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Joyce Manna Janto

*University of Richmond*, [jjanto@richmond.edu](mailto:jjanto@richmond.edu)

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# The Automation of Serials Control with SC350

Joyce Manna Janto

**ABSTRACT.** There are many automated serials control systems on the market today. SC350 is OCLC's entry. SC350 is an efficient and cost-effective way to handle serials in any type of library. The system is divided into modules, such as prediction, check-in, claiming, routing, etc. Each module is clearly defined and easy to master. No system is flawless, however, and this includes SC350. Problems exist with the manual, but these are manageable. OCLC has shown a willingness to work with users in enhancing and correcting the SC350 software. Overall, the advantages in using SC350 for serials control far outnumber the disadvantages.

## *INTRODUCTION*

The automation of serials control at the University of Richmond Law Library began in the spring of 1985. At that time, the director requested that I investigate microbased automated serial control systems and draft a report for her. After completing an extensive literature search and talking to several vendors, it was decided to examine three systems in the report: Inmagic, Innovacq and SC350. These systems were selected for various reasons: Inmagic, because it had been used successfully in a library comparable to ours; Innovacq, because it was already in use in several law libraries; and SC350, because OCLC had previously developed some well regarded automated systems.

The administration of both the law School and the University

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Joyce Manna Janto, MLS, is Acquisitions Librarian, University of Richmond, Law School Library, Richmond, VA 23173.

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85

approved the findings of this report, and a budget proposal was submitted in the fall of 1985 for the 1986/87 fiscal year.

SC350 was selected as the system to be recommended in the budget proposal. There were four reasons for this: first, SC350 possessed a greater capacity for database expansion than Inmagic; second, SC350 could be installed for a quarter of the cost of installing Innovacq; third, OCLC is a stable company with a good reputation for supporting the systems it develops; and fourth, the budget request was being made in cooperation with the University of Richmond undergraduate library, which expressed a preference for SC350.

### PROLOGUE

After the excitement generated by the anticipation of the arrival of SC350 wore off, the Law Library began to experience the problems inherent in any automation project. The first of these developed when we were asked to fill out a profile. This was a two-part problem. The first concerned the manual and the other the network personnel. The SC350 manual was and is written, as are most software manuals, by people familiar with the system for people familiar with the system. Our biggest complaint was that the manual lacks a glossary. We were told to develop caption codes. We did not have the faintest idea what a caption code was, and neither did the Solinet representative whom we called. OCLC eventually informed us that a caption code is the shorthand for what one actually calls material, such as "pp" for pocketpart and "llsp" for looseleaf supplement. It was also learned from OCLC that the manual was wrong in some areas, as it had not been fully revised to reflect changes made since the new software had been installed at the test sites. It is hard to have confidence in such a manual.

The second part of the problem was the artificial pressure put on the law Library by our network representative to finish and forward our profile. We were not informed what the profile was for and why it was needed. Nor could she adequately explain what the terms used in the profile meant. Fortunately, an OCLC representative who was demonstrating SC350 at the American Association of Law Libraries convention was able to inform us about the profile and its purpose and to answer many of the other questions we had about it.

The profile is a written list of user designed limits for the SC350 system. The purpose of the profile is to require the user to make decisions about what is wanted from the system. It is important that decisions about things such as what MARC tags, shelving locations, terminology, etc., are made before the training session, as these decisions are entered into the parameter maintenance module during installation. The more information decided on beforehand, the faster the parameter maintenance process is finished. This is a tedious and time-consuming matter, but until one establishes the parameters of the system, one cannot begin to use SC350. The decisions made should, incidentally, involve people outside of the serials department, as these can have an impact on all other departments in the library.

The placement of equipment is something else one has to think about. The chaining cable, which connects the SC350 terminal to the terminal used for cataloging, is fifty feet long. This sounds like more than enough cable until one realizes that this means fifty feet as measured up the wall, across the ceiling and then back down the wall. As an additional chaining cable and interface connectors cost \$895, it was decided that this was an ideal opportunity to rearrange the Law Library's technical service area.

### **TRAINING**

The training received from OCLC was excellent. Our only complaint about training was that little of it occurred in the Law Library itself. Normally, OCLC spends two days at a library in providing SC350 training. In our case, two days were spent at the undergraduate library (sessions which we also attended), and then one day at the Law Library. More time to ask questions specific to our library would have been helpful.

