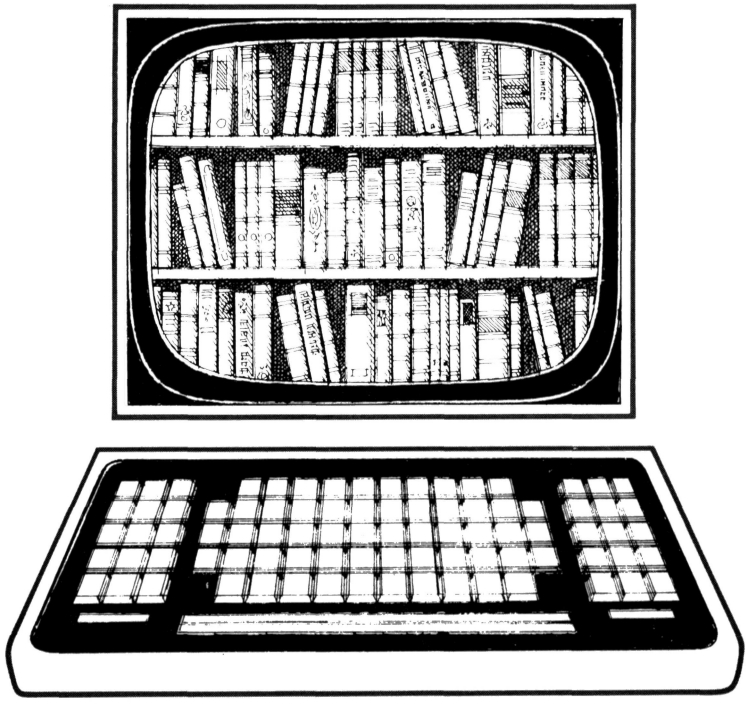
DESIGNING AN ONLINE PUBLIC ACCESS CATALOGUE

Nathalie Nadia Mitev, Gillian M Venner and Stephen Walker



Library and Information Research Report 39

The British Library

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Mitev, Nathalie Nadia
Designing an online public access catalogue:
Okapi, a catalogue on a local area network.——
(Library and information research reports,
ISSN 0263-1709; 39)
1. Catalogs, On-line
I. Title II. Venner, Gillian M.
III. Walker, Stephen IV. Series
025.3'13 Z699

ISBN 0-7123-3058-5

DESIGNING AN ONLINE PUBLIC ACCESS CATALOGUE: Okapi, a catalogue on a local area network

NATHALIE NADIA MITEV, GILLIAN M VENNER
STEPHEN WALKER

Library and Information Research Report 39

Abstract

Designing an online public access catalogue [OPAC]: *Okapi, a catalogue on a local area network* [LAN] is the final report of a two-year research project "Microprocessor networking in libraries" which was funded by the British Library and the Department of Trade and Industry, and based at the Polytechnic of Central London.

The aim was to produce an OPAC on a LAN, that would be readily usable without training or experience, without sacrificing effectiveness or being tedious for experienced users.

The result was a functioning prototype OPAC called Okapi, which has a number of distinctive features: use is eased by coloured keys and a lack of jargon; the system uses search decision trees to select a suitable action at each stage of a search, and it performs automatic Boolean and hyper-Boolean functions where appropriate. The OPAC was installed and evaluated in one of the Polytechnic site libraries.

There is a full description of Okapi under the headings: source file: indexing; search functions; user interaction and evaluation. There are also general discussions of these topics, and chapters on OPACs in general, LANs, and recommendations for future research.

Library and Information Research Reports are published by the British Library and distributed by the British Library Publications Sales Unit, Boston Spa, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 7BQ.

ISBN 0 7123 3058 5

ISSN 0263 1709

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the British Library.

Typeset in Great Britain by SB Datagraphics Ltd, Colchester and printed by William Clowes (Beccles) Ltd, Beccles.

Preface

This report is primarily about the design and use of online public access catalogues (OPACs). It describes the application of a study of existing online catalogues, and of research in information retrieval and other fields, to the design, construction and testing of a prototype experimental OPAC (called Okapi). The prototype catalogue was designed to operate within a local area network (LAN), although there is little in this report, or in Okapi, which is specific to the LAN environment.

The intended readership includes library management and technical services personnel, students of library and information science, and those concerned with interactive computer systems, particularly with systems intended for untrained and non-dedicated users.

Most of the report assumes little prior knowledge of library automation or of computing in general, but there are a few sections which require more specialised knowledge.

We wish to thank all those who have helped us during the course of the project. In particular we wish to thank Neil McLean and Mel Collier (Head and Deputy Head of Library Services, Polytechnic of Central London) for their constant support, and Paul Baxter and Maureen Grieves of the British Library Research and Development Department, who have given so much time to the project.

Other Polytechnic staff without whom the work would scarcely have been possible are Winifred Abbott (Technical Services Librarian) and the cataloguing staff — particularly Penny Pope and Helen Chapman — for endless help on cataloguing matters and the use of MARC; Maura Coghlan and her staff in the Riding House Street Library for providing facilities for us to install and test the catalogue with real users; and Dave Roberts (Head of Computer Services) for access to computing facilities. Our colleagues in the Library Technology Centre, Pat Manson and Mary Rowbottom, gave advice and encouragement on many occasions.

Outside the Polytechnic, we are particularly grateful to the following people: Philip Bryant and Alan Seal of the Centre for Catalogue Research for many stimulating discussions on the use of catalogues in general and on OPACs in particular; Linda Reynolds for help with screen layouts and with the design of evaluation procedures; Charles Hildreth of OCLC for encouragement and for having written the best book on OPACs [1]; the staff of Nestar Systems (suppliers of the hardware) — particularly Railton Frith (Technical Support Manager); Alan Hopkinson for the benefit of his encyclopaedic knowledge of cataloguing and of bibliographic exchange formats; and Margaret Slater of Aslib for her valuable advice.

Finally, there were the several hundred people — Polytechnic students and staff, professionals in various fields, conference delegates and passers by, friends and relations of the project team — who acted as guinea pigs by being persuaded to sit down in front of computer terminals, were told "Just use it!", and were observed and questioned. These individually unacknowledged collaborators made countless constructive suggestions, many of which have been incorporated in the prototype OPAC described in this report.

May 1985

NNM
GMV
SW

Reference

1 **Hildreth C R.** *Online public access catalogs: the user interface.* OCLC, 1982.

Contents

Appendices

List of figures

List of tables