9-15-2001

MARC records services - an aggregated assault

Peta J. Hopkins
Bond University, peta_hopkins@bond.edu.au

MARC records services -

An aggregated assault

By Peta Hopkins
Catalogue Librarian
Bond University Library

Introduction

Libraries are increasingly providing access to periodicals through online database services such as ProQuest, InfoTrac and Ebsco. Through subscription to such a service the library's serial holdings may suddenly jump from a couple of thousand print titles to 30,000 or more titles in a variety of formats. In addition to this huge increase in the total number of titles, the 'turbulence' (the frequent changes to the availability of titles and to the dates covered) of these databases has created a situation for cataloguers and serials librarians that some of us like to refer to as 'serial murder'.

The aggregator services provide full text articles from groups of serials. Libraries can choose which groups they want to subscribe to. At Bond University, for example, within InfoTrac we subscribe to four databases.

To improve access to titles available in full text through these databases many libraries would like to provide access directly from the Web OPAC to the database.

The Spydus Web OPAC provides a very good interface for users to navigate from catalogue records directly to electronic resources on the World Wide Web through the use of the 856 MARC tag. This tag allows cataloguers to define the location of an electronic resource and to provide instructions and information for the user about that resource.

Several of the aggregator services are now providing MARC records services, so that libraries can download sets of MARC records for the databases to which they subscribe. However, there are some issues to address in automating the management of these records. Many of these databases include hundreds of titles. Consequently each set of MARC records will contain hundreds of records.

To cope with the size and turbulence of these databases the vendors provide updated sets of records on a regular basis, perhaps bimonthly or twice a year. There is also some overlap of titles between databases.

Advantages of using MARC record services

There are several advantages to using the MARC records provided by the vendors.

- Timely – more accurate records of updates and changes. Maintenance is taken care of by regular reloading of records.
- Automated – the size and 'turbulence' of databases make it time consuming to maintain records manually.
- Increased use of product – improved access through the catalogue maximizes the investment in the service.
- Greater efficiencies for document delivery and reference staff through a comprehensive integrated catalogue.
- Costs – InfoTrac and Ebsco provide the service free with your subscription

Using record sets, cataloguers can make an aggregated assault on the hundreds of titles in each product.

InfoTrac as example

We'll look at InfoTrac in more detail as an example, as I have loaded records from this service to Bond's library catalogue. We are still ironing out a few technical issues to streamline the process.

InfoTrac records are very easy to download from the Gale Group web pages. Let me demonstrate.

- Point browser to Gale Group MARC download page
- Right click to select product/database
- Save file as a text file to your disc

The quality of the InfoTrac records has improved since early this year when I first looked at this service. However, they still do not provide Library of Congress Subject Headings. But, they do provide uncontrolled index terms that are searchable through a keyword subject search.

Spydus & InfoTrac

Spydus provides an ideal interface for direct linking to the InfoTrac service. The 856 tag displays in the Web OPAC as a hyperlink. The InfoTrac records contain an 'infomark' URL which immediately launches a search in the InfoTrac database for the serial title and the user is provided with a list of all indexed articles within that title.

Infomark describes a useful feature within InfoTrac. Once a user is in the database they can copy and save the URL in the web address of the browser

and send it to other people or use it at a later date to return to the same set of results or search screen.

This feature allows us to modify the InfoTrac records to benefit our users by inserting an additional 856 tag that point to a keyword search within the appropriate database.

The database load routine allows us to load sets of records relatively quickly, although it is recommended that these loads of large records be scheduled during times of low activity on the system. The major problem I encountered with loading these records was that current records for print subscriptions were bumped where ISSNs matched. The InfoTrac records are in data file format and have a gmd (general material designation) of [computer file]. But because many have the same ISSN as the print title I had to reload records from Kinetica to reflect the correct format of our serial holding.

Holding statements for these records were another area of concern within Spydus. Because there were no summary holdings or copy details our users were presented with a message: "There are no holdings for this title". Adding barcodes to each title is undesirable as these records are going to be deleted and reloaded on a regular basis and would be very time consuming and wasteful.

