

MALMARC Project

We decided to join MALMARC (Malaysian Machine Readable Catalogue). MALMARC is a kind of cataloguing cooperative. In fact MALMARC in the Universiti Sains (USM) in Penang under their Librarian, Mr Lim Huck Tee, who happened to be a close friend of mine. Lim Huck Tee, LHT. They always, at that time, say in the north there is one Lim Huck Tee, LHT, and in the south (in Singapore) you also have a LHT. The two LHTs.

We are rather close friends and he started this MALMARC project to serve all the university libraries and their National Library in Malaysia. All these libraries are their members. By taking in NTI Library, they have a member coming from outside of the country. Theirs essentially is the national system. By taking in NTI Library, they became international.

I did not ask them but I guess they were very happy to have us because we helped them to improve their image. All of a sudden, from national they turn international. They were very happy to have us. They were very happy to have us as a member and we were very happy to have them, to join them because we did not have access to computer at that time, at the beginning of NTI. We did not even have a computer and we had finally a computer which was not big enough.

We had to wait but when we joined MALMARC, MALMARC provided the computer and we joined them as a participating member. When we joined them we have our catalogue database in the MALMARC computer. They keep our database in their computer. We are very happy at that time because we did not have access to any computer facilities. They are happy to have us because they turned international. So we are in a very happy relationship with MALMARC.

We were with them for 2 years. They update our catalogue with our database in their computer. They produced microfiche catalogue and updated every month and sent to us. We were having this microfiche catalogue for about a year before we take back our entire catalogue database from MALMARC and they sent it to us via computer tape. At that time we had enough computer facilities in NTI.

In the sense we are very lucky to have MALMARC at that time when we did not have access to any computer facilities. When we are ready, MALMARC send back the whole catalogue database to us, for us to use on our own computer facilities.

At that time we reported that we received their tapes and we ran it on our own computers and we took 15 hours of computer time to complete the whole thing. After the 15 hours our whole system went "live".

Went "live" means the whole system from acquisition of books, creating catalogue database and serving reader services. All these activities can be started just like that with the help of the computer.

So when we reported that we took 15 hours of computer time to do the work, there was quite a stir within this MALMARC participating libraries because when they took back their computer catalogue database they had to wait for a month to do barcode linking. That is to

link the catalogue data with the loan data. You need the barcode linking. All of them have to take 1 month or more if their collection is big.

So it caused quite a stir because we said we took only 15 hours and this 15 hours became very famous at that time. The National Librarian of Malaysia, Mr Wijasuriya, came to see me personally. He said "how come all other libraries they have to take more than a month to work before their system can go "live" and your library takes only 15 hours. How come you can do that? "

I said we when we catalogue a book we already done the barcode linking part for every book. We linked the barcode to the book catalogue and therefore it can be used for the loan services.

We do barcode linking at the point of cataloguing. Once cataloguing is done, barcode linking is done and it can be used for reader services whereas the other libraries they have not done this. They have to do the barcode linking and it depends on their collection if their collection is big they need more than a month before the system can go "live". So Wijasuriya laughed and told me, "Wah you are very clever!" So we laugh.

And that is the thing at that time. If we did not do barcode linking at the point of cataloguing and if we did the same thing as the other libraries in Malaysia, we could have lost a lot of staff time. I think with our size of collection at that moment, we save tremendous amount of staff time in terms of money we might have save millions of dollars in terms of staff time. That is something I think we have achieved for NTI Library by a stroke of the pen. A decision at the right time, and our system became different from other library systems. We are very happy that we achieved this and we save the University millions of dollars.