

Tech Group Minutes

November 28, 2000

Present: Janet Brooks, Jane Carvajal, Ernestine Clark, Vickie Dixon, Sally Epp, Anne Fischer, Julia, Fresonke, Jana Hausburg, Karen Marriott, Donna Morris, Debra Spindle, Judy Walden, Jim Welch

ILS Issues

This meeting was an extended Tech Group meeting that included ILS representatives. Issues presented to the ILS Team were discussed by the Tech Group. (See attached responses prepared by Sally Epp.)

Selling Disks

Judy will discuss selling diskettes to customers with Library Managers. If they agree to do it, then they will begin proceeding with implementation which will also involve talking with Anne Hsieh re: sales tax.

Unmediated ILL follow-up

The committee looking at offering unmediated ILL to customers agreed that they would like to see this service added if possible. Implementation of the service will be listed as a task for the Tech Group to prioritize at the retreat in January.

Change in Executrain's direction

Jane reported that Executrain is making a change in their direction for training that will be offered. You will probably be seeing less Executrain classes offered as they are moving to more in-depth training such as Microsoft A+ certification, etc.

Online Brochure update and printing

Julia passed out copies of the Online Brochure and asked for comments on what needed to be deleted or added. We agreed that the instructions for setting up Dial-Up access could be removed from the brochure on only be given as a handout if someone asked for them since so many users now have Internet access and use it to access the library. Julia pointed out changes she would be making and a couple of other changes to the Internet Use Agreement were suggested. She will wait on making a final copy until the MLS commission makes a decision on the library's Internet policy.

Attachments:

ILS Issues
Tech Group Meetings for 2001

Next Tech Group Meeting:	January 26, 2001 -- Tech Group Retreat
Time:	8:30
Place:	Belle Isle
Minutes:	Anne Fischer

Issue: Sometime Virtual Circ comes up with strange responses when I try to look up a customer's card number by using a phone number.

Response: This glitch has been fixed system-wide, but please let automation know if it continues to happen on a particular computer. It may be that the V-Circ program on that particular computer needs to be updated.

Issue: When you click on "new search" in CyberMars you then have to click in the search box to get the cursor there. Can we make this the default position for the cursor on that screen?

Response: Automation did not realize there was a problem on the CyberMARS computers used by the public since it worked fine through the web browser. A change was made to the Javascript on the server and it should be fixed now..

Issue: I've had a customer place an item on reserve using a card which had been previously been coded "lost." Shouldn't this be impossible?

Response: Yes, that should be impossible. The only explanation we can think of is that maybe the reserve was placed BEFORE the card was coded "lost." Coding a card "lost" does not delete existing reserves. If the customer got a new card, and the transfer of information from the old card to the new card was done correctly, then this shouldn't be a problem. However, if they have not yet replaced their card, it is possible to get reserve notices after the card has been coded "lost."

Issue: Is it possible to have CyberMars on the screens of the catalog-dedicated computers all the time? Too many customers don't know how to open the program and are confused by the Windows "Start" button.

Response: The tech group will consider this at the retreat in January. It's a good idea, but immediate implementation would be tricky. First, we'd need to have different versions of CyberMars for the Gates & Staff computers vs. the catalog-dedicated computers. Second, automation would have to create an alternate way for staff to close CyberMars and re-start the computers. It isn't a good idea to just shut them off at the tower because doing that too often can cause major problems with Windows NT. We did come up with another option that might solve this problem. We could possibly have a message come up whenever customers clicked on the X to close the program. It could say something like, "Please don't close this program. Simply logoff to protect your privacy." This might keep CyberMars open on the screen more consistently so that new computer users don't encounter the Windows desktop. Also, trying this simpler solution might give the library-user community time to become more computer-savvy.

Issue: Would it be possible to have a CyberMars Print Preview button? When customers are looking at articles in Infotrac Searchbank and other databases, there is no way to know exactly how many pages the printout will be.

Response: This is something that we all agree is a very necessary thing to add to CyberMars. Unfortunately we have to wait to implement it until a new version of the engine that CyberMars is based on comes out. The print preview option in the current engine is VERY buggy. For now, we just have to wait. Thank you for the suggestion though, and please know that it will be added as soon as it is possible.

