

Challenges to Information Provision: The Library

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Introduction

Establishing a library for a new type of bank, one which would concentrate on a subject area which was also relatively new to the geographic region, was replete with challenges. Fine management support, unlimited participation by the researchers, unwavering inter-library cooperation and years of library staff experience at the administrative and clerical levels were able to overcome these challenges in the provision of information by the Library for the Central Bank of Barbados.

In 1974 when the process of establishing a library for the Bank began, there was only one bank library in Barbados - the Caribbean Development Bank. In addition to this, there were two other libraries with economic and financial library materials at the research level - the University of the West Indies Main Library and the Library of the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Cave Hill. None of these covered the depth of statistical information nor the range of research materials which would be required for the Central Bank's analyses of the economy of Barbados or comparative studies of the region. Hence the need to establish what was described in the Librarian's task description as:

"a library specializing in economics, money and finance, which would operate as an integral part of the Research Department and service the research needs of the institution and which would cooperate with other research libraries in Barbados and the Caribbean to ensure a buildup of research materials on money and finance."

I. Challenges of Supply

There were five major challenges at the outset of this task. These were all challenges to the supply of information in the subject areas outlined:

1. Identifying and locating what information materials had been acquired by the Bank during the two years since its establishment.
2. Locating the local producers of quality economic information.
3. Establishing what regional information, published and unpublished, would be essential to analyses of the economy of Barbados and comparative studies of the region.
4. Determining how much information from extra regional central banks and international agencies would be required for the Bank's cooperation with these agencies.
5. Selecting items which would constitute a core collection for a central bank.

1.1 *Internal Information*

Identifying what library materials were available in the Bank at that time was anticipated to be a delicate exercise, since the fear of losing valuable information tends to make researchers hold materials in their area of expertise close to them. A cordial introduction to the Library's expectations of the researchers and management was therefore absolutely essential to a smooth handover of library materials in their possession. They had to be convinced that it would be a gain rather than a loss. In a short while the Library had earned their trust, for it had convinced them that they could easily identify and locate the items in the Library's collection and that it was prepared to react immediately to any request for them. This respect for information delivery by the staff of the Library set the pattern which was to become the hallmark of the Library through the years.

To further bolster the confidence of the staff and management of the Bank in their new Library, a vigorous current awareness programme was also set up. A routing system was introduced, directing to the staff of Research information according to their subject profiles. Two years after the Library was set up they were also routing to each department of the Bank, a quarterly "List of Additions to the Catalogue of the Library." Today the Library's current awareness publications include two others which are routed to management - "Current Contents" presenting the contents pages of recently received journals and as the title implies "Selected Books Recently Received in the Library".

1.2 *Local Information*

Discovering information and library materials which were available locally and could be of use to the Bank, was a challenge in cooperation with the users of the Library and a personal challenge to the Librarian's experience and professional relationships. The first of these was discovering from the staff of the Research Department the type of local information they might need. Sometimes this was difficult to project and the Librarians simply had to keep abreast or at times even try to anticipate the changes in economic conditions and trends which might be of interest to them. In either case using a knowledge of the local information providers, they had to discover what sources would provide the information required, locate what was available anywhere in the island and how copies of these could be obtained. This task at times was made much easier because of the excellent cooperation between the librarians in other libraries in the island and the Central Bank's Librarians. These librarians, with formal or informal inter-library loan arrangements, consistently facilitated use of their library materials or the loan of them for short periods.

But acquisitions from local sources were not always simple. There was often a problem of continuous and consistent delivery of requested annual reports, and sometimes the supply of back issues of the same. At other times the company or organization would appear to be suspicious as to why the Central Bank of Barbados was requesting the statistics or the publication required. But as the years passed and confidence in the new organization grew, these problems gradually disappeared.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges was obtaining back issues of Government statistical publications. It is well known that Government ministerial portfolios change frequently, but to find out which Ministry was then responsible for the back copies of a publication, when such existed, could prove to be a test of endurance and persistence. One learnt over the years, that a back issue of a

Government publication was often many times easier to obtain from an overseas out-of print supplier, than from the local publishers. One of the greatest discoveries from overseas, was a complete collection in microfiche of local and regional statistical publications of a number of islands. These included items which the Library had tried unsuccessfully for years to locate through local and regional channels.

