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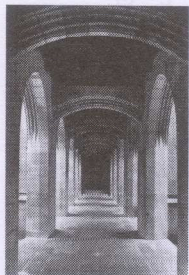
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BUILDING KENTUCKY COLLECTIONS WITH WORLDCAT

BY CAROL L. WATWOOD

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As the world's largest bibliographic database, OCLC's WorldCat has long had a great untapped potential for uses other than cataloging and interlibrary loans. Also known as "the OCLC Online Union Catalog,"

WorldCat contains 57 million bibliographic records from more than 40,000 libraries in 82 countries (Kellar). One of the most exciting developments in database searching has been the transformation of WorldCat, since it began in 1971, from a MARC-based, command-driven format used by specially-trained library employees, into a fluid, flexible storehouse of information open to readers everywhere. In April 2004, WorldCat was moved to a new platform with improvements such as enhanced keyword searching and more accurate ranking of results ("Recent Enhancements"). Eventually, WorldCat is envisioned as being "the centerpiece in a global, Web-based digital network of information resources" (Kellar). This article will focus on just one aspect of WorldCat: its availability and usefulness for collection development, not just for formal or large-scale projects, but also for informal use by individual librarians making day-to-day decisions.

WorldCat is at the fingertips of all Kentucky librarians using the FirstSearch interface through KYVL. WorldCat features three levels of searching: "basic," "advanced," and "expert". KYVL defaults to "basic," but librarians might prefer "advanced" which offers more options such as limiting by format, publication date, or type of publication.

WorldCat's most powerful search feature is the newly enhanced keyword search. Keywords may be searched, truncated, or combined in a way familiar to users of Google or Yahoo. Searching the keyword KENTUCKY, for example, looks for this word in the geographic codes, map data, extended title, notes, subjects, and author keywords. Keyword searching, rather than searching by field, enables the

user to find the item without knowing the exact title, how the author's name was entered, or what subject headings/subheadings were used.

WorldCat's display of results offers many user-friendly features. The default display of "hits" by number of holding libraries focuses the user's attention on widely-held, well-known items. Each record has a visual cue denoting the format—for example, a picture of a book or musical score. Clicking on an individual record in the list displays a detailed record that looks like an OPAC record, but uses a non-MARC format that can adapt to new forms of data. Many records incorporate cover pictures, tables of contents, and OpenURL links. All records have live links to other items with the same title, author, subject descriptors (bound or unbound), publisher, genre, and call number. A click on "Libraries worldwide that own item" will display the participating libraries in Kentucky first. The entire library name, not just the alphabetic code, displays so the user can see at a glance whether a nearby library already owns a title.

WorldCat has many creative uses in collection development. In these days of rising prices, budget cuts, and frequent mergers among publishers, librarians have an increasingly hard time finding what is out there, who publishes it, and what is best to buy. Patrons learn about new titles from sources such as Amazon.com and expect to see them at their local library long before reviews appear. In this environment, FirstSearch's user-friendly search software and the unchaining of the data from the restrictions of the MARC record have combined to make WorldCat much more versatile in searching for new items to acquire. The librarian may obtain advance notice of new editions or important new works, learn about specialized works by obscure publishers, gain information about the

reputation of an unfamiliar author or publisher, make a better determination as to whether a book is appropriate for a particular library, or double-check for key publications that should have already been acquired.

The Library of Congress's prepublication cataloging records are a useful "early alert" to anticipate and budget for key new titles. For example, *West's Encyclopedia of American Law* is an important item on the libraries' reference shelf at Western Kentucky University (WKU). Entering this title and the publication year "2004" pulls up an LC prepublication record alerting the library to the fact that a new edition is imminent and also shows that this set has changed publishers. For reference works that go through many editions, WorldCat shows the past pattern of publication. The librarian might decide to save money and wait a year for a new edition. The notes field also generally indicates whether a new title is a repackaging of previously published material that may be outdated and/or already owned under another title. The lack of multiple holdings or complete physical description for an advertised title suggests that its publication may be delayed.

WorldCat can also identify works that every library ought to own, and serve as a useful check for important items that may have been overlooked. A subject specialist can search by keyword for subjects in his or her area of interest. The list of "hits" will display with the most widely held items first. Very broad subject areas may be limited by type or year of publication. The default display of hits by number of holding libraries is a powerful tool in collection development. The book held by the greatest number of participating libraries displays first, followed by the rest of the books in descending order of holding libraries. Of course popularity does not always equal quality, but the number of holdings is an index reflecting the number of libraries that have considered a book useful enough to acquire and catalog. Peter Jacso has recently described the use of this feature in answering reference questions such as "What is the best book on ..." (55).

