Symposium on Technical Information Facilities—Planning and Modification

Introductory Remarks*

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The papers in this Symposium are especially appropriate in 1968 since we seem to be rounding a bend in this area at this time. For one thing, the long talked about concept of more compact storage and use is much closer to reality now that ACS has announced availability of ACS research journals on microfilm. *Chemical Abstracts* has been available on film for more than a year now, with apparently good results. At the same time, the U.S. Patent Office, which has offered patents on microfilm for a number of months, now seems to be working toward more versatile configurations which will permit both faster and more efficient searching. This resurgence of interest in microforms is probably surprising to many; however, more experience and technological improvements may be needed to gain full acceptance of this concept.

It is also significant that the U.S. Patent Office Examiners now have available, at their new quarters in Virginia, private offices of ample size. If we can roughly equate the Literature Chemist with the Patent Examiner, we can see that there is a trend toward more privacy for more effective work in the information field. We may not have as yet fully determined the optimum facility which is at the same time consistent with funds available.

Another factor in facility planning is that of special-purpose areas. In this category, the provision of suitable space for data processing personnel and equipment probably leads the list. We must also consider such needs as for report writing and for conference or special study areas.

On the horizon is work being done by such investigators as those connected with Project INTREX at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This work is still experimental, but if successful, could have a profound impact on the planning and operation of information centers, provided that costs of systems developed are within reach of these centers. Possibly even more significant to the chemical industry are the steps being taken at *CA* toward full mechanization of activities there.

In this group of three papers, there are two which describe well established, mature information centers and one which describes a newly constructed center. In all three cases, the desire of the managers of these centers to look, insofar as possible, toward future needs and changing environments is evident. The papers by Dr. Skolnik at Hercules and Mr. Meckly at Koppers give insight into the success of this kind of forward planning in retrospect. The paper by Messrs. Graham, Lee, and Meyer of Celanese describes the long-range planning and thinking which went into a just completed information center.

Some things, I think, are clear from all of these papers. The better information centers in industry today are comfortable for both user and staff, yet functional and efficient, and they have been planned with a view to the future. If these concepts are successfully applied to specific situations, both laboratory chemists and literature chemists should be far better able to cope with the information retrieval problem both now and in the future. Also, it is hoped that these papers make available to research management useful and current information on factors which need to be considered in the construction or modification of the research laboratories of which information centers are an important part, and which relate to cost and space requirements. Finally, I think there is recognition that a fully adequate and well conceived physical plant is essential to the success of information centers and systems. The acceptance of this by all concerned is a giant step in the right direction.

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