1.3 *Regional Information*

In 1974, there was little regional central banking library experience for a librarian to draw on, since there were only three relatively young central banks in the Caribbean. In addition there were no national bibliographies, few subject bibliographies, and fewer publisher's lists to provide a record of what was available in economics, finance, banking etc in the Caribbean region. The journals - *Social and Economic Studies*, *Caribbean Studies*, *Caribbean Quarterly* - the publications lists of ISER, bibliographies and library publications out of the UWI campuses, and papers presented to such annual or occasional meetings as the Regional Programme of Monetary Studies and the Caribbean Studies Association, had to be scanned for regional bibliographic information and reviews. One also had to depend on reports of new publications and studies from those who travelled widely throughout the region.

Only recently has the region seen the appearance of lists produced by such publishers as Ian Randle, and the relatively new Caribbean and Third World publishers abroad. It has also seen the birth of *Caribbean Abstracts* and increasing numbers of Caribbean entries in general bibliographies and online services; the task now is certainly less challenging.

Working with Caribbean serial publications had their peculiar challenges. Journal publications in economics or banking at the research level were very few. The Library also had to provide background information in other subject areas for the writing of papers and documents, and the Librarians therefore had to be aware of the status of the various regional serial publications. Before the 90s, a librarian like a detective would have to hunt to find who published what (since many printers are also publishers) to discover what was in print; and at times even conduct an investigation to find out whether a regional serial had lapsed, was out of print, or ceased to exist. These tasks were even more time consuming because of the absence of regional bibliographic publications. Keeping track of the serial output of the region was truly a challenge; only staff alertness and an understanding of the problems of publishing in the Caribbean proved to be beneficial.

A factor which cannot be overlooked in the supply of regional information is the role of the annual regional meeting of Librarians - The Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL). These conferences starting in 1969, provided an opportunity for regional librarians to network with their counterparts. In 1987, Special Interest Groups were introduced in the Conference. The Special Libraries Interest Group helped tremendously during these years and continues to provide opportunities for networking both with central bank librarians and with a wide range of special librarians. This group has always been eager to exchange library materials, as well as ideas and experiences in dealing with the challenges of information provision in specialized subject areas in this region.

1.4 *International Information*

In the early stages of the development of the Library, letters were dispatched to a range of central banks and financial institutions requesting the exchange of the Bank's publications for theirs. The response made it clear that central banks are prolific publishers and, if shelf space in the Library was to be maximized, before very long the Library staff would have to more closely reassess what was being supplied according to its value to the Bank's current research needs. The present collection controlled now by retention schedules has made the output of the exchanges more manageable. Control of the volume of documents resulting from the Bank's membership of international banking institutions was even more overwhelming, but experience gained over time has helped in the assessment of what is truly essential, to the satisfaction of all concerned.

The Library also has a collection of the published output of a number of international organizations. The major statistical publication of these bodies used by the Research staff, is the monthly International Financial Statistics of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Until recently, copying a table from this publication in its book format meant copying it in long hand, or photocopying it and retyping it into the new document. For years the Library pursued getting this publication in a simpler and more space saving format, with little success. Three years ago they were able to acquire a subscription to it in CD-ROM format and a researcher can now print a table or copy it to diskette so that data can be manipulated more easily. In this format researchers also have access to longer runs of statistics in a number of the IMF's statistical publications.

1.5 *A Core Collection*

Determining what constituted a core central banking collection for the Caribbean was a challenge for a number of years. Throughout those years, the Librarians had to keep in close contact with internal and external subject specialists, and monitor the banking and library publications of similar regional and international banking institutions. Discovering what basic texts and other library materials were vital to those working in the various subject areas entailed observing which publications were most often requested by the staff of the Bank, which researchers and publications were cited most often in regionally published and unpublished working papers, and in conference papers. It also required diligence in collecting widely the economic and banking literature on the Caribbean, particularly that of the islands with central banks.

