

Microcomputer Software for Libraries

Report from Aisling Judge

Last September, a series of demonstrations of microcomputer software packages for libraries was organized by the Government Libraries Group and was followed by a day-long seminar during which participants had the opportunity to evaluate the packages further. Response to the entire series was extremely good, with almost fifty people attending the final Evaluation Seminar.

The six software packages (Bookshelf, Inmagic, Microcairs, Oasis, Status and Sydney) which were demonstrated had been selected on the basis that they were networkable and, between them, catered for a range of different sizes and types of libraries. A seventh package (Tinlib) has been included in this summary as it was one of the original group selected and it was demonstrated in November to substantially the same audience as had attended the main series. In addition, a test version was evaluated by Mary Doyle in the Department of Agriculture and Food Library.

The Evaluation Seminar started with an introductory talk by Anna Gethings of Oracle Information Services on the basic steps in evaluating software for libraries. The rest of the day was devoted to workshops, one for each software package, allowing participants to discuss up to four different packages with suppliers and, in most cases, users of the software.

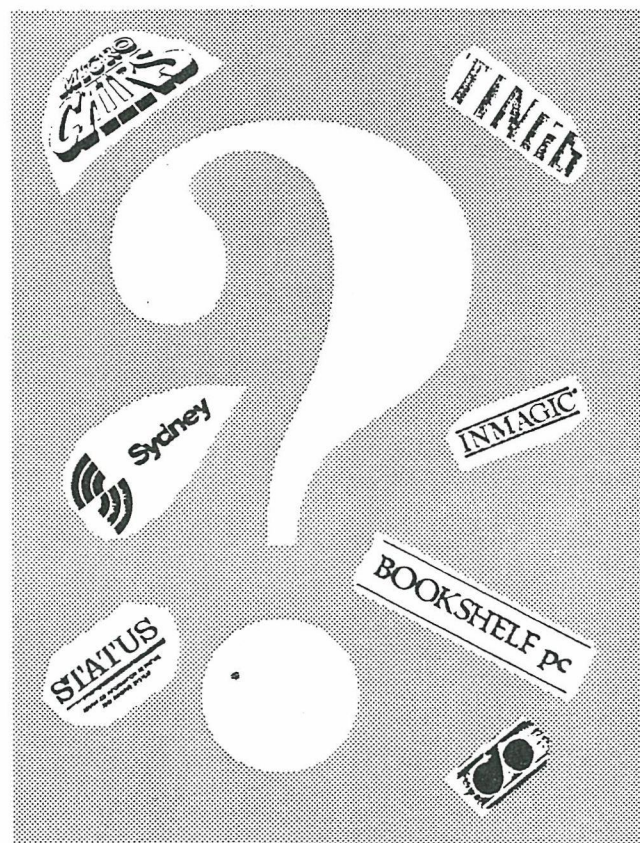
The evaluations that follow are a distillation of the views of those GLG committee members who took part in the seminar. As such, these summaries should be used only as a guide to the main features of each package and to their strengths and weaknesses as perceived by those who examined them.

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Full details for all seven packages, including suppliers' names and price lists, can be obtained on

request from Mary Doyle, Librarian, Department of Agriculture and Food, Kildare Street, Dublin 2, (Tel: 789001 x 2163).

See page 2 inside for evaluation summary



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Summary of evaluation feedback from the recent seminar on library software

"These summaries should be used only as a guide to the main features of each package and to their strengths and weaknesses as perceived by those who examined them."

BOOKSHELF

BOOKSHELF is an integrated fully relational database package designed for library management. The modules available are catalogue / enquiry, thesaurus, acquisitions, circulation, report generator and (except on the micro version) serials.

It is visually attractive and generally user-friendly, with variable-length fields, good index updating, good displays of items retrieved and excellent report facilities. Data-entry is hampered by rigid screen formats. The weakest part of the system is the Boolean search. Although full Boolean logic can be used it is cumbersome (maximum of two search terms in each command).

A peculiarity of the package is that it runs on the Pick operating system (which may overlay another system such as MS DOS). While this has its attractions, it was seen as a disadvantage for networking. — LS

INMAGIC and SEARCHMAGIC

INMAGIC is a powerful text-retrieval program with particularly good indexing and search facilities, which could be suited to most small special libraries. It is not a relational database package, and must be manipulated to enable housekeeping functions to be performed with it. This can be done through the use of its extremely flexible, though rather complex, report generator. The software suppliers also market a collection of report formats and database designs (called BIBLIO GUIDE) to help librarians manage serials, loans and acquisitions with INMAGIC.

