Sydney's Library Automation System at the NMB Bank

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This short article contains information on the working of Sydney's Library Automation System (LAS), especially the serials module, in a commercial bank in the Netherlands.

NMB Bank

NMB Bank is the fourth largest commercial bank in The Netherlands, with a total of 11,000 employees worldwide. Only 2,400 of these are employed at the head office in Amsterdam.

Two years ago, the NMB Bank purchased Sydney's Library software package for its Library and Documentation Department. All the modules which comprise the system have been in operation for over a year. Ordering and cataloguing of books, the creation of a database of journal articles, a current awareness service and the handling of journals are all achieved with the help of Sydney's LAS. At the moment, NMB Bank handles almost 2,500 subscriptions.

The hardware configuration comprises an IBM PC-AT as a file server, a Novell 109 MB hard disk, a Canon laser printer and twelve IBM PC-XTs. The LAN software is Novell 286. A tapestreamer is used for backing-up.

Handling of journals

The module design of Sydney's LAS enables a user to purchase only the Serials Management section. In this way serials management can be handled without affecting the acquisition of books or the cataloguing of articles. The serials module covers serials purchasing and cancellation, printing of circulation slips, claiming, production of subscription lists and statistical reports. As always, the handling of serials is the most complicated part of the library software. The documentation should be carefully studied. It is quite impossible to implement the serials function on a rainy afternoon and it is advisable to run a separate serials training database.

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It is also advisable to appoint a project team of experts from the Library and Documentation department. The project team is responsible to management on the one hand and on the other for instructing the data-entry clerk. The team is also responsible for the progress and the quality of the work. Once a week the project team reports back to other staff on progress, problems, etc.

The following is a brief explanation of how Sydney's LAS handles the library's journals and what information is required to enable the system to run properly.

Firstly, the user should set up the required default parameters in the System Management module. The next steps are as follows:

1. Add charge codes (departmental name and number)
2. Add suppliers (names and addresses)
3. Add division codes (indicates structure of the organisation)
4. Add clients (employee number, charge code, division, address etc.)

Steps 2 and 4 can be added during the ordering process.

It is then possible to start inputting journal data. Before entering online data it is advisable to analyse carefully the manual records. This preparation includes: checking supplier data, charge code information, client data, frequency of publication, whether or not automatic renewal is required, subscription commencement and expiry dates.

Entering of this information can take a long time. It has to be entered carefully to avoid problems with deletions at a later date. The system requires the inputting of data which is not always known at the ordering stage. One of the trickiest aspects is predicting expected arrival dates in order to enter them into the system. For example, a monthly which is arriving very irregularly causes problems. A date must be selected in the system calendar for every month. A claim period is entered for

each serial. Obviously there is a relationship between the frequency of the serial and this claim period. A monthly may have a claim period of ten days whereas a weekly may have a claim period of only one. If the user is unsure of the arrival pattern of the serial, this may cause bias in the system information.

A further very important feature of Sydney's LAS is the use of three different dates:

1. **Expected start date** : the date the library expects the subscription to start ;

2. **Expected renewal date** : this may be three or four months prior to the expiry date. The system will use this date to alert the Librarian that a serial is up for renewal. The Librarian can then inform the user of the serial that the subscription expires in a few months, thus giving sufficient time for a decision to be made as to whether to renew or cancel ;

3. **Expiry date** : the last date of the subscription period.

Once the subscription period and the start dates have been entered the system automatically calculates the expiry date, whereas the Library staff must enter the chosen renewal date.

When entering retrospective subscription records, all issues for the current year must be checked-in. For example, entering a subscription in November means that the January to October issues should be checked-in (assuming the subscription runs from 1st January to 31st December). After the issues have been checked-in, circulation slips must be prepared. The circulation slip contains the name and internal mailing address of the recipient. When this is completed, all the necessary routines are fulfilled and the system is operational.

The above information covers the working of the system. As already indicated it is impossible to implement a serials module on a rainy afternoon without initial preparation. First it is advisable to look closely at the serial module and enter a number of test records. In consultation with the manuals every step should be planned and the consequences considered. Make notes of all steps, paying special attention to things that are not covered in the manual. Before entering journal information make a check-list of all data which has to be entered. Make photocopies of manual receipt records, on which the project team can add significant notes for data-entry clerks. There should be daily feedback from staff to the project team regarding any problems encountered. The project manager must check the quality of data input and make decisions on how problems can be resolved during the process.

Nothing is perfect; neither is Sydney's LAS. One deficiency is the way in which manuals are written. Too little information is given and there could be considerably more detail. Nothing is included to give users any explanation as to why functions need to be done in a certain order. The appendix indicates how journals should be handled but it is insufficient. A checklist would be very valuable.

A further point to consider relates to additions made to circulation slips. The internal mailing address is not shown on the screen, even though data is on file, making it difficult to add a new user at the appropriate point.

Initially the financial features were inadequate, although many improvements have been made since the last release. For a while it was difficult to select the correct journal being invoiced because expiry date and charge code information were not displayed.

The positive points about Sydney's LAS are that it is a fairly reliable system for handling journals. In profit-oriented organisations such as banks, Library and Documentation departments have to struggle for survival. Working with Sydney's LAS improves the quality of the products and services offered to the library's users. The department becomes proactive instead of reactive. In general, once all the relevant information has been properly entered the system works without any major problems. NMB Bank is satisfied with Sydney's Library Automation System.