

Reprint Exchange. II. *Project REX* is ISI®'s
Code Name for Contemplated
Reprint Expediting Service

September 20, 1972

Recently I referred to the reprint exchange problem "ordinaire".¹ Now I propose what some may consider a solution "extraordinaire." But before ISI embarks on such an ambitious scheme, we want to hear from interested readers in order to confirm that there is a significant grass-roots sentiment to back up the letters and calls we have received until now. You are cordially invited to write or call to express your interest.

As a conservative estimate, the international reprint exchange system costs about \$10 million a year. Though its importance to scientists for communications, education, and public relations shouldn't be denigrated, the present reprint exchange system must be judged extremely wasteful or inefficient. Recognizing this, one of my respected colleagues at NIH proposed several years ago an impractical scheme for storing reprints in a huge central warehouse.² There is no need to belabor why I felt his proposal was impractical.³ If one could obtain the massive cooperation from authors he required, then it would still be cheaper to use modern reprographic methods rather than reprints! Even now, the cost of tear sheets from ISI's *OATS*® service compares quite favorably with the true cost of reprint exchange.

ISI's plan for a Reprint Expedit-

ing Service, hereinafter referred to as *Project REX*, was originally formulated over five years ago. At that time, however, analyses showed that the costs involved made it impractical. However, the significant change in postal rates, increased use of *CC*®, and continued growth of the literature has made the concept realizable. It remains to be seen whether scientists are prepared to adopt such a scheme.

As information engineers, we at ISI are very conscious of the role *CC* plays as part of a larger system. Thus, when we designed our *Request-A-Print*® card, it was done less out of direct profit motive and more from the view of developing more reader satisfaction with the total system involved. Using this card, the requester makes in one typing operation (1) the reprint request card itself, (2) a record of the request both for himself and the person addressed, and (3) a mailing label for use by the author. But *Request-A-Print* does not eliminate several key cost-factors, including out-of-pocket expenditures for the cards and postage—as well as labor.

Project REX would work as follows. In each issue of *CC* a detachable card or order sheet would be included. All you would do is provide your name and address and circle the appropriate code numbers

indicating the reprints you wish to receive. You would send this card or sheet to *Project REX* at ISI headquarters. Depending upon the volume of cards received, each day or each week ISI would enter all this information into its data bank and extract the appropriate author addresses and citations. We would prepare an omnibus letter to each author enclosing addressed labels. All the author would have to do then is attach these to an envelope containing the reprint.

It seems incredible that the system can be so briefly described, but the source of its beauty is in its simplicity.

A serious problem is that of payment and control. As in our *ASCA*[®] system there is a minimum threshold of cost involved even if you use the system once each year. Thus, I would expect that for an annual fee each reader would be entitled to a minimum of 500 to 1000 requests. After all, if you only order one reprint per week, you really don't have much of a problem! Besides, one order form could handle requests for several people at the same department. We know that ordinarily each CC is shared by half-dozen or more readers.

Using computer methods makes it simple to maintain appropriate statistics. Once you had exceeded the threshold, you would be billed

for an additional increment of cost. The key to the success of such a venture is in the unit cost to you as compared to your present system. It also depends upon operating the system with an incredibly low error rate. And finally, it depends upon the cooperation of authors. After all, authors just may not like the impersonality of receiving a list of unsigned labels instead of a steady stream of mail.

Based on the same methodology already employed in our *ASCA* system, we could embellish the system by automatically requesting for you reprints of all new articles by Professor X, or reprints of articles which cite your own work. More generically, we would request reprints for everything published from the XYZ Laboratories, or reprints for articles on cystic omphalosis, or any other subject you care to specify. The possibilities are enormously intriguing and make good economic sense, if your administrators are in a mood to be sensible. By combining *ASCA* with *REX* you could eliminate a significant time-lag.

If the concept of *Project REX* interests you, I want to hear from you. Please write to me *now* at:

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1. Garfield, E. Reprint exchange. I. The multi-million dollar problem "ordinaire". *Current Contents* No. 36, September 6, 1972, p. 5-6.
2. Schneider, J. H. Reprint clearinghouse. *Science* 165:126, 1969.
3. Garfield, E. Private communication to J. H. Schneider. September 19, 1969.