

AN ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTH CAROLINA ONLINE USERS GROUP

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Introduction

A study of the development of the North Carolina Online Users Group (NCOLUG) was conducted to determine the primary reasons why the group was formed separate of the already existing library-oriented organizations. Members were asked to give their reasons for joining and to state how their needs were being met by holding membership in NCOLUG. One hundred sixteen questionnaires were sent to NCOLUG members, of which eighty-two (82 percent) were returned with usable data.

Questionnaires were also sent to three organization presidents. The presidents were asked to explain what their groups were doing to keep abreast of the current trends in users services.

It was hypothesized that NCOLUG was formed to meet the specific needs of online users, needs that were not being addressed in the other organizations.

Results

The analysis of the data revealed that the hypothesis was supported. The two major reasons given for the formation of NCOLUG were that the members could focus on the more specific needs of the online users and that the other organizations did not respond to their needs in general. Of the seventy-one responses to the question on the group's formation, forty-seven (66 percent) were the former reason and eleven (15 percent), were the latter. See also Table 1.

The reasons given as to how the members' needs were being met were basically in agreement with those given for joining.

General awareness and continuing education were the most frequently checked reasons for joining NCOLUG. Some members checked all of the proposed reasons. The other reasons were: (1) Get together with people of like interests for exchange of ideas (3rd); (2) Improved relations with vendors (5th); and (3) Aid in developing better search strategies (4th).

The responses of the presidents of the three organizations were compared to the reasons given by the NCOLUG members as to why the group was not formed as a part of an already existing organization. One president said that the members of that organization were made aware of NCOLUG meetings. Another president stressed the point that different levels of involvement promoted the formation of different groups. The three presidents' responses indicated that they felt that the formation of NCOLUG was necessary and that cooperation between all library-oriented groups was necessary to enhance the effectiveness of the information flow process.

The author concludes that based on the data reviewed, the formation of the online users group was necessary in order to adequately address the specifics of information storage and retrieval. The author feels that the other professional organizations could better address the general needs of librarians. The use of book indices and other manually used reference materials did not promote the need of a "users group" in the institutions and

businesses in the Research Triangle area as was the case in other parts of the United States. The automation of reference materials and the increase in computer-based activities in the area have fostered the need for an online users group.

North Carolina Online Users Group membership will probably increase as people become more involved in online searching. This group can be classed as one of the specialized professional organizations devoted to the promotion and continuation of the information flow process; a process that is vital to all librarians regardless of their level of involvement or expertise. If the objectives of this group are achieved consistently, then NCOLUG will remain viable and continue to function in the Research Triangle area.

**This article represents the results of a research project conducted at North Carolina Central University School of Library Science by the author, April 1979. A complete copy of the report is on file in the North Carolina Central University School of Library Science Library.*

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