Summary Report

BACKGROUND

On January 31, 2000 the National Library of Canada (NLC) hosted an invitational consultation meeting with Canadian publishers of online publications and representatives from Canadian publishers' associations. The purpose of the consultation was to identify and address issues with respect to acquisition, preservation and provision of access to online publications by the National Library. A strong multi-stakeholder group representing many sectors of the publishing industry were in attendance at the consultation.

EXPECTATIONS

The participants' expectations of the session were to:

♦ identify the respective roles and expectations of the publishing community and the National Library;

♦ ensure a recognition of the commercial imperative and an appropriate balance of access between publishers, librarians and readers;

♦ focus key issues around standards of format, deliverables and definition of publication, to maintain accessibility and to facilitate transfer;

♦ clarify the implications of legal deposit as they apply to electronic publications;

♦ discuss the policy implications associated with lending rights, licensing agreements, and access;

♦ explore and understand the readiness of the National Library; and,

♦ develop a "next step" plan to move forward.

CONTEXT

In order to help set the context, Alan MacDonald, Senior Advisor to the Director of Information Resources, University of Calgary provided an overview of online publishing in Canada - current state, and expected future state. A copy of his presentation and all other presentations made at the session are appended to this report.

ACQUISITION

Participants were asked to de-couple the acquisition and access discussion and to restrict the focus of their discussion in the first instance on the pros and cons of online publication acquisition. The need for leadership in this area surfaced as a key issue, and one group suggested that the most logical organization to take that lead is the National Library. An archive of publications is seen as valuable, and the National Library is the ongoing legislated institution to perform this function.

The key concerns which emerged, revolved around the issue of selection. Sheer volume drives the need to be selective, but who should select, and what should guide the selection will require further thought and guidance from the broader community. It was also suggested that the National Library should investigate the mechanism of Legal Deposit to include electronic publishing, or at a minimum, some form of registration of the publication. Finally, given the fact that the work is too large in scope for any one institution to handle, the concept of "NLC franchise" was advanced to help share the task. The proposed scenario would see the National Library playing a role of accreditation, monitoring and standard setting.

ACCESS

Greater diffusion and distribution of publications were seen as key "access" benefits. In addition, the potential for single window access was seen as an advantage from a public perspective. It was clear from all groups that the benefits must accrue to all parties, and must not result in an erosion of the publishers' share of market/revenue stream. Questions were raised with regard to whether or not provision of access goes beyond the mandate of the National Library and, whether the National Library is setting itself up as a competitor to commercial interests. Public policy issues related to licencing and the Copyright Act and, the increasing need for intervention and for an intermediary were also raised.

Several suggestions/recommendations were advanced by the discussion groups:

♦ with regard to dissemination, the "a la carte" strategy is described as one where the publishers deposit their documents to an automated database system, then make their own access decisions. In this case, the publishers would be responsible for their document descriptions, whether the public will have access via web, on-site only or not at all, date when the document will be made freely available, etc.

♦ creation of a database of publications registered with the National Library which would include description of the publication and access status.

♦ as there is an increasing need for interventions and for an intermediary, it was suggested that libraries can manage the flow. Packaging and branding will be very important, and the NLC could be the main intermediary on the part of others.

♦ finally, a "bare bones" alternative was suggested where the National Library could act as the portal or the link to the publishers' sites.

STANDARDS

Standards are seen as desirable to help streamline pre-production and pre-publishing work, to provide greater accessibility and to increase ease of transferability. However, one of the core issues which emerged with regard to standards is that these will continue to emerge. Continually evolving technology raises many issues and questions including, a need for flexibility, backward compatibility, the viability of encryption for literature, legal protection against abuse, and just what, if any role the government or more precisely, the National Library should play. It was also noted that the current centralized numbering system is quickly running out of numbers.

On the question of government role, there were some strongly divided opinions with at least two camps emerging. Some felt that there is a need for government intervention to facilitate training, and that the publishing industry needs a champion. Industry Canada and HRDC were seen as sources of funding to support both the development of standards and for the provision of training to meet the standards set. Another camp felt that this is an industry concern, and that industry should work out its own solutions. The essence of the problem is not how to cope with broken links, but rather, lets not have broken links in the first place. In the view of some, this requires organizational commitment, not government intervention.

Participants suggested that the government should:

♦ focus on urging Industry Canada and Canadian Heritage to implement the WIPO treaties to provide legal protection and to impose sanctions against violators of copyright protection systems;

♦ develop a menu or compilation of standards that the National Library can accommodate successfully;

♦ develop a reliable centralized numbering and registration system;

♦ establish a basic standard metadata capture; and,

♦ identify best practices and most common tools used by publishers.

PRESERVATION

Storage for posterity, streamlining of publishers' sites of prior versions of texts and backup/redundancy of information were all seen as benefits that the National Library could provide through preservation activities. Long-term preservation is seen as a government role as business/industry has a short-term vision by necessity. Preservation is seen as an archival and cultural issue which is best dealt with by government.

Complexity of formats and software emerged as key concerns along with the costs associated with the infrastructure and resources required to maintain such a system. Works without material form present a particular challenge. Long term viability of media formats and the preservation of original formats dictate that the National Library will require extensive format capabilities.

Selection issues were raised once again as well as the link between preservation and access i.e. if something is preserved, how accessible is it and how accessible do we want it to be?

Potential solutions proposed included:

♦ capturing publications at regularly timed intervals for preservation purposes;

♦ capturing the information in an un-encrypted format for ease of future access;

♦ providing access only after the publication is no longer available on the publisher's site (when there is no longer a commercial value);

♦ converting digital to paper to microform for deposit purposes;

♦ providing economic incentives to preserve;

♦ having the National Library time/date stamp publications - acting as a "trusted third party" for purposes of registering copyright;

♦ using the franchise concept

♦ raising awareness of the complexity of issues and the need for preservation.

NEXT STEPS

Moving forward, the proposed immediate next steps are:

1. Prepare a report from this session and circulate for further comment.

2. Structure an advisory committee (with sub-groups to work on specific themes) to move the recommendations forward.

3. Establish a closed listserv to continue the discussions started here.