Issue: Here is an example of a problem that came up while a customer was searching CyberMars. The customer did a title search for "Murder Beyond the Mountains" which is an audiotope. She typed that title into the search box and then clicked on Title. She clicked on the graphic and pulled up the bib record (Bib. #05254305). Then she clicked on Index, which should take you back to the previous screen of titles (i.e. titles beginning with the word "Murder"). Instead, it pulled up a screen with titles beginning with the word "new." I can see why it is doing that, as the Main Entry title for the bib record is "New adventures of Sherlock

Holmes,” and “Murder beyond the Mountains” is actually an added entry for one of the short works included on the audiotape. The problem is that the customer expected to get back to the alphabet at the same place she left it. Is it possible to fix this?

Response: Unfortunately, it is not possible to fix this. Hopefully, since we’re dealing with a problem based on an added entry, it won’t come up too often. (There is one caveat before I begin my explanation – all this is based on field-based searching NOT keyword.) The technical reason this happens is that the “index” function is linked to the TYPE of search and the record on the screen, not the original search terms. So, when you click on index, here’s what the system does. First, it looks at what type of search you did (a title search in this case). Then, it looks at the information in the corresponding field (“New Adventures...” in this case). Finally, it re-creates the index based on that information. Unfortunately, the re-created index will be completely different (in this case) than the index created by your original search.

The reason the index function is set up like this involves the “next” and “previous” functions. Imagine you do a search, retrieve one bib record, and then click “next” numerous times. When you stop and click “index” you want the alphabetical list to pop up at the spot where the current record is (the one you stopped clicking “next” on). The only way to make this possible is to link the “index” function to the record currently on the screen instead of your original search term.

Now, here’s the strange part. When you click on “next” while looking at the record in your example you get the next title that begins with the word “murder.” The “next” and “previous” functions are based on the index that was pulled up originally! It has to be this way since you use “next” and “previous” after a keyword search as well. So, I guess the solution is to have the rare customer who is confused by this re-do the search and then go through the records using “next” and “previous” instead of clicking on “index.” Actually, this should also be quicker than returning to the index between each title. Once they’re past the record that has the added entry (the exception), then they will get back to the “Murder” index if they click on “index” ... because the “index” is based on the current record! I know, the logic IS slightly circular, but hopefully it will help.

Issue: If a customer does an anonymous search in CyberMars and finds something interesting, they then have to log off, log on with their card number and do the search again in order to place it on reserve. Could the request copy button be available for a bib entry in the anonymous search also? If clicked, the system could then ask for the library card number. This used to be available on our first version of the website catalog.

Response: The Tech Group will consider this at their retreat in January. Implementing this would involve lots of new programming. There are lots of things vying for Automation’s attention, so this change must be evaluated and compared to the other things desired of them. The minutes of the retreat will indicate the order in which Automation will tackle their various “Do-its” over the coming year.

Issue: A customer tried to renew a book and got the message that “others are waiting for this item.” He checked and there was no reserve list for the book and he had not had it out for the maximum time. Could this be a bug in the system?

Response: Yes, it was a bug, and it was fixed on November 1.

Issue: When patrons are searching CyberMars for a title beginning with an article, they typically type in the full title including the leading “a”, “an”, or “the.” This causes the search to miss the wanted item if the title begins with “a”. However, including or omitting “an” or “the” does not result in erroneous results. Would it be possible to overcome this problem?

Response: It is true that the catalog used to strip off the article “a” the same way it does “an” or “the”. The reason it doesn’t anymore is that there are quite a few books that really have the letter “a” (not the article) as the first word in the title. Examples include “A+ Certification,” “A is

for Alibi,” and all the “A B C” books. It is necessary to keep “a” as possible start word in the title index because of the large number of books for which begin with the letter and not the article.

Issue: It would be nice to have some reader’s advisory on our website. We could have a list of “coming soon” books that we know people are going to be asking for (like the newest John Grisham or Harry Potter book). We could put up cover pictures and reviews like Amazon.com does, update them once a month and allow people to place reserves from that screen. We could even let them put their name on a “RFP” list before there is an order record or bib number. This type of service would enhance catalog browsing, allow us to compete with online bookstores, and reduce repetitive work for reference and materials selection.

Response: The Tech Group is very excited about the possibilities for a full-time Webmaster. All projects of this nature are on hold, however, until a full-time Webmaster is actually hired. Please continue to think of new things the library system can do to enhance its website. Tech Group members are keeping lists of ideas to pass along to the new Webmaster once he/she begins work.

Issue: If we are a system, why does the Internet access log-on say “your library is...”?

Response: It seems we just kept the old log-on from GUI Mars. Automation will try to get rid of it. Thanks for pointing it out!