The Bank's membership of a number of international banking institutions, not only yielded a wide range of their publications, but regular access to their bibliographies and lists of publications. In addition, international publishers, subscription agents and booksellers supplied reviews and advance notices of new publications, reprints etc which were constantly routed to the management of Research for their perusal. The search for quality economic information which would be valuable to a researcher was always a priority.

2. **Challenges in Access and Delivery of Information**

2.1 *Current Information*

Increasing the speed of delivery of current information to researchers, is a constant challenge in a field which is so heavily influenced by what goes on in the rapidly changing developed world. As the demand for current information grew, the character of the Library's collection gradually changed. There was less demand for books and more for journals because of the currency of the information published in them. The supply of books and journals from the United Kingdom, Europe and from North America by overseas agents could be problematic at times. Delivery from the United Kingdom and Europe by surface mail was quicker, but even their times could be considered a long wait when a publication was urgently needed. Orders from the United States usually took between two and four months. One could use airmail when the publications were not too weighty, but those times were few. The involvement of the Research staff in more meetings and conferences around the world was increasing their demand for a wider range of

information and it was becoming obvious that the challenges to delivery and supply would have to be overcome.

By 1986, the search was on for quicker access to a wider range of journal information. Eventually a proposal was made to management, requesting support and technology for connections to DIALOG Online Information Retrieval Services (now Knight Ridder Information Service) which was providing out of Palo Alto, California, access to hundreds of databases in the U.S. and a number of other countries. This was approved, and arrangements were made not only for a link with them, but for one of DIALOG's staff to conduct a course introducing the Library staff and specifically the staff of the Research Department to its capabilities. A few other librarians were invited to join in the introductory sessions and the advanced course which was being offered in Barbados for the first time.

The challenge for the Librarians of the Bank after the course was to develop an efficient command of the search techniques and to sustain the staff's interest in its usefulness. That they succeeded in providing a knowledge of what was published worldwide, and the usefulness of the service, is indicated by the fact that shortly after its introduction, arrangements were made to use the British Library Lending Division's Document Delivery service from within DIALOG, for the delivery of hard copies of items requested. Items ordered in this way were often received in Barbados within 10 days. The Library had indeed found a quicker source for the supply of current information.

Having introduced this method of information provision, it was also possible for the Library to develop connections with other local and regional online services. Arrangements were made with CANA for the supply of CARICOM Financial News, with Barbados External Telecommunications Online, later Caribbean Online for local information, and Ambionet, the database of regional information, originating in Trinidad. More recent connections with Internet have brought to the researcher a still wider range of information as well as other technological developments like E-mail and file transfer. These have now become an accepted medium for the transfer of information and research between the Bank's regional counterparts and the world. In June 1996 the Library broke new ground when the Bank's website was launched. The technical work was done by a contracted company but the Library is responsible for the design, compilation and upgrading of information. In February 1997 another website was launched for the International Symposium on Forecasting, co-sponsored by the Bank and the International Institute of Forecasters. The Librarians' training in information retrieval and dissemination has made them the natural choice for this task.

2.2 *Greater Depth*

Some of the earliest policy decisions taken were that library materials would be acquired in any format available; that all back issues of valuable research journals would be stored in microfilm or microfiche; and that the conversion to these formats would be progressive as a space-saving measure. For a number of years with duty-free status, the Library was able to pursue the conversion. After that status was lost, the major challenge to continuing this very valuable exercise was the increase in the cost of landing them. The failure to convince customs authorities to recognize microforms as educational, rather than entertainment materials which were to be taxed by the length of the microfilm, was the major obstacle and without this, the cost of landing microfilm often trebled the price of the items ordered. This was never resolved and the exercise had to be discontinued.

2.3 *Better Internal Access*

The wider distribution of computers in the Bank and the development of a local area network made it possible for the Library to improve the internal access to information. Conversion of the Library's manual catalogue started in 1988 using UNESCO'S CDS/ISIS software. But the conversion has been slow because of the lack of cataloguing and data entry staff who could devote time essentially to this. Nevertheless, in 1993 with the first 5,000 items in the database, the catalogue was made available from any desk with a computer via the Bank's local area network. This made it possible for users on the staff of the Bank to search the Library's collection before even coming to the Library and to be more aware of the resources of the Library. The challenge is still to get all the items on the Library in the database with the limited staff available.