Web display

Previously we had problems with the display of very long URLs in the Web OPAC. In Netscape the record was pushed over to the left and the resulting layout made it difficult to interpret the full catalogue record. This problem has been addressed in version 6.3.0. When the 856 $3[materials specified] or $y[link text] is present it will display as the hyperlink instead of the $u[URL].

MarcEDIT the helper application

Resolving some of these issues has been possible through the use of a shareware application called MarcEDIT. Developed by Terry Reese at the Oregon State University, this application is based on the DOS programs MarcBreaker and MarcMaker that were created at the Library of Congress. Terry has incorporated these programs into a Windows environment and provided a text editor with functionality designed especially for cataloguers.

The InfoTrac records were "broken" to create a formatted text file that was manipulated to suit the library's needs. First of all, the ISSNs were stripped from the sets of records to prevent bumping and consequently also prevent retrieval from the web OPAC through ISSN searching. Fortunately this is not high on our users' lists of search strategies.

The next step was to insert an additional 856 tag pointing to an 'infomark' for the default search screen for the database within InfoTrac. This URL applied to every

record within the set and like the stripped ISSNs were removed, were inserted in each record in one easy step.

To include information about the date of record generation and the specific set to which each record belonged, the 500 tag "This record generated from Gale etc." was modified to include additional information. This is the note that will be used for deletion of the set.

Once all these changes were made, the text file was converted back to a MARC text file suitable for the database load routine. This was then renamed marclink.kin and run through our usual Marclink load routine.

Record display

The problem with the holding display was resolved by creating a parent record for each set prior to loading. This parent record has a holding statement and this generates a holding summary for each of the 'child' records. The parent has serial coding in the leader so that the 984 tag generates a holding summary according to our site-specific arrangement for serials.

An improvement to the display of 856 data would be helpful in improving the display of holdings. The label in the web OPAC is Internet URL. The 856 tag may describe other kinds of electronic resources rather than just URLs. The 856 tag could describe an email resource, discussion list, or some other kind of computer file. If it must have a label then something more appropriate such as "Electronic location" or "Electronic access" would be more encompassing. However, a better solution would probably be to take the 856 data out of the full display and place it immediately above the other holdings data in a similar yet separate table.

An alternative would be to amend the text that displays when there are no copies attached to the bibliographic record. Possibly something like "Check Internet URL for electronic access" might be appropriate depending on how many and the kinds of records that exist in the database without copies.

Conclusions

Technically it is possible for Spydus users to import these MARC records into their databases increasing resource discovery and providing desktop delivery to their users. However, each service provided by the aggregators needs to be looked at carefully to tailor the records to their users' needs and to address display and useability issues. Some of these issues can be laid at the door of the aggregator vendors and some will be the responsibility of the libraries' cataloguers and electronic services librarians.

Areas in need of more discussion:
Remote access for library users – liaison between aggregator vendors, libraries and library system vendors is required to establish techniques of improving

remote access while not infringing licences. For example, possibilities exist here for patron authentication through borrower records and PIN numbers.

Role of Kinetica – At the 2001 Kinetica Annual Users' Meeting, the Expert Advisory Group on Electronic Resources reported on their recommendation that records for datasets in aggregator services should be purchased and managed centrally to expedite the cataloguing and maintenance of records.

Links:
Bond University Library – Home page http://www.bond.edu.au/library
15 September 2001

Bond University Library – OPAC http://library.bond.edu.au
15 September 2001

EBSCOhost – Ebsco Information Services http://www.epnet.com/maglists/maglist.htm

InfoTrac – Gale Group
http://www.gale.com/servlet/HTMLFileServlet?region=9&imprint=000&fileName=catalog/title.htm

MarcEdit – Terry Reese, Oregon State University http://ucs.orst.edu/~reeset/marcedit/
15 September 2001

ProQuest – Bell & Howell http://tls.il.proquest.com/hp/Features/Marc/

Peta Hopkins - Catalogue Librarian, Bond University peta_Hopkins@bond.edu.au