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## OCLC's CORC Service: A User's Perspective

Michael Wright

**SUMMARY.** OCLC's CORC service consists of two Web-based utilities: the CORC Resource Catalog (RC) and the Pathfinder utility. The RC consists of a generator for creating MARC or Dublin Core bibliographic records for Internet resources as well as a database of such records. The Pathfinder utility features a database of research guides in a Web format and offers a straightforward method to create original research guides. Both elements of the CORC service are well wrought and should be of interest to libraries.

**KEYWORDS.** OCLC, CORC, cataloging, electronic resource, Pathfinder, MARC, Dublin Core, Internet

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CORC (the Cooperative Online Resource Catalog), OCLC's service designed to speed cataloging and discovery of electronic resources, received an amazing amount of attention and interest, both within and without the OCLC community, when it was unveiled as a research initiative in 1998. Now a continuing OCLC service with over 855 participating libraries and a growing database of over 425,000 records, interest in CORC remains high. CORC participation is limited to OCLC cataloging users with a full or partial cataloging authorization.

CORC is not an attempt to get libraries to comprehensively catalog the World-Wide-Web-a task nearly all agree is impossible due to its sheer size-but rather an attempt to cooperatively build a database of and guide to some of the Web's most useful resources, making them more easily accessible to libraries and their users.

Unlike OCLC's familiar Passport and Cataloging MicroEnhancer (CatME) products,

CORC is a fully Web-based interface, using a browser, either Netscape or Internet Explorer, to interact with the CORC software on OCLC's server.

As one might expect, the interface is point-and-click, rather than command driven, and makes extensive use of drop-down menus and so-called radio buttons.

In a nutshell, CORC actually consists of two services: the Resource Catalog (RC) and the Pathfinders service, which are basically independent of each other. The Resource Catalog includes a cataloging utility and database, while the Pathfinder service includes a database of subject-specific research guides which may or may not contain items from the RC.

### ***CORC RESOURCE CATALOG***

The Resource Catalog consists of bibliographic records, in MARC or Dublin Core formats, representing electronic resources including online versions of serials, digitized archival images, Web pages, etc. The RC also contains a record generator, which can create AACR2 minimal-level (OCLC's Encoding Level K for MARC or 3 for Dublin Core) bibliographic records by extracting data from Web pages, a process known as harvesting. These records can be edited and upgraded or left as they are, and can then be exported to a local system or Web page. CORC's RC is synchronized with OCLC's WorldCat bibliographic database; all CORC records appear in WorldCat within 24 hours of creation.

In addition, CORC offers full access to the OCLC online authority tile (including interactive access from individual Resource Catalog records) and to WebDewey, an optional, subscription-based version of Dewey Decimal Classification.

Probably most interest in CORC has been directed toward the cataloging utility, the Resource Catalog, from which users can search both the RC and OCLC's WorldCat bibliographic databases, create records, and import records created elsewhere.

Using a natural language interface, CORC draws upon standard Boolean searching, much like other databases. Not surprisingly it is reminiscent of OCLC's FirstSearch service. Search elements can be drawn from a number of sources: typical elements such as subject, title, and name are of course there, but searches can also include URL phrases, cataloging source, and language, among others. Up to four terms can be linked using the standard Boolean operators (and, or, not). The database is fast and relevance ranking applies (or can be turned off at the user's discretion). Search results can vary dramatically depending on how the search is constructed. Unlike most Web search engines, however, exactly reproducing a search will achieve the same results consistently, due to the controlled nature of the database. Unfortunately, the database is still relatively small in relation to the Internet and many items aren't yet represented. In addition, a fair number of the records in RC aren't for Web resources as such; there are many for photographs and archival collections, records which include MARC 856 fields. Some of these came in when OCLC seeded the initial database with records from its NetFirst service, although institutions are still encouraged to add them. This is fine, but it is a bit frustrating when searching for Web resources on a given subject to have records for digitized photographs pop up instead.

A strength, at least in concept, of the RC is that the records are selected by librarians; presumably this means "no junk." By and large this appears to be true, although the old maxim, "one person's junk is another's treasure" comes to mind on occasion. Certainly the usual odd hits for pornographic and other spurious sites don't occur in CORC as they seem to with regular Web browsers.

There are no standards for inclusion of resources in CORC; OCLC assumes that librarians will police their own choices. If a library deems a resource useful and wishes to

catalog it, a record can be created and entered in the Resource Catalog. In this respect CORC is really no different than the main OCLC database, WorldCat. Indeed, as previously noted, the two databases are synchronized.

When creating records in CORC, users can elect to build records using a blank template or have CORC extract data (“harvest”) from an existing Web resource and automatically generate a K-level (less from full cataloging which meets minimum AACR2 requirements for a bibliographic record) MARC record or a 3-level Dublin Core record.

A truly useful CORC feature is the ability, when cataloging from an existing Web page, to actually open a live link to the page, either as part of a split CORC display or in a separate browser screen.

