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GPO Access Gateway at Case Western Reserve University

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Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) became the 8th Government Printing Office (GPO) Access Gateway in March, 1995. The process of opening the gateway was the outgrowth of a set of cooperative efforts and agreements that are reflective of the networked environment of the CWRU campus, an illustration of the effect of the developing networked infrastructure on library services and decision making.

Initial Steps

With the passage and initial implementation of the GPO Access legislation (P.L. 103-27), Federal depository libraries were given the opportunity to have a single free connection to the server running the mandated databases. At the time of the initial registration and rollout by the Office of Electronic Information Dissemination Services of GPO (late summer of 1994) there was already unofficial word that GPO would work toward expanding access through "gateways" in a short time. Within weeks the Library Programs Service issued a call for potential gateway sites and began providing additional free logins to the system, up to a total of ten per depository, for gateway libraries.

The Electronic Learning Environment at CWRU

Case Western Reserve University operates a high speed fiber optic network, CWRUnet, which connects virtually every classroom, laboratory, office, and residence hall room with a suite of services maintained locally and around the nation and world. Every student, faculty member, and staff person has access to libraries of software, servers with nearly 100 CD-ROM titles, the integrated library system, electronic mail services, Usenet access, a campus-wide and community-wide information system, shared computing resources, and administrative data, among other resources. Within this environment, the libraries of the campus have moved aggressively to integrate electronic and traditional resources into library services.

Over the past two years, for example, collection development policies within the University Library (the general library for Humanities, Social Sciences, Science, Engineering, and Business) have been extensively revised to incorporate digital format and campus wide

availability as factors in building subject area collections. Computing resources are directed at networked applications rather than stand-alone workstations, thus it has become the practice (and a de facto policy) that electronic products be evaluated for their networkability: sources that must run on a single machine in a single location are not selected unless they provide absolutely essential information not available in another configuration or format, and the cost of licensing must become a factor in the price of a given resource.

Within this context, the GPO's initial rollout of the single user connection to the GPO Access server was disappointing at the least, since the single remaining stand-alone workstation for CD- ROMs in the Government Documents Department was entirely stand-alone, without a connection to the campus network, and since networked machines in the public areas are protected by a secured menu system which prevents users from reaching a wide-open connection to the Internet.

Opening the Gateway

The rapid expansion into the Gateway project fit with the University's goals and practice immediately and without question. This fit was such that there was no need for extensive policy discussions about CWRU's participation as a gateway. The resource was evaluated by the appropriate selector (the documents librarian) on the basis of the criteria set forth in the collection development policy, and was added to the library collection (in this case the virtual collection available online) on the merits of those criteria and the ability to make the service widely available.

Because all campus libraries (including health sciences, law, and social work) share in the use of the campus network, a committee composed of representatives of those constituencies, as well as from the system support office (Library Information Technologies) convenes to make decisions on selection and deployment of campus-wide resources. The GPO Gateway proposal was taken to this body, the Networked Resources Committee, as a joint effort of the University Library and Law Library, and was immediately and unanimously endorsed for inclusion.

In the course of that selection process, system support personnel were brought into the process to advise on technical concerns. Both modes of connection to the GPO server were examined, and the viable route was found to be SWAIS, owing to limitations imposed by the incompatibility of the Windows-based local client WAIS software and CWRU's network software, and the inability of the GPO WAIS server to accommodate connections from distributed IP addresses. The second depository on the campus, the School of Law Library, was brought on board at this point as well, contributing to the total pool of available logins from their allotment of 10.

The choice between "full" (local client) WAIS service and SWAIS was radically altered by the introduction of the Gateway project. With the information supplied for the initial rollout, local client WAIS had the advantage of fuller functionality in terms of its graphics transfer capabilities. When it became clear that SWAIS was the only viable option in the existing range of choices for implementing the gateway, a closer look revealed that SWAIS is functionally quite powerful and is not a pale second choice to the full WAIS option. In terms of clarity and relative ease of use, SWAIS has, in fact, some definite advantages, not the

least of which is its display of the list of databases to select from at the outset of the search, and the less "busy" appearance of the screens.

The continuing concern for graphics transfer capability led to the decision to retain a local client WAIS connection in each depository (University Library and Law) devoting the remaining 18 simultaneous connects (9 from each) to the pool. Users are instructed in help files now under development that if the graphic element missing from the ASCII text version over the network is required, they must contact the documents librarian at the Law Library or University Library, who will then secure the appropriate page(s) via either WAIS or the printed copy.

The timing of GPO's rollout was fortunate in that within the same month that the call was put out for Gateway volunteers, CWRU began beta testing for a new release of integrated library system software for its vendor. Included in the release was a feature (named, awkwardly enough, "gateway") that allows connection to remote hosts from the OPAC by means of scripted logons within the front end of the online catalog system. Thus a user now looks at the first screen for EuclidPLUS, the library's system, and chooses between the OPAC and a menu of other remote sources and databases including GPO Access. Upon choosing GPO Access, the connection is made seamlessly, with login and password hidden from the user.

The linkage of the project to the integrated library system was a desired outcome of the approval process by the Networked Resources Committee. By placing the service "in the mainstream," users benefit immediately from a cleaner interface and fewer points of entry to library databases, and in the long term from ongoing improvements to the integrated system extended to all services under the OPAC umbrella.

The single longest delay in the process, and that with the thorniest issues surrounding it, was a debate which developed while the testing of the new system software release was underway. For various reasons of security to the campus network, it was decided that there would no longer be the possibility of a totally anonymous remote connection to the CWRU system. Up to that point a dial-in user could connect to the CWRU computers, and using a default login and password, gain limited access to public databases such as the library catalog.

With concerns for network security growing across the country, a campus-wide discussion resulted in this free access being cut off, thus cutting off public users of GPO Access. After further discussions and consultations, a solution was proposed that allows free public access through the Cleveland Free-Net, a community network which operates from the CWRU domain, which registers users without charge and provides them with a wide range of services and information. CWRU users and external users, whether over the Internet or via the Free-Net, now see parallel OPAC front ends, with a wider range of options available to CWRU users, but with the library catalogs, GPO Access, and a CWRU-produced database of local and regional economic and demographic data available to everyone. Much discussion has taken place in the depository library community regarding the provision of access to government information online to users at the so-called "low end," that is, without direct network connection, coming on through modems and telephone lines.

It was with these users in mind that the search for a solution to the question of security and access was sought and ultimately found.

Although the service is in its first weeks of normal operation as this is being written, and very little publicity has taken place either on the CWRU campus or in the community, the first full week of service saw nearly 140 connects to GPO Access, a larger number than to several other popular databases including OCLC Worldcat. The strategy in promoting the service will be to promote in such a way that we build a core of "power users," who will be comfortable with the software and adept at performing useful searches. To that end reference librarians are currently being trained, and a series of workshops focusing on the individual databases within GPO Access are scheduled, with key user groups on campus targeted. We will, at the same time, inform our community of the availability of the resource and the assistance available from library staff in using it.

While the WAIS interface is not a popular favorite among librarians on this campus, and the databases remain somewhat idiosyncratic, the introduction of the GPO Access program has brought government information a great leap forward in the electronic learning environment on this campus, and has demonstrated in microcosm the emerging models for building and maintaining collections in the library of the future.