A caveat about training. We were told ahead of time to have available as examples records that represented varying degrees of check-in difficulty: one hard example, one medium, and one easy. Do not do this. Choosing three difficult examples would have been preferable, as after the training it is easy to figure out how to set up records for the less difficult cases. Moreover, there is point in having an expert available when one is attempting to deal with the difficult cases.

## PARAMETER MAINTENANCE

Parameter maintenance refers to the basic information one needs to enter into the system to define the operation of the system. It is here that the information collected and decided on for the profile goes into the system. One enters which MARC tags will be retained in the records and how these tags will be indexed. One also identifies at this point the various locations in the library where material is housed. We identified over fifty such locations in the library and the law school building.

It is critical that as many of these items as possible are entered before one begins to build the database. If MARC tag needs are discovered at a later time, the only way to add them to the existing records is to download from OCLC for a second time every record in the database. The Law Library retained eighty-eight MARC tags. It may never be necessary to use all of these; but if they are needed, they are available. Indexing all of the tags is not quite so critical. It is possible, and not at all difficult, to re-index the entire database. On the other hand, if one does not enter all of the library locations at one time, time will be wasted shifting from the copy record module to the parameter maintenance module when a missing library location is identified.

Parameter maintenance is the procedure by which the caption codes are defined for the system. The best thing about caption codes is that they are limited for four characters. This forces careful consideration of what one calls all those things that arrive in the mail. The limitation makes one decide, for instance, if it is necessary to distinguish supplements by format, such as pamphlet, looseleaf or pocket-part. Should the item be called a "pamp," "llsp," "pp" or just "supp"? Does it matter for statistical purposes in the library?

The worst things about caption codes is that the system distinguishes between small and capital letters and punctuated and unpunctuated items (e.g., "P.P." is different from either "PP" or "pp"). One must be aware that there is no list of codes in the module in which they are used, or otherwise there is difficulty. The Law Library received many "invalid code" messages before it went back and capitalized all codes and eliminated periods.

## SYSTEM CONVERSION

The Law Library's training took place at the end of July, 1986, and our first optimistic estimate was that total conversion to the automated system would take place by Christmas, 1986. In reality, the conversion took fifty weeks. The reasons it stretched from an anticipated four months to an actual twelve are many. A week after training was completed, the system's hard disk drive died (a traumatic experience) and it took two weeks to have this replaced. And blocks of time were lost here and there as glitches developed in the system. When these occurred, it was necessary, of course, to wait until either we or OCLC figured out how to correct them before we felt comfortable about proceeding further.

The first major problem that slowed conversion, however, was that we were unable to hire additional full-time personnel to assist with the project. We did receive two ten-hour-a-week student assistants, but one left halfway through the project. As a result of these limitations, our serials specialist was able to average only fifteen to twenty hours a week on the conversion project.

A second major problem was that in estimating how quickly we might be able to convert records, we had relied too heavily on reports from the test libraries. The June, 1986, *OCLC Newsletter* reported that the test libraries could download from OCLC to SC350 and completely set up an average of twenty records an hour. The most conservative estimate given was eight records an hour. Based on these figures, the Law Library estimated that, with approximately 2100 records in its Kardex, anywhere from two to five months were needed to convert from the Kardex to the SC350.

What had been forgotten was that law libraries define serials differently from the way other libraries do. In our library, anything that receives a supplement is considered a serial; and in this field, even monographs are serially supplemented. The test libraries, apparently, were transferring standard serials. Had we converted just standard serial titles, the job would have been finished in record time. It took only three days, for example, working about four hours each day, to completely convert our journal holdings, roughly 510 titles in all, to SC350.

## DOWNLOADING RECORDS

This is the process by which an item's cataloging record is located on OCLC and transferred to the SC350 database. When a record is found on OCLC, it is placed in an SC350 save file. When SC350 is entered, a function key is pressed and the records are "dumped" from the save file. A second function key is then pressed, and the records are inserted into the SC350 database.

