



World Library and Information Congress: 69th IFLA General Conference and Council

1-9 August 2003, Berlin

Code Number: 109-E
Meeting: 86. Bibliography
Simultaneous Interpretation: Yes

Electronic national bibliographies: state of the art review

Unni Knutsen

National Library of Norway
Oslo Division

Abstract:

In 2001 the undersigned presented an update of the study 'Results of a "Survey on bibliographic control and national bibliography"' conducted by Robert Holley in 1996.

The present paper analyses further the data compiled and focuses on the formats of the national bibliographies. The position of the electronic national bibliography is strong, and Internet versions are getting increasingly popular. The paper gives an overview of the situation of today, the plans of the national bibliographic agencies in the near future and brief remarks on the adherence to the recommendations of the International Conference on National Bibliographic Services. It also shows examples of good practice from countries from different parts of the world and points to areas that might be addressed in order to develop an even better electronic national bibliography.

Introduction:

In 1996 Robert Holly presented the 'Results of a "Survey on bibliographic control and national bibliography"'. The study was updated by the undersigned in 2001. 52 bibliographic agencies from all parts of the world kindly shared their current situation and plans for the future.

The 2001 study showed that print still remained the main format for the national bibliography, 75% of the national bibliographic agencies maintained a printed national bibliography, a decrease of 15% over 5 years. CD-ROM still held a strong position. Other electronic formats such as microfiche, computer tape, floppy disks etc were rapidly losing ground. There was increased focus on online and Internet access as the main format of the national bibliography.

The main finding was, however, that most national bibliographic agencies (NBAs) still distribute their national bibliographies in multiple formats.

A breakdown into types of format showed:

Print:

- 39 NBAs maintain a printed national bibliography
- 13 NBAs do not maintain a printed national bibliography
- 14 NBAs only publish in print (mainly low income countries)
- 25 NBAs maintain a printed national bibliography in addition to publication in various electronic formats

CD-ROM:

- 19 NBAs produce CD-ROM
- 5 NBAs produce CD-ROM, but do not offer online/Internet connection
- 2 NBAs have CD-ROM as their only format

Online access/Internet:

- 6 NBAs provide online access, but not Internet access
- 2 NBAs provide online/Internet access as the only format(s)
- 23 NBAs publish their national bibliography on Internet

Future plans of NBAs:

The findings mentioned above raised the following questions:

1. Do NBAs that publish their national bibliographies only in printed format today plan to go straight into publishing on Internet once they are computerized?
2. Do NBAs that produce CD-ROM today but have no Internet connection intend to cease producing CD-ROM once they have established an Internet version of the national bibliography?
3. Do NBAs that have online/Internet and CD-ROM as current formats intend to stop producing CD-ROM?
4. Do countries with online, but no Internet access plan to establish an Internet version of the national bibliography?
5. Will Internet take over as the main format of the national bibliography?

All these questions could be answered in a limited (up to 2006) perspective by studying the plans of the NBAs.

1. As mentioned above 14 NBAs publish in print only. 5 of these foresaw no major changes in publishing. 7 agencies reported that they planned to add CD-ROM in combination with online or Internet access. 6 countries planned to launch an Internet version, but not a single agency planned to have Internet access as the single format.

2. One agency had no plans for the future, whereas the others planned to have online and/or Internet access. None of the agencies foresaw that they would stop producing CD-ROM.
3. None of the 14 countries that have online/Internet access in addition to CD-ROM planned to stop producing CD-ROM.
4. Of the 6 agencies with online but no Internet access 4 had plans to develop Internet access.
5. Only two agencies reported that they are considering abolishing the printed format. 15 NBAs reported that they want to establish an Internet version whereas 9 wanted to provide online access, mostly in addition to Internet access. No agency reported any plans to abolish CD-ROM whereas 13 agencies might consider introducing CD-ROM.