WorldCat is quite useful in identifying state-specific material in all subject areas. A WorldCat keyword search effectively locates both fiction and nonfiction books about Kentucky. Kentucky materials may be identified simply by adding "and Kentucky" as a keyword. The immense size and powerful search capabilities of WorldCat enable many

Kentucky publications that might otherwise fall through the cracks, to be found and acquired. If a library collects Kentucky fiction and the searcher wishes to be sure that all the important titles have been acquired. Using WorldCat's "advanced" search the user can search the keyword "Kentucky" limited to the publication type "fiction." The resulting list of hits is ranked by number of holding libraries. The well-known and widely-held titles will appear at the beginning of the list and can be considered for acquisition if they are not already owned.

Often, WorldCat can identify useful titles that may have been missed because they come from unexpected sources. In some subject areas, most materials are produced by a handful of large publishers. Librarians do not have to seek out these materials because they receive advertisements targeted to specific subject audiences. However, useful works by professional associations, university presses, or local, state, or federal government agencies are easily missed. Kentucky has no state depository system and librarians do not automatically receive most Kentucky state documents. Publications of professional organizations are often marketed only to members. Because of the huge size of the WorldCat database, chances are that someone somewhere has cataloged such items and a keyword search will find them.

WKU, for example, maintains a Kentucky law reference collection. Some of these materials are produced by large law publishers such as Lexis and Thomson/West. However, many valuable titles come from less-well-known sources such as Kentucky's Legislative Research Commission and the University of Kentucky's Office of Continuing Legal Education. A keyword search on WorldCat for Kentucky AND (law OR legal) limited to 2004 will locate new or forthcoming materials on this subject regardless of source.

If a title, author, or publisher is unfamiliar, the searcher can click the link to "Libraries worldwide" to see which libraries own the book. Information on the types of libraries that own a book or its earlier editions is useful in determining whether a title is appropriate only for a subject specialist, suitable for an academic library that does not offer an advanced degree in that subject, or useful in a public library.

For example, a public librarian interested in family law in Kentucky might enter "family law Kentucky" in the keyword search box

(WorldCat assumes that these terms are connected by AND) and find the title *Kentucky Family Law* by Petrilli. The list of holding libraries includes law school, general academic, and public libraries. The librarian could correctly determine that this is a scholarly work read by lawyers, but it is also appropriate for other types of libraries because of the widespread interest in this subject among laypeople. On the other hand, *Manual on Recurring Problems in Criminal Trials*, third edition, by Voorhees et al., is not held by any Kentucky public libraries, and is probably inappropriate for a public library, even though the record contains the keyword "Kentucky."

Furthermore, WorldCat can serve as one indicator of a book's quality, as it has been judged by other librarians. An unfamiliar title, especially if it has been out for a while, may be compared with other titles published on the same subject at the same time. A small number of holdings, as compared to similar works, sometimes means that the title has not been widely marketed, the author is not yet well-known, or the subject matter is of specialized appeal. However, especially for nonfiction, a small number of OCLC holdings is often a "red flag" that a book is too expensive, unsubstantial, poorly reviewed, or the work of a questionable author or publisher. For a scholarly work, the lack of acquisition of a title by any prestigious academic library could be a warning sign. A better title may often be

found by clicking on the subject headings in a bibliographic record. These subject headings are links to other WorldCat records that have been cataloged with the same heading.

WorldCat also includes bonus features not expected in traditional cataloging records. A color picture of the cover appears for many recent works. A link to a detailed table of contents is often found. If the publication is available on the Web, a live link will generally be found. Many government publications are available free on the Web, and ordering the print version may be unnecessary.

WorldCat is, as has recently been asserted, "not your mother's union catalog" (Tennant 28). In its earlier incarnations, the OCLC database was not for the casual user when required detailed written instructions as to search keys (3,2,2,1 for a title) and other intricacies of its use were necessary. WorldCat is now easily used by anyone familiar with search engines such as Google. OCLC is testing access to WorldCat through Google and through non-library Web sites ("Alliances and Deals," 12) so it may be even more readily available in the future. WorldCat contains a wealth of useful information and can be a valuable tool to build and tailor collections for the special needs of Kentucky readers.

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