Our first snag was encountered in downloading records during our training session. We attempted to transfer the record for *Hearsay Handbook*, a monograph. The instructor explained that SC350 would accept only serial records, and asked why in the world we would want to transfer a monographic record. We explained that forty percent of our collection consisted of monographs that were supplemented serially. The concept of the serially supplemented monograph had not occurred to OCLC. What was needed, then, was that the fixed field of every monographic record we wanted to transfer had to be converted to a serial fixed field. To OCLC's credit, within a week of our training, we were sent instructions on how to program four of our function keys to change a monographic fixed field automatically into a serial field.

We quickly discovered that the easiest way to locate records in the sea of similar titles and duplicate records on OCLC is to search by some identifying number, such as the ISSN, ISBN or LC card number. A routine was developed of checking each Kardex card against the self-list, *Legal Looseleaves in Print*, the *Standard Periodical Directory*, and other sources to discover these numbers. In deciding between duplicate records, those with DLC cataloging were accepted first, and then Conser records were chosen. Other libraries' records were accepted when these were the only ones available.

## PREDICTION RECORDS

Prediction records tell the issue check-in module and the claims module how many pieces of an item to expect in a given period of time. These records take their cue for regularity and frequency from the OCLC fixed fields. It was found that some items defied their fixed field characterizations in the reality of SC350. The *Code of*

*Federal Regulations*, for example, is issued annually, and is very regular. Each title of the *Code* is cataloged individually. Each, however, is issued not as one title, but in parts. Because of this, it is impossible to set up the record as would be done in the case of a regular annual. To do so, one would have to make a dummy record on OCLC with the parts of the title listed in the 245 or 222 field, i.e., as Title 29 pts. 1-29. Such a procedure would require at last count one hundred and eighty-nine records, as opposed to fifty, in order to maintain this as a predictable title. In the era of automation, there are still a few titles that will not cooperate, and they are, ultimately, unpredictable.

The prediction module also requires the enumeration levels for the title. The enumeration is the description of how the material is numbered or identified. This is where caption codes are used. The SC350's default captions are volume and number. The system will also ask for the number of issues that will be received before an increment appears in the volume number. If the serial is described as a normalized irregular, the system prompts for the day, week, or month when the serial is published.

SC350 is not amenable to predicting solely by date. SC350 wants the date, season or month tied to an enumeration level. We discovered that by omitting the enumeration level and by checking in by date alone, we could force the system to predict by date. Version 2 of the software temporarily closed this loophole—when the software was enhanced, this possibility was accidentally enhanced out of existence. A disk to restore it appeared within a month of the Version 2 update.

### ***COPY RECORDS***

The copy record is the module where the status of an item is entered. Is this title bound? If so, when? Is this an active or inactive record? How many days must pass before a claim should be generated for an expected item? SC350 is an interactive system, and the data entered on the copy record directs the operation of the other modules of the system such as binding, claiming and check-in. The copy records also contain information dealing with loan policies for interaction with an automated circulation system.

The copy record is where the call number for an item is entered.



The call number will transfer on the downloading of an OCLC record only if this record is a local data record. In-library locations are also added to the copy record. The locations of every place in the library or anywhere else that materials are shelved is part of parameter maintenance. In copy record maintenance, one merely chooses the number on the list for a particular location and that location is transferred to the copy record. For example, if "Second Floor" is #1 on the list, #1 is selected and "Second Floor" appears on the copy record. There is one problem with the locations in the copy record. The copy record requests the locations of both bound and unbound issues, but only one location, the unbound, appears on the check-in screen. If there are different locations for bound and unbound material, the bound location will have to appear as a note on the check-in record.

### CHECK-IN

The main purpose of the SC350, the checking in of material, is met beautifully. The time needed to check in material in the Law Library has been cut almost in half. Because SC350 searches by any words in the title, the search through the Kardex trying to recall the real title of the book for which a supplement has arrived has been eliminated. *Oil and Gas Law* is really the *Law of Oil and Gas*, but SC350 does not care. It will retrieve the title regardless of the order in which the words appear in the search request.

Check-in is a two-step process. Once the system has located the title, the cursor automatically moves to the next expected issue. A function key is then pressed to enter the current date which was programmed into the system when it was booted up in the morning. SC350 Version 2 required the installation of a Tseng memory board into the IBM-PC. This board has in it an independent clock/calendar and it is possible to run a program to install this clock/calendar onto the hard disk drive. After this is done, the date does not have to be entered on a daily basis; it appears as part of the boot procedure. To record the information checked in, another function key is pressed.

