



# LIBRARY AUTOMATION

By Brian Watson

Let's take a look at some questions that church librarians have been asking regarding the options available with library automation.

### **CAN I START SIMPLE, OR DO I HAVE TO BAR CODE EVERY-**

### **THING AND HAVE COMPUTERS AVAILABLE FOR SEARCHING?**

When librarians think of automation, it is easy to think of bar codes and search stations. The reality is that you don't have to start with all of that if you don't want to (or don't have the time to).

### **MY PATRONS HAVE USED THE CARD CATALOG FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS. NOW WHAT?**

Instead of making a drastic change from the card catalog to computer-based searching, why not ease the transition? Most people do not like change, especially

**Flexible software will be able to help you out wherever you are in the automation process, regardless of the level of automation you want to achieve.**

to those things that have been consistent for a number of years. No one says you have to even get rid of your card catalog.

The card catalog may be best for your audience, or you may desire to transition to other ways of finding information in your library. You don't have to spend too much time on a typewriter (or even using copy and paste in your word processor) to realize that it sure would be nice to enter the information once, press a button, and print as many cards as necessary for your newly acquired items.

As you are entering new items and generating cards, you are also building your database. All of the information you enter is being accumulated for you so that, if you wish, someday you could transition to a fully online searching system.

### **IF I DON'T SET UP SEARCH COMPUTERS, HOW WILL PATRONS FIND OUT ABOUT MY RESOURCES?**

Over the years, a number of customers have told me how printed listings suit their audience very well. They tell me that they keep a listing by title, author, category and subject in a binder. Yes, from time to time, they have to reprint their listing, but people can easily look and find what they are looking for. No knowledge of how to use a card catalog, no need for extra computers.

### **I AM ASSUMING I HAVE TO ENTER ALL OF THE RESOURCES BEFORE IT WILL BE OF ANY USE. IS THAT TRUE?**

This scenario is nice, but, depending on how you enter your items, it can be a long process. It is possible to only enter new items as you acquire them or enter items as they are checked out. More on that later. The computer and the software that

you use are intended to be a tool to help you with your responsibilities.

### **WE CAN ONLY AFFORD ONE COMPUTER. WILL PEOPLE BE ABLE TO TAMPER WITH THE INFORMATION I HAVE ENTERED?**

Password security can prevent people from tampering with your hard work. If the patron search module is separate from the maintenance module, patrons can search your collection without ever coming close to the ability to change your entered information. Previously, I also mentioned the value of printed listings, which is a great way to present your collection without the need for computer-based searching.

### **I WANT TO GENERATE OVERDUE NOTICES IN THE SIMPLEST WAY POSSIBLE. CAN IT BE DONE?**

Try this – when you sit down, sometime after church, with the collection of sign-out cards from the newly checked-out items, add the basic information for that item (title, author) before checking it out using your software. Should that item go overdue, you have enough basic information to generate an overdue notice to give or e-mail to the patron.

When the item is checked in, you may want to add some other important information while you have the physical item in your hand. Adding the ISBN at this time would definitely be helpful for a lookup by ISBN either then or at a later time.

As more items are circulated, you continue to accumulate your database. Right away, your software has helped you generate overdue notices while building your collection, a few items at a time.

### **IF I AM READY TO BAR CODE, ARE THERE ANY OTHER BENEFITS BESIDES QUICKER CIRCULATION PROCESSING?**

Quicker circulation processing is the first benefit of bar coding your library. If your items are bar coded, it is also much easier to perform your year-end inventory to determine items not checked out that have now gone missing. If you do inventory on an annual basis, this time saving alone can make bar coding worthwhile.

### **IF MY ITEMS ARE BAR CODED, DOES EVERY CHILD HAVE TO HAVE A BAR-CODED CARD WITH THEM TO BE ABLE TO CHECK OUT ITEMS?**

What are the chances of the children who borrow your videos having a bar-coded card with them when they want to check out items on a Sunday morning? Pretty slim. Even though your items might be bar coded, most check-out screens will allow you to enter the first few letters of the patron's last name to choose them for item check out.

I hope these examples have given you an idea of the many ways that library software can help you manage the ministry for which you are responsible. Flexible software will be able to help you out wherever you are in the automation process, regardless of the level of automation you want to achieve. **RPN**

**Brian Watson** is the president of Jaywil Software Dev. Inc., the developers of ResourceMate library software, [www.resourcemate.com](http://www.resourcemate.com). They have been serving churches around the world since 1993.