In general, good onscreen HELP and a well-written manual make the package easy to set up and use, though for untrained users the use of SEARCHMAGIC would be advisable. This is an add-on program which allows a choice of simple or full Boolean searching of INMAGIC databases. Both packages come in stand-alone or network versions. Larger libraries with heavy circulation demands

would probably not find their needs met by INMAGIC. — AJ

MICROCAIRS

CAIRS IMS (Information management system) enables the user to design a relational database and retrieve from it. The user has great freedom in setting up the structures and defining fields and field lengths.

CAIRS LMS (Library management system) is a self-contained fully relational integrated package covering all aspects of library management. The field structure and field lengths are fixed by the suppliers. The main module comprises catalogue / search / loans, and a periodicals module is extra.

The two systems are compatible (one can start with LMS and upgrade to IMS or one can design one's own database on IMS and integrate it with LMS). Setting up one's own system entails considerable effort, but not too much expertise.

There is a choice between command language (mnemonic) and menus. DOS windowing can be used in conjunction with Microcairs, but its usefulness could not be assessed as it was not demonstrated. Files are Ascii and data is readily transferable.

Storage of records is fast and indexing is comprehensive. Unfortunately the entire indexes need to be rebuilt in batch for each update. The cataloguing module of LMS is hampered by rigid structures (fixed field lengths) and rigid screen formats which show only a portion of long fields at one time. An undesirable feature is the use of the comma as a delimiter in subfields. There is no provision for repeatable fields (except author).

The over-all quality of the system seems impressive. Particularly impressive is the excellent search, which has many refinements and which allows elaborate Boolean searches to be entered as a single command with nested brackets. Cross file/database searches are also possible. Retrieval speed is good. — LS

OASIS

OASIS was demonstrated and seemed to be a very user-friendly integrated system with fully relational modules. It had well-developed windowing facilities which made data-entry very easy. The original module to be developed was the serials module, and this looked impressive. The system is still under development.

The limited demonstration made assessment difficult. As there was no follow-up (OASIS did not take part in the workshop) members were not able to check doubtful points — fixed-field structures, search facilities, space requirements, back-up and support services etc. — LS

STATUS/PC

STATUS/PC is the microcomputer version of STATUS (a free-text information retrieval software program) and must be tailored by the user for library applications. This process is complex and labour-intensive, and must be considered a major drawback to what is otherwise an extremely comprehensive program.

Once properly set up, however, STATUS is a fully integrated relational data-base management system with full ordering, cataloguing and circulation management. Searching is very good and output is possible under a full range of formats. User-friendly interfaces can be created to facilitate an OPAC (on-line public access) on a network. — AJ

SYDNEY

SYDNEY is a modular package designed for libraries, available as an economical 'standard' system (catalogue / enquiry, circulation, acquisitions and MARC communications) or as a 'professional' system with additional modules for serials and inter-library loans.

It is menu-driven and generally easy to use, with good on-screen help facilities and labelled function keys. But the manuals provided are very poor, and training would be required. Screen lay-outs are clear but inflexible.

The largest module (serials) looked very good, and so did the circulation module, which had good statistical facilities but was not yet geared to overdue notices or fines. Output facilities were good. Report formatting was not very flexible, but a 'Datascan' report generator is available as an extra.

The cataloguing module suffers from having fixed (system-defined) field lengths and inflexible screen displays, and the compulsory authority validation slows up data-entry somewhat. The weakest part of the system is its search. Text-retrieval is good, but

the searching is slow and combination of terms very limited. There is not a full Boolean search (NOT is absent from it). — LS

TINLIB

The TINLIB package was designed with libraries in mind and comes in the form of a number of integrated modules covering acquisitions, cataloguing, thesaurus construction, serials, circulation and, most recently, report generating. Not all of these were demonstrated or available for trial.

Cataloguing is extremely easy and includes many attractive features such as validation, authority control and windowing. Stop-words are user-definable, but the filing conventions take getting used to. The screen lay-out is fixed but comprehensive. Fields are repeatable (except title field) and variable in length. Full-screen editing with wordprocessing facilities is supported. There is a range of search options including 'browse and navigate' through the indexes, simple form-filling and (theoretically) full Boolean search facilities. The simple search is not comprehensive, however, while instructions for the more complex techniques are inadequate. The user moves within and between options/modules by means of either menus or function keys.

The main weaknesses in the system related to user-friendliness and speed of operation. Neither the manuals nor the HELP screens were clear, consistent or comprehensive while, even on the fastest computer, delays between screens and during processing were considerable. — AJ

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

It's that time of year again!