Another improvement in internal access has been the distribution of CARICOM Financial News downloaded daily from CANA. At first this was downloaded directly and circulated in hard copy, then with the introduction of a local area network the news was made available online to the staff from the Library. Today the CARICOM Financial News comes directly from CANA into the Bank via Internet E-mail before being sent online to the staff.

Soon after the Bank moved into its new building it became clear that access to Library materials could be improved through a computerized loan system. The program was designed by one of the Programmers in the Bank's Management Information System Department who working in close cooperation with the Librarians, was able to develop a system to monitor all items taken on loan and

to produce overdue notices from the loan information in the database. The system which produced the first computerized loan system in libraries in Barbados has served the Library well. The success of these efforts further challenged the staff of the Library to undertake the computerization of some areas of library management. 'Books on Order' and 'Library Correspondence' were automated using software available to the Library at that time, but the need to find software which could integrate all of the Library's processes was always being pursued.

Until such was found, one of the most time-consuming and challenging procedures in the library - the management of its over 600 serial titles - continued to be a manual process. Selecting software to satisfactorily handle this operation had been a tremendous challenge to librarians in general during the past ten years. In 1996 the search culminated with the decision to integrate a number of areas of library management including serials, with Inmagic DBTextworks. This package will not only automate the management of serials, but will integrate cataloguing and orders databases and facilitate their use by the loans database. The program can also make the automation of these processes simpler since it will permit the scanning of images into the database. Since the software is Windows-based, it can also migrate to a windows platform when this is available in the Bank. Eventually, this software will completely replace CDS/ISIS for library management and the databases created will be accessible throughout the Bank.

2.4 *Expanding Horizons*

The Library today provides published and unpublished information to satisfy the needs of the staff, bona fide researchers in Barbados and an ever increasing number of researchers from throughout the region, and the world.

The Library has also been the watchdog for the recognition of publication standards in the Bank and has been directly involved in the international recognition of the Bank's publications by negotiating International Standard Serial Numbers (ISSN) and supervising International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN) for the Bank's publications. These internationally accepted numbers identify the Bank's publications anywhere in the world.

3. Conclusion

The development of a Library for the Central Bank of Barbados was not a single-handed exercise. It owes a great deal to a number of persons. First of all, to the foresight and unstinting support of Dr. Courtney Blackman - the first Governor of the Bank. His recognition that a good library is the backbone of any

research-oriented organization made it easier for the Library's staff to cope with the challenges met in establishing it.

In content the Library owes a great debt to the then Director of Research (now Deputy Governor) whose willingness to support new ideas and to embrace new technological developments encouraged the small Library staff to constantly look for more efficient ways of doing things. It is also grateful to the staff of the Research Department over the years who were always willing to give their opinions on matters concerning the development of the Library.

As the first Librarian of the Bank, I am indebted to another Bank Librarian - Mrs. Nancy St. John, then Librarian of the Caribbean Development Bank. Mrs. St. John gave valuable support and advice such as "*let all your library acquisitions be direct requests from those using the Library.*" It was sound advice which was readily applied from the outset, so that the Management and the Staff of the Bank, particularly of the Research Department worked with the Librarians to ensure that the collection satisfied their specific needs. This advice, because it encouraged direct involvement in the content of the collection, sustained their interest in its development over the years.

The Bank's Librarians are also indebted to a number of their counterparts in libraries in Barbados, especially those in the libraries with materials at the research level (cited earlier), and to those in the National Library Service who gave access to local research materials. Their excellent cooperation often helped to bridge the gaps in the Library's collection and enabled the Library's staff to live up to the Bank's expectations of them.

The recognition of the Library as one of the foremost financial libraries in the region is largely due to the excellent cooperation of its small but dedicated staff of four persons, always willing to uphold the standards set for information provision in the Bank and to plunge right into any new technology which would help them to maintain this.

Some of the challenges mentioned here have been experienced by many librarians in this region, but it must be recognized that for the Library of the Central Bank of Barbados, the establishment of a library dedicated to research into the economy and banking in Barbados was the breaking of new ground.