A minor annoyance with the system is that it will not allow one to return to a screen that has an unposted check-in entry on it. The

entries are "posted," that is permanently recorded on the hard disk drive, by exiting the check-in module. The greater the number of items that have been checked in during one session, the longer it takes for these entries to be posted. This minor annoyance occurs when a second release of a particular title, such as *Automobile Law Reports*, is found at the bottom of a stack of materials that has just been checked in. In order to check in this second issue, the issue check-in module must be exited, at which point there is a delay until the system has finished posting the earlier entries. Then the check-in module must be reentered and a title search occur before the second release can be checked in.

### **SUBSCRIPTION RECORDS**

It took the Law Library a long time to set up its subscription records as it does not use a jobber. This again was a situation that OCLC did not anticipate. The system's claiming and subscription modules require the name and address of the publisher or supplier from whom material is received in order to operate properly. The fact that we do not use a jobber required the use of more disk space than OCLC expected a library with our number of titles would need. Luckily, we had ordered a larger hard disk drive than OCLC recommended.

An improvement that SC350 has over the manual system in making payments is that it is impossible to confuse similar titles from publishers with similar names, such as the Forensic Society's *Journal of the Forensic Society* and the American Forensic Society's *Forensic Science Journal*. SC350 is also very good when posting "umbrella" payments, i.e., one payment covering several subscriptions. This is because SC350 can link several copies to one subscription record.

There are two serious defects in the subscription module. First, there is no way to delete an entry. A payment entered in error, or figures entered incorrectly, can never be erased. A corresponding credit to balance out the accounts must be entered. Second, the SC350 screen provides only a six line display. After the screen has been filled, each additional payment causes the oldest payment to drop off the record. This is a serious problem in that no readily

accessible record may be available to tell whether or not a piece of material has been paid for. One must search invoice files for this information. The Law Library has some material for which payments are posted twice a month; in these cases, we are unable to track payments for even half a fiscal year.

### CLAIMING

We have only recently begun using the claims function on SC350. The claim forms generated by the SC350 are very good. They not only indicate to the supplier what is being claimed, but also why it is being claimed (i.e., nonreceipt, damaged item, etc.). The form tells the supplier when the subscription was paid and what the invoice number was. The bottom half of the form has a list of responses for the supplier to check off and return to the library. These responses range from "replacement sent on date \_\_\_\_\_," to "too early to claim, no action taken." The claim form is formatted so that when it is folded in half lengthwise twice, both the "Claim Sent To" and "Send Claim Reply To" are in position to be used with a window envelope.

A problem with the claims function is that unpredictable titles cannot be excluded from the claims scan. The reason the record for an item is marked "unpredictable" is that no one knows when to expect the material. It is pointless, for instance, to claim government documents until they appear on a shipping list. One thing done to eliminate false claims is to adjust the claim period on the copy record. We have told the system to wait 999 days after the issue is due before a claim is generated. This effectively eliminates the title from the claims scan.

Another problem is that the claims module cannot generate a list of what is being claimed. One can print off each screen individually, but this is inadequate. The screens in the claims module display only the first thirty-two characters of the title to be claimed. In some cases, it is not clear from the screen what is being claimed. The screen also contains information, such as how many times a claim has been sent, that is of interest only to those in the serials department. It would be helpful to have a hardcopy list of materials currently being claimed to give to others who need it.

## ROUTING

SC350 produces attractive routing slips. In the routing module, a header and a footer of up to four lines each can appear on the routing slips. The title, volume, and issue number of the routed material is printed under the header.

In the routing module, a file is created of people to whom material is routed. This is known as the recipient record. It is from these records that one draws the names used in creating special routes. Standard routes can also be created. A standard route is created when there is a group of people, all of whom receive the same routed material. We have created a standard route designated "Librarians." This slip is used for materials, such as the *Library Journal*, that are read by all of the librarians on the staff.

To create a routing slip for a title, one first searches for the title in the routing module. Once the title is found, SC350 will ask if this title should be linked to a standard route or a special route. If a standard route is chosen, the name of the standard route is entered. If a special route is chosen, the names of the individuals (from the recipient record) who wish to receive the title are entered. Then, whenever this title is checked in, a routing slip is automatically printed.