Changes in formats 2001-2006

Format	2001 study	Plans 2001-2006
Print	39	37
CD-ROM	19	32
On line access (other than Internet)	17	26
Internet	23	38

The tradition of printing will continue, it seems. The print format meets the archiving and preservation requirements of the *The final recommendations of the International Conference on National Bibliographic Services* and is obviously also a useful form of distribution when computers and computer networks are scarce.

The strong position of the CD-ROM is mainly due to the fact that the format is generally very user friendly with multiple access points. Downloading of data is normally easy. The fact that print and CD-ROM formats generate income for the NBAs also adds to their popularity.

The aim of timely and effective distribution of the national bibliography can best be met by providing online/Internet access to a database where records are added to continuously. Online/Internet formats may also offer multiple access points and a user-friendly interface. Also the special needs of certain groups of users can be met. The world wide accessibility that Internet offers will enhance the interchange of data and move us a giant leap forward in terms of establishing universal bibliographic control. The NBAs should, however, ensure that data could be easily downloaded and reused by other agencies. In a few more years I imagine that CD-ROM will disappear and Internet evolve as the main product of the national bibliography.

National bibliographies on Internet:

As stated before 15 of the NBAs in my study planned to establish an Internet version before the end of 2006. I am happy to report that at least 9 of the agencies have achieved this goal within mid 2003! It is especially nice to see that the list includes several representatives of low-income countries.

Are national bibliographies promoted by the agency?

When it comes to the promotion of national bibliographies on Internet I am afraid the NBAs have a job to do! Not many home pages point directly to the national bibliography. The most common way of giving access to the national bibliography is naturally via a link to catalogues and databases. When presented to the list of databases, however, it frequently proves quite problematic to decide whether a certain database contains the national bibliographic records or not! In my opinion the national bibliographic agencies should pay more attention to the presentation of their databases. Even when the national bibliography is published as a separate file it may prove hard to identify.

There are a few agencies that make an exception. The National Library of Canada points directly to their AMICUS (Canadian national catalogue) database from the home page <http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/index-e.html>. The same applies to Austria http://www.onb.ac.at/index_eng.htm.

Another example is Iran (<http://www.nli.ir/new/english/>) where the national bibliography with Latin and Persian interface is just a pull-down menu within reach.

Also in the homepage of the Kenya National Library Service (<http://www.knls.or.ke/>) information on the national bibliography is easy to find. The fact that the national bibliography is not yet on Internet does not prevent the agency for promoting the service and the printed product (<http://www.knls.or.ke/publications.htm>). Several agencies have a similar approach to describing and promoting their bibliographies in print and CD-ROM.

Generally speaking many agencies have put a lot of effort into describing the national bibliographic services and products. One example is Die Deutsche Bibliothek http://www.ddb.de/index_e.htm. Another example is the Swiss National Library (http://www.sn�.ch/d/online/inna_ueb.htm) where Das Schweizer Buch is even available in a PDF-format for subscribers! To my knowledge this is quite an uncommon approach.

National bibliographic records as an online resource

The national bibliographic data are made available via Internet in a number of ways. In my study 16 agencies answered that the records were mixed in as part of the file that includes all records held by the agency. 17 reported that the records are kept in a separate file. 12 stated that the records were mixed in as part of the union catalogue whereas 6 had their records included as part of the union catalogue. Quite often the national bibliographic data appear in several contexts. An example of this is the Canadian national bibliography, which is a part of the AMICUS database (<http://amicus.nlc-bnc.ca/aaweb/amilogine.htm>) where National Library of Canada records co-exists with other source records and the Canadian union catalogue records.

Examples of other countries that have the national bibliographic records mixed in with the OPAC are Croatia (<http://www.nsk.hr/opac-crolist/crolist.html>) and South Africa (http://natlib1.unisa.ac.za/screens/opacmenu_s3.html)

Examples of countries that have chosen to present the national bibliography as a separate database are Latvia

(<http://fikuss.lanet.lv:4505/ALEPH0/LBNFT4I11H5GVKIY8JM6IQ625RBTC9MBPE6P7KY98FPQ6M5M7I-03310/con-Ing/eng>)
and Namibia (<http://library.unam.na/nml.html>).

