Electronic resources have been a hot topic in recent years. They are still evolving — both in their nature and their deliver. In the literature, one finds older articles about these resources, and it is interesting to consider how they have changed since then, and how standards have been developed and then reflected in cataloging rules. Libraries are still striving to find ways to provide optional access to them. A keyword search on the words “electronic resources” in Library Literature online returns 474 hits. One also finds books written on the subject. If one narrows one’s search by including the keyword “cataloging,” the result is 33 records, ranging in date from the mid-nineties to the present.

This essay will not address the suitability of MARC and other metadata schemes for cataloging these resources, a subject better treated in the Metadata essays.

Librarians are still considering the conceptual issues related to electronic resources and are exchanging practical advice about bibliographic control of these resources in a constantly changing online environment. We are still seeking to answer some fundamental questions: What is the nature of e-resources? How are libraries providing access to them? How are users discovering them?

For research ideas on this topic, as well as to see what has already been written, a good place to look is the Journal of Internet Cataloging. It is, in essence, an entire journal devoted to the organization of electronic resources.

Many electronic resources are delivered as part of aggregators. Calhoun and Kara (2000a) say that aggregator databases are forcing librarians to “color outside the lines.” They bring up alternative solutions to the problem of scarce resources and point to a huge volume of work related to the bibliographic control of aggregator databases. In their conclusion they discuss the spirited public dialogue among catalogers that has resulted in a greater understanding of the issues, if not a consensus. Such dialogue needs to continue, be it at professional meetings or in publications so that practitioners can share how they are dealing with these resources. Some libraries have shared their solutions to the aggregator problem, from presentations at conferences to the report of the second Program for Cooperative Cataloging Task Group on Aggregator, which presents a sampling of different approaches. More sharing of this sort would be very valuable.

Ann Okerson has written a valuable article, published in 2000, that reviews trends in electronic resources and offers some predictions for future years through 2005. This interesting article does not mention cataloging per se, except to note that another gateway to electronic resources might be a library’s online catalog, where each licensed e-title is hot-linked to the content. An article like this but focused more on cataloging trends might be interesting.

In her article on cataloging e-resources for school libraries Letarte (2000) notes that there is very little literature on this subject. In May 1999, she conducted a survey to explore how school library media centers provide access to electronic resources. In her conclusion she states that further research is yet to be done on possible cooperative ventures that would involve libraries, vendors, national cooperative programs, and bibliographic utilities.

Another important question about electronic resources is how users are discovering them? Do they go to the OPAC. Lists on Web pages? By accident? Calhoun (2000) encourages people to conduct user studies. Results of these studies would provide much-needed insight.

There are many challenges and questions related to the bibliographic control of electronic resources, and much room for research to understand how people discover them and what is the best way to provide access.
Works Cited


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Prepared by Beth Jedlicka, Serials Cataloging, University of Georgia, bethj@libris.libbs.uga.edu