It is possible to make global changes in the routing module. When a staff member leaves, his/her name is replaced in the recipient record with the name of his/her successor. The new staff person's name appears automatically on the routing slips for all materials received by his/her predecessor.

There are only two flaws in the routing module. First, there is no place in the module where the recipient records can be viewed on-line. To discover who is on the list, the "print recipient records" function must be chosen, and then the routing module exited before the list will print. This is an awkward way to review a list in order to determine if it needs updating or changing. Second, when a title is found in the routing function, there is no way to display a list of the people already receiving it. This can have an impact if one has a policy of ordering a second copy once the routing list contains a certain number of recipients.

## BINDERY

The Law Library does not yet use the bindery module. This module, working from information obtained in the copy record, will compile a list of titles ready to be bound, print bindery slips, and generate a shipping list of titles sent to the bindery. After checking in the bound volumes, SC350 will track down any volumes not returned by the bindery. The bindery module also has a component for recording payment of bindery invoices.

Unfortunately, in the bindery module, a list of the titles to be bound cannot be printed until the data on how the spine of the volume should read has been entered. If such a list were available from the start, it would encourage people to use the more sophisticated features of this module sooner than happens now.

## PROBLEMS

Most of the problems we experienced with SC350 have worked themselves out over time as we grew more adept at manipulating the system. SC350 still does not accept monographic records; one must rely on the OCLC-developed function keys that transform a monographic fixed field into a serials fixed field. This causes inconvenience when searching and downloading groups of records where there is a run of serial titles. When a monograph turns up, there is a tendency to forget to check the fixed field. Such errors come to light only when one enters SC350 and attempts to insert a record into the database. One must then exit SC350, reenter the cataloging module, search again for the record, reedit it, save it again, exit to SC350 and download it.

Another challenge we experienced was in deciding how to check in material that has more than one type of supplementation, such as state codes (which are updated by annual pocket parts, revised hard-bound volumes and legislative pamphlets), and "umbrella" titles (materials, for example, that are cataloged and classified under a series title). For titles with more than one type of supplementation, each of which requires a different enumeration and prediction record, we create dummy records on OCLC. We take the original OCLC record, replace the OCLC number with a number we make

up (to prevent the dummy record from replacing the original record in the SC350 database), and alter the title to reflect the supplementation to be recorded (e.g., *Virginia Code Legislative Service*, which updates the *Virginia Code*). Altering the title also proves helpful, it was found, when a title is received in two formats, e.g., in both paper and microform.

For a series, copy records are created for each title in the series, with the name of the title in place of the copy number. When the series *Courtroom Medicine* is searched and retrieved, a list of copies (i.e., titles) available is presented: e.g., *Neck, Brain, Eye*, etc.

A final problem, and one that should be most easily cured, is the problem of the manual. After using the system for as long as we have, we still cannot read the section on a new module and understand readily how that module operates. The manual needs to be rewritten. It was considerably revised when SC350 Version 2 was introduced, but unfortunately the index was left untouched. At the very least, this manual needs a glossary to help the user understand the terms used in the system.

### CONCLUSION

When discussing automated systems, librarians most commonly complain that the system is too rigid to meet their needs. What frequently develops upon close inspection is the realization that it is the librarian, and not the system, that is too rigid. The first and hardest lesson to accept when converting to an automated serials control system is that an idiosyncratic Kardex cannot be recreated online. One must ask (and honestly answer) the questions: Why are certain procedures followed? Is this the best way to keep track of a particular kind of material? Is this information needed by the library and/or the library's patrons? Or is a procedure used because it has always been used, even when its purpose has been lost? New ways of doing things must be developed. SC350 encourages the checking in of material in what is almost surely a better and more efficient manner than the manual arrangement afforded. Different does not necessarily mean worse.

The training and support provided by OCLC are excellent. The system is not flawless, but so far OCLC has been very responsive in

dealing with problems caused by bugs in the software or by poor system design. OCLC has also sought input from users as to what future enhancements would be desirable.

The SC350 Serials Control System is an economical, fast and convenient alternative to the manual Kardex. The University of Richmond Law Library considers it as good, if not better, than any other serials control system on the market today.

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