

A MICROFICHE CATALOG ON THE BOOKMOBILE

by

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In 1987, the Rawls Library introduced microfiche readers on its bookmobiles to be used as the catalog. Readers were already at headquarters and in all the branches. The bookmobiles, though, had never had any sort of catalog.

Previously, bookmobile patrons had to tell the staff what they wanted. The requests were written in a notebook (one notebook for each bookmobile route) and were checked in the card catalog at headquarters. By having a catalog on the vehicle, we hope to fill requests more effectively.

The bookmobile staff were opposed to the microfiche readers. They feared that patrons, who had been depending on them for years to fill their request, would now just use the fiche reader and not ask them anything anymore. The professional staff explained to them that having the catalog on the vehicle did not mean they would never be asked questions again by patrons. (How many patrons even with a catalog in headquarters will still go to the staff for help, before looking at the catalog?)

Our explanations alleviated their fears somewhat, but not totally. Much of the fear was simply of the new. The bookmobile staff saw the microfiche as a machine they would have to learn how to use, and they were afraid of not being able to master it. Our aim was to get them used to it, and make them comfortable. We didn't want them to fear failure! We explained that in time they would get used to the microfiche.

Installing the fiche reader presented space problems. On both of our bookmobiles, we had to take out some of our shelves to fit in the reader. A hole then had to be drilled in the side of the shelf area to run the cord to the outlet in the back of the vehicle by the rear circulation desk. This, of course, eliminated some space for books.

When we put the readers on the trucks, we decided to take the fiche off at the end of each run. This allowed us to use one box of microfiche for the two vehicles. We also did not want the fiche on the vehicles in hot weather. We wanted the bookmobile staff to be in the habit of always taking the fiche off when they came in at the end of the day.

After two years, I have found by talking to my bookmobile staff and by going on the runs myself, that most of the patrons do not use the fiche reader catalog. However, it has come in handy for the bookmobile staff. They can now look up things immediately. They seem to be comfortable using it and no longer view it as a threat.

The best of all possible worlds would be to get a Data Riod system for the bookmobiles. This way, books requested on the bookmobile could be put on reserve immediately. It would cut down on the amount of work the bookmobile staff would have to do in the library concerning these reserves.

The microfiche readers on the bookmobile are better than no catalog system at all, but they are just a stopgap measure, until a more advanced system can be purchased. The new technology is going a long way toward making work on the bookmobile more efficient, and it is helping to tie in bookmobile operations with the main library.