This year's AGM will be held on **Wednesday, 11 April 1990 at 3.00 pm at: Department of the Marine, Leeson Lane, Dublin.**

As you are aware from our Newsletters the Group is involved in many activities affecting Government libraries and we want to hear as wide a cross-section of views as possible.

That means we would like at least one representative from every Government library — 34 in all.

Group activities include:

- meetings, visits to libraries, computer demonstrations, social events;
- production of publications including *GLINT*;
- liaison with the Central IT Services, the Government Supplies Agency and various groups concerned with library and information matters.

PARTICIPATE — COME TO THE AGM

The following is a short note on the use of CD-ROMs. It is necessarily brief as we have not been using them long enough to give a more detailed account.

What are CD-ROMs? Basically they are similar to the CDs we are all now familiar with on which our favourite music is recorded, except that CD-ROMs contain data instead of music and need a PC to access the data. They are, in fact, publications in machine readable form.

Examples of publications on CD-ROMs are: Oxford English dictionary; Harrap's multilingual dictionary; CAB on CD-ROM (abstracts of the world literature on agriculture from 1984); JUSTIS (containing the text of the Official Journal of the European Communities, related Court of Justice Reports etc).

Searching CD-ROMs is not unlike searching online databases though without the pressure of time charges. They are not of course as up-to-date as the equivalent online service and so complement rather than replace them. Online database hosts will also continue to play an important role in providing access to a broad selection of databases, as few organisations could afford to subscribe to all the CD-ROM services relevant to their area.

Currently the Dept of Agriculture and Food, the Dept of Health and the State Laboratory have subscribed to the JUSTIS database and the Dept of Agriculture and Food is awaiting CAB on CD-ROM.

Initial impressions of the JUSTIS database have been very favourable, though Aisling Judge in the State Laboratory encountered a problem when loading it on DOS 3.3 even though the software is supposed to work on DOS 3.2 or higher. Forewarned, we in the Dept of Agriculture and Food loaded DOS 3.2 and so far have had no problems.

The JUSTIS database comprises the full text of all EEC legislation except those regulations

which deal with day-to-day management, all related Court of Justice cases and details (not full text) of all preparatory documents. It also includes the full text of all EEC treaties with the exception of the Treaty of Rome. A major advantage apart from the ability to search for information on any subject is the fact that all documents include a list of related documents, e.g. amending legislation, Court of Justice cases etc.

To use a CD-ROM you need a microcomputer, usually IBM compatible, although some are based on Apple machines. You will also need a CD-ROM drive with an interface card residing in the microcomputer to facilitate the link between the two. The drives to which the majority of CD-ROM producers have adapted their products comply with ISO 9660 (High Sierra). Some integrated workstations are now available on the market. If you are likely to subscribe to several different products it might be worth considering a jukebox drive which can hold and provide access to several CD-ROMs at a time.

The LAI/IIS Joint Seminar which was held on 26 January 1990 devoted 3 papers to the use, advantages, disadvantages and pitfalls of CD-ROMs. I do not propose to detail all that was said. However I will pass on a word of advice from Jim O'Reilly of the ESB who currently subscribes to 16 CD-ROM products:- Problems can arise if installing more than one CD-ROM product. He recommends that if you are installing a new product you should copy the Config Sys and Auto Exec batch files and rename them so that if they are overridden you still have the originals.

As I said this has been no more than a brief introduction to an exciting new medium. For further information you should refer to:

Akeroyd, John. CD-ROM usage and prospects: an overview. *Program* (1989) 23:367-376

Cormack, Erin (ed). *The CD-ROM directory*. Latest ed. London: TFPL.

THE GOVERNMENT SUPPLIES AGENCY

Two representatives of the GSA (Seamus Molloy and Kieran Whelan) attended a committee meeting of the GLG on 15 November 1989. They explained the practical implications of the imminent commercialization of the Government Supplies Agency and its expected repercussions on Government Departments and Government Libraries.

They described the computerised systems running on networked workstations in the GSA — Lyric and SMART. Lyric is a semi-commercial accounting package; SMART, which they use for publications, is a standard data-base package with spreadsheet, sorting and search facilities.

In December a small group from the GLG — Mary Moore (Department of the Marine), Maeve McNamara (Oireachtas) and Lisa Shields (Meteorological Service) — visited the GSA to see these systems in operation. The SMART system was of particular relevance to the Oireachtas Library, which is closely involved in the production of some major Government publications.