

They can get you answers—quick!

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HUNTINGTON BEACH—When the man came to the research desk at Huntington Central Library, he needed information and he needed it quickly.

His wife, he told the reference librarian, had been diagnosed as having a rare form of cancer. It was important, he said, that he locate as many of the latest articles on the disease as possible in order to give the information to his wife's physicians.

In the past, said Donna Harris, senior reference librarian, the concerned patron would have been directed to Reader's Guide and other in-print reference materials. If he were fortunate, he may have located three to five articles of the type he needed.

Instead, he walked out of the library a short while later with a list of 50 recent articles written about his wife's disease.

The difference, Ms. Harris said, is a computer terminal recently acquired by Huntington Central Library, Talbert and Golden West streets, which gives the library's reference department access to hundreds of informational sources not previously available in the reference department.

"We're hoping to see the terminal used on a daily basis," Ms. Harris said. "We would like to see it used all the time as a regular tool."

Ms. Harris, as well as reference librarian Mary Ann Hutton, have been specially trained to use the Hewlett Packard terminal, with which they can do data base searches through DIALOG, BRS (Bibliographic Retrieval Service) and The Source.

DIALOG and BRS, the librarian said,

have access to more than 150 data bases each "and some of this information is available through no other avenue than the data base searching."

For instance, although there is an in-print version of the \$1-million Directory," the library's computer terminal can tap into information updated on a daily basis, Ms. Harris said.

A Med-Line, the librarian noted, contains articles and papers from medical journals, conferences, etc. Using News Search, the librarian added, a patron has access to at least 2,000 daily newspapers and the articles they contain.

"And through ERIC (Educational Research and Information Clearing House), we have access to educational research and information from Ph.D. theses, research data, articles, etc.," Ms. Harris said.

Having a reference librarian digging-up information using the terminal, Ms. Harris said, is not suggested for those who need only one or two articles on a common subject. That's because one pays for time used on the terminal and if using the terminal isn't necessary, it seems foolish to pay even a nominal fee.

However, for persons wanting the most extensive, complete, up-to-date information; those who need information quickly; or those researching obscure subjects, the library's terminal can be the perfect answer.

So far, Ms. Harris said, Huntington Central has been able to assist students, writers, businessmen, etc.

"For instance, we had a person from Pepperdine College wanting to research quality circles.

Huntington Beach Lib.

"And we did research for a woman writer who had been given a rather large budget by a national cosmetology magazine to write an article about the use of drugs by hairdressers," Ms. Harris said. "Our research revealed that her article would be the first done on the subject."

Another patron, Ms. Harris said, wanted to find articles on label fraud in designer clothing. Still another needed as much information as possible on cross-flow turbines. And one enthusiastic gentleman may be coming in monthly to review terminal-supplied data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"We can also search daily stock market information," Ms. Harris said. "And through The Source, we can give a patron a wine menu, airline schedules, allow them to make reservations, consult the day's astrological reading, and get a UPI update on what was said in the world this morning."

In most cases, Ms. Harris said, information on individual subjects can be obtained in a matter of a few minutes.

However, no search is done without first giving the patron an estimate of the cost (the library pays a fee to the three data base information vendors it receives information from). And if it appears that the search will take longer than estimated, the patron is called for approval before a search continues, the librarian said.

"We want this terminal to be one of the resources people think of when they're having a hard time locating information," Ms. Harris said. "We're the only ones offering this as a public service at the present time, so we'd like as many people as possible to know about it."