

Libraries Without Shelves

Pages with reference to book, From 157 To 157

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Information overload, explosion of knowledge; these expressions have become so common that they have lost their impact. But, the problem is still there and increasing day by day. The technology of information gathering and dissemination is itself changing rapidly. The next ten to twenty years may see the emergence of what is being called libraries without shelves. Despite the introduction of desk top composition which has reduced the previous laborious methods of type setting, the cost of printing is going up. On the other hand the cost of disks and other forms of electronically transmitted information are getting cheaper. Soon the two lines will cross and printed books and journals will be costlier than the same information on disks. Disks, specially the "CD" or compact disks, offer a number of advantages. A large volume of information can be stored on compact disks. Already a whole range of back issues of journals are available on them. The compact disks are longer lasting than books printed on paper. They cannot be erased or scribbled on and are not susceptible to pests. On the whole they offer a more permanent storage system than books and journals printed on paper. Advent of high resolution TV screens and a link up with computers offers access to a wide range of information. The technology of reproducing photographs and charts along with text is already here and some "text books" (till we find a new term) are being produced on compact disks. The old aficionados will miss the feel of a new book whose pages are opened for the first time, but the younger generation is already more at home with a keyboard and screen than books. Soon the libraries will consist of rows of computer screens and you will be able to ask for the "book" or "journal" by pressing the right keys. If you insist on having the information on paper you can always get a printout. Another parallel development is transmission through satellites. This will make it possible to get the information you want from a central data bank which could be located anywhere in the world. This way the library or individual subscriber does not even require a CD player, you can ask for your desired "journal" or "book" through your computer. Already the satellites have made it possible for member institutions to participate in international meetings sitting in their own institutions. The system works both ways and you can even ask questions. Such a service is already available in Europe. The technology already exists in the form of Star TV network, the problem is of financing. When enough institutions are willing to pay for it or find sponsors PTV2 could provide this service.