I do not think one should argue that one solution is better than another. The important thing is that the national bibliographic records are promoted by the agency. It is encouraging to see that most databases have at least an English interface in addition to an interface in the national language(s) thus enabling the outside world to access the bibliographic data.

How to facilitate acquisition?

National bibliographies are of course important tools for acquisition librarians and professional users who need to keep up to date with current publications. Several agencies have therefore introduced lists of newly acquired material.

The frequency of publication differs from weekly (example Sweden: <http://dijkstra.libris.kb.se/svb/v21/>), fortnightly (example Austria: <http://bibliographie.onb.ac.at/biblio/> and Norway <http://nabo.nb.no/nyhetsliste/>) to monthly (example Belgium: <http://www.kbr.be/bb/fr/Bbstr1.htm>).

In my opinion agencies without this kind of acquisition tool should be strongly encouraged to create such a service.

Adherence to current recommendations

The final recommendations of the 1998 *International Conference on National Bibliographic Services* paragraphs 6-10 deals with the presentation and timeliness of the national bibliography.

Paragraph 6 states the variety of existing formats. It especially mentions that at least one of the formats should be capable of meeting archiving and preservation needs and should be permanently accessible. In my opinion the fear that information in electronic versions may vanish as time goes by is one of the main reasons why the printed format still holds such a strong position. The NBAs should explore the possibilities of long-term preservation of the electronic national bibliography. In the meantime the best thing we can do is probably to print copies for preservation purposes!

No format can meet the requirements of paragraph 7 better than the online format. This paragraph urges the NBAs to present the material as soon as possible after publication and to ensure that the distribution is effective. An updated, accessible database is of course a far better channel of distribution than the print or even the CD-ROM format.

Paragraph 8 deals with the information presented in each issue of the bibliography. The term issue is of course irrelevant for a continuously updated database, but applies well to the print and CD-ROM formats and to some extent to online static issues such as lists of newly required material. This being said the online, updated formats also need to present themselves in a clear way for identification purposes.

Paragraph 9 states the importance of including an introduction and if possible a users guide informing e.g. of the basic of records, coverage, arrangement, bibliographic, classification and cataloguing tools and lists of special terms, with definitions and abbreviations. The printed bibliographies usually contain this information. In my experience the CD-ROM and online formats leave a bit to be wished on this point. Some agencies have, however, put effort into meeting these requirements even in the electronic environment. My agency as an example has added user guides to the different search fields, lists of abbreviations used (<http://www.nb.no/baser/norbok/english.html>) and an overview of the coverage, basic for records, bibliographic tools etc (http://nabo.nb.no/trip?_b=baser&_s=E&navn=norbok&_h=0).

Paragraph 10 states the importance to base the national bibliography on international recognized standards. The paragraph also clearly emphasizes that the bibliography should be arranged in an appropriate manner with access points to satisfy the needs of the users. This is of course a tricky point as the users differs from professional librarians to specialized users, users with special needs such as vision impaired and of course ordinary end users. I would imagine that most NBAs would claim that their Internet bibliography is arranged in a manner that meets the need of user, but as we have seen from the examples above there is a colourful mix of presentation forms! Maybe we should develop a set of basic recommendations pertaining to electronic national bibliographies and/or publish some examples of good practice?

References:

The final recommendations of the International Conference on National Bibliographic Services. 2002. <http://www.ifla.org/VI/3/icnbs/fina.htm>

HOLLEY, Robert. *Result of a "Survey on bibliographic control and national bibliography, IFLA Section on Bibliography"*. *International Cataloguing and Bibliographic Control*, 27 (1), January/March 1998, pp. 3-7

KNUTSEN, Unni. *Changes in national bibliographies, 1996-2001*. 2001. <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla67/papers/143-199e.pdf>