# The Federal Depository Library Program:
## Current and Future Challenges of the Electronic Transition

## Presentation by U.S. Superintendent of Documents Judith C. Russell

**Canadian Library Association AGIIG and
American Library Association GODORT Joint Program:
How is Federal Government Information Reaching the Public in the 21st Century?**

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Susan [Tullis'] history of the Federal Depository Library Program stopped short of the most recent legislative change for both GPO and the FDLP – the 1993 *GPO Access* law,[1] which mandated that GPO established an online service. In 1994 GPO offered its first databases, the *Federal Register* and the *Congressional Record*. By the end of the first year, GPO was offering a number of other titles and had added the PDF files so that users could view the equivalent of the printed pages.

The train that left the station in 1994, moving toward a more electronic Federal Depository Library Program (as the 1996 GPO report was entitled) is gaining speed. *GPO Access* now has over 2000 databases available for free public access and we provide approximately 32 million downloaded documents per month. We have had peak months with downloads in excess of 37 million documents.

All year we have been talking the fact that this is the year that the FDLP crosses the Rubicon. We projected that more than half of the documents added to the Federal Depository Library Program this year would be electronic online titles, available through *GPO Access* or by links to electronic publications on agency or other websites. In fact, at the Depository Library Council meeting in Reno in April, we forecast that 60% of the new titles added this year would be online electronic titles.

What is the reality? From October 1, 2002 (the beginning of the fiscal year) through May 31, 2003, GPO has added 26,441 titles to the FDLP collection. 10,545 of those titles are available online through GPO and an additional 6,898 are links to publications on agency websites, for a total of 17,443 new online electronic titles. During the same period, GPO distributed only 8,998 tangible titles: 4,582 paper titles, 3,037 microfiche titles, 265 CD-ROM/DVD titles and 1,114 USGS maps. So far this year, 66% of the new titles added to the FDLP are electronic online titles, even more than we projected.

But there is more. In May 2003, 7,402 items were added to the program of which 86% were online electronic titles. The trend is clear and the speed of our transformation is accelerating.

What does this mean for the Federal Depository Library Program? We are rapidly approaching a critical time in the program. The FDLP has always been a delicate balance between the self-interest of the library in obtaining publications without cost and the public interest in access to the information. The balance on the scales is tipping dangerously. Within a few years, perhaps as few

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[1] Public Law 103-40, known as the Government Printing Office Electronic Information Enhancement Act of 1993.

as three or as many as five, there will be very few tangible products distributed to depository libraries, other than those that we collectively decide to preserve in paper or other tangible format.

Practically from the moment GPO shipped the first CD-ROM to a depository library, the community has discussed and debated the future of the program and how we would meet the challenges of a more electronic FDLP. Susan listed a number of the reports and study groups that addressed this issue. We cannot delay any longer. Together we must re-examine the services that GPO provides to the public directly and through the depository libraries. We must define the services that are required, now and in the future, to support the mission. We must address the fundamental question that we have been asking each other since 1995: Why be a depository library when you can obtain "everything" (or virtually everything) free on the Internet without being part of the program?

Recently we had some management training at GPO that described how successful businesses identify their "strategic anchors" – the fundamental, guiding principles that can be used to evaluate every option and make every decision, large and small. For example, Southwest Airlines strategic anchors include on time arrival and low cost fares. If a decision improves on time arrival or reduces airfares, it is a good decision. If an option is proposed that increases fares or delays on time arrivals, it is easy to make the decision to choose some other path. Together, we need to identify the strategic anchors of the Federal Depository Library Program. Then GPO can evaluate every decision we make to see how it affects the future of the program and the quality of services that we provide to the public, directly and through depository libraries.

**Bookstore Closures**

This spring we made the painful decision to close all of the bookstores, other than the main bookstore in Washington. By September they will all be closed. It was not an easy decision, but it was the right decision. The walk-in traffic in the bookstores has dwindled to a trickle. The public has already embraced online ordering of publications, as shown by the enormous popularity of Amazon.com. We project that 85% of our sales orders will come through the online bookstore by 2005.

As the press release says: With nearly a quarter of a million titles available online and free of charge, and with public retrievals exceeding 32 million every month, *GPO Access* (www.gpoaccess.gov), a service of the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), has become one of the principal tools for providing public access to official U.S. Government information. In part as a result of increased access through the Internet, the overall volume of sales has dropped dramatically, from 24.3 million copies sold in FY 1993 to 4.4 million copies sold in FY 2002. Ten years ago we sold 35,000 subscriptions to the *Federal Register*; today we sell 2,700. At the same time, we are now downloading over 4 million *Federal Register* documents each month from *GPO Access*. Revenue has plummeted as a result of these changes, while costs have dropped less rapidly, resulting in losses that must be stopped.

**Publications on Demand**

Even as we are closing the bookstores, we are seeking to restructure the sales program so that the costs are in line with the achievable revenues. We continue to make every effort to stabilize the sales program at a sustainable level and to expand the range of titles and services that are available to the public through the sales program.

We know that we need to create less inventory and we have begun an experiment with print-on-demand services. We see two ways to use this technology.

> One way is to buy far fewer copies in the initial press run – just enough to meet the initial short term demand – and then print a small number of copies, perhaps 25 at a time, to keep a small inventory. If sales dry up, we have very little wasted inventory and we can reduce our warehouse space substantially. As sales volume diminishes, we can allow the title to go out of stock, but not out of print, and print copies only when there is a sale.

