

"Quantifying the intangible" is a phrase often used by A. E. Cawkell, ISI®'s research director. This is how he describes the problem of defining the value of information services.¹ Producers and users of information services often have trouble explaining the value of such services to administrators. Research administrators willingly allocate funds for expensive electron microscopes, particle accelerators, or other scientific instruments. But often they are reluctant to spend money for information services.^{2,3,4}

What is the source of this kind of bias? An electron microscope, spectrograph, gas chromatograph, or colorimeter is a shiny, metallic, conspicuous, scientific-looking sort of thing. If someone asks, "What's it for?", you can always explain what it does, regardless of whether it is necessary.

In contrast, a copy of *Current Contents*® is rather unobtrusive. The layman often thinks it is a scientific version of *TV Guide*. It certainly doesn't look scientific, metallic, or expensive. Of course, if you let a few years' worth of *CC*® accumulate you have an impressive volume of paper. Perhaps it is not as impressive as a five-year cumula-

tion of the *Science Citation Index*® (*SCI*®) or *Chemical Abstracts*. In any case, paper does not impress administrators. They are up to their ears in it already.

I've often wondered about a new approach to the problem. Is it a matter of semantics? Maybe we should call *Current Contents* an "Inforometer." That ought to impress any self-respecting purchasing agent! Or maybe we should call the *SCI* a "SCItometer" — that is much more impressive than *Science Citation Index*. A "SCItometer" sounds like something every scientist ought to have.

Recently, I told you about our plans for PRIMATE—*Personal Retrieval of Information by Minicomputer And Terminal Ensemble*.⁵ The unusual thing about PRIMATE is that it involves a piece of hardware. Never in the entire history of *CC* have I received so many letters about an editorial. The response surpasses anything I've ever written on sex, Nobel Prizes, or motherhood.

You may recall that in talking about PRIMATE I mentioned the possibility that we could deliver your *CC* in the form of a floppy disc. That would be tantamount to

a shipment of test tubes or petri dishes every week. It would be very conspicuous. Your shipping department would have a package to receive each week, instead of this silly little magazine that comes in with the junk mail. Even the security guards would be happy. Who wants to investigate someone for stealing a copy of *Current Contents*? But if someone steals your floppy disc, they'll never hear the end of it.

We could start to deliver *Current Contents* in a metal or plastic box. It wouldn't be as cheap, or as convenient, as the paper version. I don't know how you would read it

on the train or in the joint. But suppose some readers might sacrifice these conveniences for the status conveyed by owning a Mar IV Inforometer. Even if it were the size of a pocket calculator few people would question its value, as long as it looked scientific. If an administrator asks you, "What's for?", you can say, "It's an information generator." If that doesn't impress him then simply say it is an IS Inforometer. By that time he will have seen our four-color ads in all the trade journals and won't dare ask how, or if, it works.

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