When harvesting to create a MARC record, CORC will automatically attempt to generate the MARC 008 or Fixed Field, tags 245 and 260, as well as summary notes and subject terms which may or may not be similar to Library of Congress subject headings. All harvested records include an 856 field. In addition CORC includes a drop-down menu which can create a completed 006 tag for any format.

As mentioned, the resulting record qualifies as Minimal-level cataloging; most libraries will want to add additional MARC tags to bring the record up to the Full standard.

Libraries subscribing to WebDewey may, if desired, choose to have CORC prepare Dewey Decimal Classification numbers as well. However, the software which constructs the numbers works by matching terms found in the Web page against the Dewey index, and in the process CORC may pick up terms which are tangential to the subject of the Web document. Because of this, the numbers created by CORC deserve scrutiny. For instance, if a library is using CORC to harvest data from a Web resource on the Denver ACRL meeting, and the site

includes restaurant information, the software might build a Dewey number for restaurants.

Similar to OCLC's Passport and Cataloging MicroEnhancer software, CORC also allows users to create a new bibliographic record by cloning an existing record. CORC extracts data from the existing record and the user can then edit it to suit, entering the "new" record into the database.

Unlike other OCLC services, CORC's Resource Catalog now features URL checking and notification on data in 856 fields, a major enhancement. URL-checking software is constantly scrambling through the CORC Resource Catalog records looking for broken or otherwise inactive links in MARC 856 fields. When one is found, CORC can automatically notify the inputting library of the bad link. The library can then correct the URL. This is clearly a boon for libraries which have cataloged remote-access electronic resources.

In addition to MARC records, CORC can be used to create records in Dublin Core (DC) format, and can display these in either Dublin Core HTML or RDF. CORC-produced DC records are very similar to those created in the other major DC record generator, DC Dot (<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/metadata/dcdot/>).

### ***PATHFINDERS***

In addition to the CORC Resource Catalog and record creation, there's another piece to CORC: the Pathfinders database.

Pathfinders are simply bibliographies in a Web format. Contents of CORC pathfinders usually include Web resources, but aren't limited to them. Pathfinders can be built using any resource a library wishes to include (books, articles, databases, etc.) using a straightforward point-and-click format which is similar in look to the Resource Catalog.

Once a Pathfinder is assembled and added to the Pathfinders database, it can be exported

in its entirety in HTML format for use in the library's Web page, or the Pathfinder can be left on OCLC's server and only an HTML link to it exported. By selecting the latter option, OCLC will maintain any URL appearing in the Pathfinder.

Pathfinders can be very simple affairs or they can be dressed up using cascading style sheets and images. Even the most complex-looking Pathfinder is still very easy to create. Indeed, ease of use is a strong point of the utility. A series of Pathfinders on whatever subject can be assembled in a matter of minutes.

### ***DOCUMENTATION AND SUPPORT***

All CORC documentation is available in PDF from the CORC Website (<http://www2.oclc.org/corc/documentation/>)—OCLC is not distributing printed documentation for CORC. From rather spotty beginnings, the CORC manuals have improved quickly and now are up to OCLC's usual high documentation standards, although their look is very different from that of other OCLC manuals. CORC documentation is updated frequently.

CORC's first-line support is offered by OCLC-affiliated regional library networks and by OCLC itself, which offers 24/7 help availability. In addition, there is a busy CORC listserv as well as an active and enthusiastic CORC Users Group, complete with special interest groups.

### ***TO PARTICIPATE, OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE?***

So, the ultimate question: Why should a library use CORC?

If a library catalogs a lot of Web-based resources, the CORC's ability to build a quick bibliographic record via harvesting is a big convenience, more so with the link to the OCLC Authority File. The records as generated are basic, but the editing features are easy to use and the records are thus easy to upgrade. Along the same line, these features also make producing records from scratch very straightforward. While some expert Passport or CatME users may find

CORC's interface awkward at first, it is easy to adapt to.

OCLC plans, within the next two years, to roll out a new cataloging utility which will be based upon the CORC service. This Web-based utility will then replace the venerable Passport software for cataloging, although an enhanced version of the Cataloging MicroEnhancer will remain. If libraries wonder what the future of OCLC cataloging looks like, CORC will be its springboard. Those institutions that are using CORC regularly will likely have a smoother transition when the old software is discontinued.

Ultimately, the most powerful reason to use CORC for cataloging electronic resources is the URL-checking feature, which satisfies a long-standing need in part of the library community. Indeed, perhaps the biggest roadblock for cataloging electronic resources has been how to best keep up with 856 fields. CORC eliminates this problem.

As for CORC's Pathfinder database, public services staff in particular should be giving it a serious look. Pathfinders take an existing product that many skilled public services departments have been offering right along—the research guide—and updates it to a straightforward Web format. It's a simple way to gather resources on a given subject, and the export features allow staff to whisk the pathfinders to a local Web page for quick use by the library's clientele.

Overall, CORC is a well thought-out product that has created a small but growing niche for itself. For libraries that are cataloging electronic resources or are considering doing so, or that want to explore the creation of Web-based resource guides, the CORC service deserves a serious look.