.

The MOU clearly identifies the information product that is covered by the stipulations of the MOU, which are products that DOS migrates from their current DOSFAN Web site to the DOSFAN Electronic Research Collection which is maintained by UIC in partnership with the FDLP. Beyond identifying the DOSFAN Electronic Research Collection, the MOU outlines the requirements and responsibilities among the partners to assure that the partnership provides permanent public access to the DOSFAN collection. Overall, there are some 32 separate codicils in the MOU which can be collapsed under the following broader topics:

Ownership

The MOU recognizes that the content of the information contained in the DOSFAN Electronic Research Collection is in the public domain, and that a copy of software developed as an integral part of DOSFAN must accompany DOSFAN content if the product is transferred from UIC. It is recognized, however, that UIC does own the intellectual property associated with any value-added software the university develops for DOSFAN, other than specifically in its application to DOSFAN.

Security

The MOU has many codicils addressing security matters, which focus on such standard issues as providing adequate back-up procedures and fire walls.

Consultation

The MOU provides for consultation among the partners on a number of issues pertaining to the DOSFAN product. Notable is the stipulation that UIC must consult with GPO if UIC plans to significantly alter the way in which DOSFAN is organized or accessed. Consultation is also called for in the identification of resources on DOSFAN which are appropriate for FDLP access.

Access

The MOU requires provision for at least five simultaneous users, and requires that the product be available for Internet access ninety-five percent of the time.

Notification of Partnership

To promote the partnership and to provide appropriate notification that DOS and GPO recognize the UIC site as the official location for the DOSFAN Research Collection, adequate notice of the partnership will be posted to Internet sites operated by each partner.

Locators and Bibliographic Control

Through its Locator Services and GPO Access Monthly Catalog, GPO will provide pointers and bibliographic access to products on both DOSFAN and the DOSFAN Research Collection.

Fail Safe Mechanism

Probably the most important stipulation, the MOU requires UIC to surrender a copy of the DOSFAN Research Collection and any UIC developed software necessary to access the collection in the event UIC can no longer support permanent access. The stipulation recognizes that no institution can realistically agree that they will maintain a product like DOSFAN forever, though the partnership suggests that effort will be made.

Future Partnering Efforts

As I look to the future of partnerships I see the GPO's role as that of broker between prospective FDLP library partners and Federal agencies that view FDLP libraries as a means for providing permanent public access to remotely accessed electronic agency information products. My efforts this year to date have focused on examining the role of FDLP libraries as FDLP partners, and to identify libraries and library consortia interested in participating. Toward this end I have held two focus groups, one each at the fall and spring Depository Library Council meetings, and have identified about ten libraries or library systems and consortia that are interested in signing on as partners.

My problem now is the other side of the brokerage. Initial efforts to identify agencies interested in signing on to partnerships have not been effective. In fact, the overall initial efforts to communicate to agencies GPO's interest in providing permanent access have not had much success. Which means my final two months at GPO will be busy trying to pick up the agency side of this. It is obvious that new tactics must be explored to interest agencies in using the FDLP to provide permanent public access to their information products. My first step in designing new strategies will be to consult with Council members employed by Federal agencies, including Eliot Christian, Phyllis Christenson, and Dan Clemmer.

On a final note, when John Shuler and I spoke last week we realized that now that the MOU was signed we actually have work we need to do to implement the UIC/DOS/GPO partnership. Though I will still be involved, Lee Morey of GPO's Electronic Transition Staff will be working directly with John and with Colleen Hope of the Department of State to fill in the detail to make this first FDLP partnership a success.

1. Study to Identify Measures Necessary for a Successful Transition to a More Electronic Federal Depository Library Program (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1996). p. E-7.

http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/dpos/studyhtm.html