



World Library and Information Congress: 69th IFLA General Conference and Council

1-9 August 2003, Berlin

Code Number: 014-E
Meeting: 91. Education and Training
Simultaneous Interpretation: Yes

Report on the Results of a Global Web-based Survey of Continuing Education and Training Needs of Library Staff

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ABSTRACT

In 2002 OCLC commissioned a distance training and education market needs assessment of library workers worldwide. The study was conducted through the use of a Web-based survey instrument. OCLC received 2,112 responses to the survey, 32% of which were outside of the U.S. Specifically, the study identified:

- 1) a benchmark for library spending on training;*
- 2) a benchmark for the amount of training library workers receive;*
- 3) the kinds of training needed by library workers;*
- 4) trends in Web-based training for library workers; and*
- 5) where to focus efforts in the development of Web-based training*

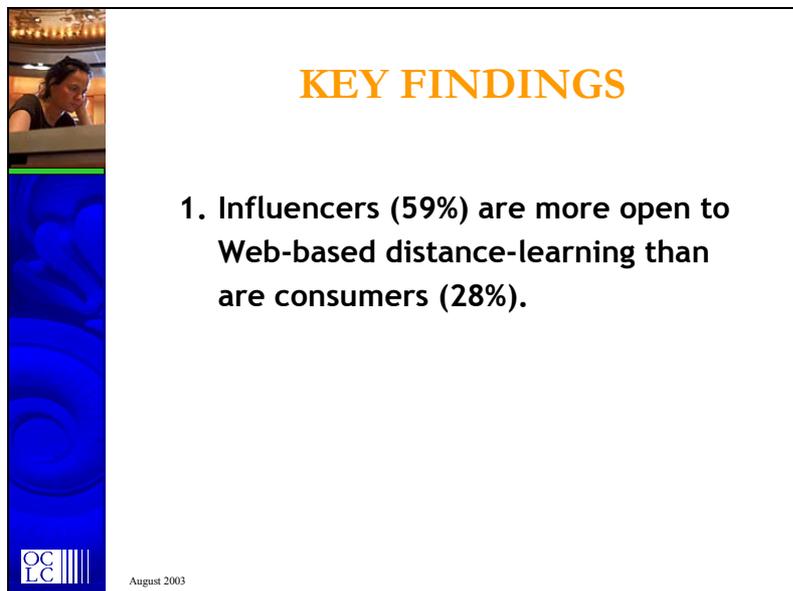
This paper will report the key findings of the study and discuss the conclusions we can draw from the survey data. In addition, the paper briefly reports on OCLC's activities in the area of Web-based course offerings.

Founded in 1967, OCLC is a nonprofit, membership, computer library service and research organization dedicated to the public purposes of furthering access to the world's information and reducing information costs. More than 42,000 libraries in 86 countries use OCLC services to locate, acquire, catalog, lend and preserve library materials. Researchers, students, faculty, scholars, professional librarians and other information seekers use OCLC services to obtain bibliographic, abstract and full-text information when and where they need it. OCLC and its member libraries cooperatively produce and maintain WorldCat—the OCLC Online Union Catalog.

In August 2002 OCLC hired Outsell, Inc., a library market research firm based in the U.S., to carry out an online Web-based survey of the training and education needs of library staff. The survey was conducted from August 20, 2002 to September 13, 2002. We received 2,112 responses, 32% of which were from outside of the U.S. Both “consumers” (library workers who select training for themselves only) and “influencers” (library workers who select training for themselves and others) responded to the survey.

The survey provided useful data that is helping us to set priorities for our educational and training programs. It is interesting to note that OCLC validated some of the findings of this survey with the delegates of the OCLC Members Council during their meetings in October 2002 and February 2003. At the end of this paper, I will outline some of the steps that OCLC is taking with regard to Web-based training.

KEY FINDINGS



KEY FINDINGS

- 1. Influencers (59%) are more open to Web-based distance-learning than are consumers (28%).**

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Managerial/supervisory respondents are also more likely than individual contributors to say they are planning to use Web-based distance learning in the future.



KEY FINDINGS

- 2. Institutions support and fund traditional training programs for library workers rather than emerging alternatives like Web-based distance learning.**



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79% of the respondents say their organization provides financial support and time for library workers to attend traditional forms off training, such as offsite seminars and professional conferences. By comparison, less than half (49%) report that computer-mediated learning is supported financially and with time-off.



KEY FINDINGS

- 3. Web-based training is an option that will become increasingly important to the library community.**



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The respondents indicated that classroom training, conference participation and self-directed learning are more popular than distance learning. Web-based training ranks as the highest form of distance learning and almost half of the respondents expect that they or someone from their institution will participate in Web-based training in the next 12 months.



KEY FINDINGS

4. Training needs are reported in high numbers for three skill set categories

- Library Standards and Practices
 - Creating a digital library
 - Collection development and management
 - Database searching
- Management Skills
 - Change and innovation
 - Leadership
 - Marketing the library
- Computing/Information Technology
 - Web development and design
 - Library automation
 - Computers, networks, operating systems

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KEY FINDINGS

5. Respondents have very positive regard for continuing education for library workers and satisfaction with Web-based learning is high.

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Nearly all (97%) respondents agree with the statement that “A library worker should continue training and education beyond the initial qualifying degree or certificate.” Of the more than half (51%) of respondents who have participated in Web-based training and education, three-quarters were very or somewhat satisfied with the experience.



