HOW MUCH DOES A $150.00 CDROM COST?

Pearl Berger

Description: Librarians must contend with a host of policy and technical issues in order to provide library patrons with access to electronic resources. Judaic e-resources present additional complexities resulting from language/script and conditions under which databases are produced. This brief introduction will identify the issue and set the stage for the panel presentations.

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How much does a $150.00 CDROM cost? The two-word answer to this question is "It depends." Librarians know that purchasing an item for the collection is only a part of the process and of the cost. This is true in the paper environment where selection, acquisition, cataloging, processing, binding and preservation are all factors that must be taken into account. In the electronic environment we face a host of additional considerations, some rather complex, that affect our ability to bring an item to the library patron and consequently inflate its cost. A case in point, experienced at Yeshiva University this year is the upgraded version of the Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language, the $150 purchase I referred to earlier. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, we did not track the staff hours invested in making the CD work. Suffice it to say that $150.00 represents just a small fraction of the total investment. It was that experience, exemplifying an ongoing problem that inspired the idea for this session.

At last year's conference Heidi Lerner presented an excellent paper about a workshop developed at Stanford to familiarize library staff and patrons with bibliographic databases and electronic resources for research in Jewish Studies. The paper is available in the *Proceedings* posted on the AJL web page. This year's program includes sessions on electronic resources as well. Those presentations deal with content. The focus of today's session is different, not bibliographic. Here we are interested in the process of bringing the electronic resource to the user. What then are the issues? The following are some that come to mind:

- System requirements versus the PCs on hand – moving forward or moving backward and are they telling us the truth?
- Proper display of scripts
- Networking of CD-ROMs versus stand alone or single user workstations
- Multiple resources on one PC and compatibility problems
- Circulating CD-ROMs for outside use and/or installation of the software on library PCs
- Upgrades
- The hasp/dongle/plug or as I consider it the "headache."
- Security
- Non-commercial, low budget database producers who provide important content but cannot keep up with fast moving technology
- Whether or not to include word processing software on PCs along with research resources

- Remote access

The presentations at this session will provide some answers or approaches to dealing with several of these issues. Where satisfactory answers are lacking we will at least have established a forum for discussion and we can share the *hatsi nehamah* of *tsarat rabim* (partial comfort of a shared problem.)

In order to make most efficient use of time I will introduce all three speakers now and they will offer their presentations in sequence without interruption for introductions. We will save all questions for the end of the session.