> Secondly, we can take many, perhaps even most, of the titles that are selected for the Federal Depository Library Program that historically would not have been included in the sales program and make them available strictly as print on demand titles. With minimal costs to add these titles to the database of items for sale, and no actual expense to produce the publication until someone orders a copy, we can significantly expand the titles we offer – and these titles will ever go out of print.

We believe we can guarantee shipment of print on demand titles within 48 hours or less and that we can do some print on demand at the main bookstore within an hour after an order is received.

This print on demand capability offers advantages to publishing agencies and to depository libraries as well sales program customers. Agencies will be able to keep their titles "in print" indefinitely without the usual guesswork about how many copies will be needed over the life of the publication. Depositories will be able to order paper versions of titles that are included in the FDLP only as electronic files if they need a tangible copy and don't wish to print one locally.

One future benefit that we are considering for the FDLP is the ability to allow each library to define specific titles they wish to receive in paper, so each library may be allocated a certain number of pages or titles that can be received free through print on demand and then purchase additional titles once the allocation of free services has been used up.

**OMB/GPO Agreement**

GPO is working on a number of pilot projects to test various services that GPO may offer in the future. Perhaps the most exciting one, and certainly the one that has received the most press, is the agreement between the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and GPO. This agreement is truly a win for all concerned. It is an innovative approach to contracting for Executive Branch printing that is completely within GPO's statutory responsibility under Title 44 of the US Code. Under the agreement an agency may choose its own commercial printers using standard contracts issued by GPO. The publishing agency will pay GPO, and GPO will pay the printer, less a modest 3% fee to cover GPO's contracting and administrative costs. However, the printer will not be paid until my office has received two print copies and one electronic copy (in a format that I specify).

This will give GPO an electronic copy of each publication for dissemination to the public, directly and through the FDLP. It will also give us two copies of last resort so GPO can, if necessary, create a new digital copy in the future if the electronic copy can no longer be used due to changes in technology or other problems.

The agreement also preserves the right of the Superintendent of Documents to purchase from the printer, at its own expense, additional copies for sale or depository distribution. And, as if that wasn't enough, OMB will limit agency use of in-house and other Executive Branch printing capability and seek to have all appropriate publications from such facilities provided to the Superintendent of Documents as required by Title 44.

This agreement will be tested with a single agency during FY 2004, which begins on October 1, 2003, and if it is successful, it will be extended to other agencies in FY 2005. The agency has not yet been designated, but we expect to know within the next few weeks what agency OMB has chosen for the pilot project.

The agreement should go along way toward eliminating the fugitive document problem and bring many more titles into the FDLP. The Public Printer, Bruce James, deserves enormous credit for listening to the concerns of OMB and the Executive Branch agencies and making them an offer that addresses their concerns, stays within the legal requirements of Title 44, and improves public access to government information.

This is an example of the kind of innovation you will continue to see from GPO, and this agreement should give you have every reason to be encouraged about our ability to work together to define a bright future for the Federal Depository Library Program and other services of the Government Printing Office.

**Planning for the Future of the FDLP**

I could spend hours talking with you about all of the initiatives that we are pursuing as we re-examine the mission of the Federal Depository Library Program and seek to ensure that there is a viable program for the next hundred years that acknowledges and utilizes new technologies to support democracy and inform our users. It is a lofty and ambitious, but achievable, goal and one that is well worth the effort that it will require to shape it.

Each of your institutions has an important role to play in the process, even those of you who represent Canadian libraries. Each month, there are thousands of *GPO Access* visitor sessions from Canada and referrals from websites using the country code for Canada. At present it is only about 1% of our total traffic, but it is growing – and obviously, there are very likely many more sessions and referrals that cannot be easily identified as Canadian in origin. We are very proud that GPO Access is a worldwide resource, delivering an average 37 million government documents per month to its users. We welcome input from all of our users as we re-examine our services and plan for the future.

We are not going to redesign the Federal Depository Library Program in Washington and impose a new structure on the depository library community. GPO administers the program on behalf of the participating libraries and the public we jointly serve. That community must drive the decisions about what the program should be in the future. We cannot do it without you – and, even if we could, we do not want to, or intend to, do it without you.

Together we must re-examine the services that GPO provides to the public directly and through the depository libraries. We must define the services that are required now and in the future to support the mission. We must address the fundamental question that we have been asking each other since 1995: Why be a depository library when you can obtain "everything" (or virtually everything) free on the Internet without being part of the program?

To do this well, we must be like the two-headed Roman god Janus. We must look both forward and backwards. We must "get out of the box" and take a fresh look at the mission we share and determine the best means to accomplish it. We should not limit ourselves to incremental changes to the current system, but seek a new vision, which respects the foundation of the current program, but is not constrained by it, and that takes optimum advantage of the enormous volume electronic resources that are, and will be, available.

At the same time, we must find creative ways to reduce the burdens of the large historical collections on our regional depository libraries and other large selectives, without losing the value of having a distributed system that protects these assets and ensures permanent public access. We want to work with the library community on expanded digitization, preservation, retrospective cataloging, and other services to better mange the retrospective materials and make them more accessible to users in and outside of your libraries.