KEY FINDINGS

6. Respondents see strong benefits in Web-based distance learning.

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The most important benefits were convenience (86%) and cost-effectiveness (82%). For 71%, a benefit of Web-based training is the opportunity to take a course they otherwise would not have access to. Other benefits are that participants can serve their clients better (68%) and they learned skills that saved them time (54%).



KEY FINDINGS

7. The perceived problems with Web-based training are relative to the value of the course, not the technology platform.

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The top problems noted by respondents are trouble finding the time (42%), finding the right courses/topics (32%), getting funding/affordability (32%) and knowing what courses are available (26%). For potential participants, there must be a good value proposition for a Web-based course before they'll make the time and find the funding to participate. Having access to the Internet and high speed connections is not a serious concern.



KEY FINDINGS

- 8. Influencers and consumers agree that the number one reason for continuing training and education for library workers is “Keeping Current.”**

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Consumers feel that advancement is the second most important reason, while influencers see “reducing skill gaps” as the second most important reason for continuing training and education



KEY FINDINGS

- 9. The average total training budget for all library workers within an institution is \$12,067 or about one-half of one percent of the library’s total operating budget.**

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Over the next 12 months, more respondents expect decreases in the total budget and the training budget. The three-year outlook is more favorable, however, with more respondents expecting increases than decreases.



KEY FINDINGS

- 10. Respondents believe that they are under-spending on training and education programs. Web-based distance learning is regarded as a cost-effective option.**

While the actual annual amount spent per employee on training and education is \$531, respondents say a reasonable amount would be some 30% higher, at \$692. Influencers say that they currently pay about \$277 per employee for instructor-led courses and about \$171 for Web-based ones.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS FROM THE SURVEY

Libraries are facing an environment of significant resource constraints. At the same time, acquiring new skills and keeping current on technologies, sources and trends is more important than ever for library workers. One reasonable answer to this dilemma is the adoption of Web-based distance learning, and yet, it has not been widely adopted by the library community, despite the fact that it is cost-effective, time-efficient and convenient. It appears that both influencers and consumers still don't think of this learning environment as "serious." The study finds that a large number of library workers have been satisfied with Web-based training courses. Efforts should be made to enlighten the market to the benefits of Web-based training as a solution that provides a low-cost opportunity to gain new knowledge and skills.

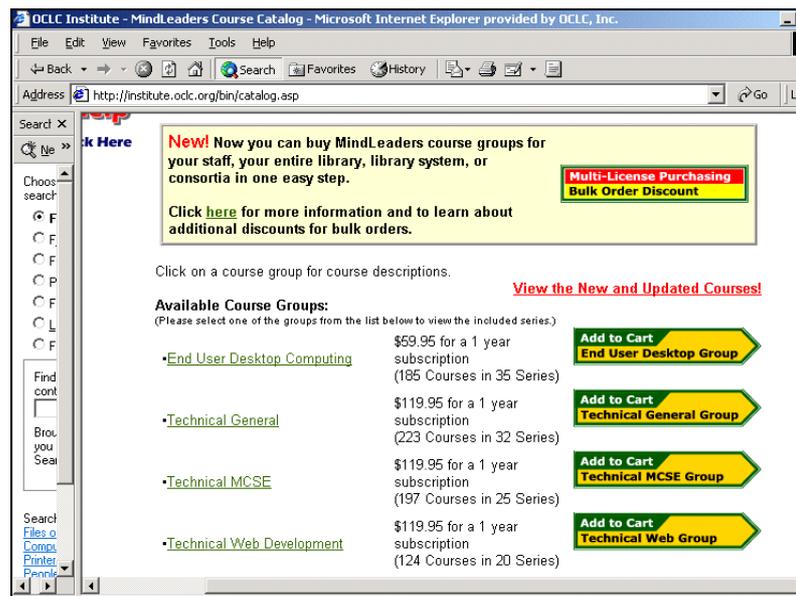
There are definite training gaps in some of the new library skill sets that are required to lead the library in this digital age. Both influencers and consumers pointed to the need for training in areas such as digital library creation and management, change and innovation, marketing the library, and, of course, computing and information technology skills. Library staff want courses that keep them current, help them advance, and close specific skill gaps.

The library community is already supportive of the concept of continuous learning, and those who have used Web-based training express a high level of satisfaction with it. Furthermore, library staffs are willing to pay for these types of courses. So, while the library market is not 100% aware of the value proposition of Web-based training and education, it seems that courses that address the topics identified as critical success factors will be well-received by many libraries around the world. Web-based learning is an important part of the future for library workers.

OCLC AND WEB-BASED LEARNING COURSES

OCLC has evaluated many providers of Web-based learning, especially in the area of Computing and Information Technology. As a result of these evaluations, OCLC negotiated on behalf of libraries worldwide very low prices on more than 700 technical Web-based courses from an organization called MindLeaders. These courses are accessible from the OCLC Web site, www.oclc.org.

The courses are packaged in four course groups as follows:



Through this agreement with MindLeaders, OCLC is making available to libraries high quality Web-based technical courses for an average price of 60 cents U.S. per course per person. The one-year subscription allows each person to take all the courses in each group as many times as you like, any place you like, for a one-year period. It gives each individual time to learn and grow.

In addition to technical Web-based courses, OCLC also offers a Web-based course to help libraries build digital libraries. This course is entitled "Cataloging Internet Resources Using MARC21 and AACR2 V2."

OCLC plans to make more Web-based courses available in the future and we are working to create a clearinghouse function on the OCLC home page so that we can point users to the vast array of courses that are available from many providers.