

How Much Information Service*

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The papers published here were presented at the September 6, 1961, ACS Meeting and constitute the symposium on "How Much Information Service?" This symposium followed a 1958 ACS symposium, "Administration of Technical Information Groups."

The last five years have witnessed the rise of a large number of information services, all of them supposedly geared to serve the researcher and the engineer. However, the rapid proliferation of these information services has caused serious thought as to the scope, size, and methods which would be most helpful to the practicing research scientist or engineer.

The papers present widely differing viewpoints regarding information services, all of them aimed at trying to determine how much organized information service should be given, and how much information digging should be left to the professional man as his personal responsibility. The order of the papers flows from a lesser need for information services to a greater need—from basic or exploratory research to detailed project engineering. The publishing industry and the Federal Government also have large stakes in the technical information crisis, and their viewpoints are presented in the final two papers.

The symposium chairman will exercise his prerogative by further introducing this symposium with a few personal observations relative to "How Much Information Service?" One basic principle is that the information service is not an end in itself, but instead is a device by which its users get information to help solve their daily problems. There is no virtue in *any* information service unless people use it actively. We are in an industrial society and will remain so. This industrial society is dependent on active exploitation of information for its forward momentum and continued progress. Today an information service must dedicate itself to the active exploitation of recorded knowledge, and must pay relatively less attention to the acquisition and storage of information than to those parts of the service which will promote the active use of the information.

An information service competes with the individual's own sources of information. The users of information services are adults, most of them trained through colleges

and universities, people who have had considerable experience in acquiring the information they needed to solve daily problems. They possess certain patterns of information acquisition and handling that were begun in early childhood, were reinforced by formal schooling, and were deeply engrained by practical experience. An outgoing, aggressive, use-oriented information service, in effect, asks the individual to change, sometimes in a radical manner, the information acquisition and handling pattern which he has developed for himself over his lifetime. The amount and type of information service will thus obviously depend on the continuously changing relation between the information service and its users.

The type and amount of information service are influenced heavily by the relations between the head of the information service and the managements of other departments of the company and the corporate management. The effectiveness of industrial research organizations will be scrutinized in the future more than ever, and this scrutiny has a dollars-and-cents effect on the information service. Since budgeting costs, staffing, facilities, *etc.*, are the appropriate concern of management, it follows that obtaining the support for information services at the management level is a prime determinant in the successful operation of an information service. Continuing personal consultation is necessary, therefore, between the administrators of an information service and their counterparts in the rest of the organization.

It is important for the management of an information service to look continually for quantitative measures of the effectiveness of the service. If it does not, others in the organization will. The best defense is still a good offense. If, as I believe to be the case, the worthwhileness of an information service depends on the use made of its store of information, the best measures of the effectiveness of the information service will be the usage of information. Simple statistics, such as volumes circulated, abstracts published, reading room attendance, *etc.*, are better than no measures. Even better, however, are specific examples where information developed with the aid or on the initiative of the information service has been responsible for specific research programs or engineering applications. A few good examples of this type are far more effective than many pages of general discussion in justifying an information service.

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