Rise of the Phoenix: A Review of New Forms and Exploitations of Grey Literature

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**phoenix n:** A bird of ancient legend said to be the only one of its kind and to live more than 500 years, at the end of which it built for itself a funeral pile, lighted it with the fanning of its wings, and rose again from its ashes; hence, an emblem of immortality; a paragon.

In the field of scientific, technical, and business information a new legend has arisen. Grey literature (GL), thought by many to have become dormant, has witnessed a rebirth. Grey literature, like the phoenix of ancient legend, has been enkindled by its own resources. New producers and publishers of grey literature have provided us with new forms and types of grey literature. New methods and mediums of storing and distributing grey literature have created new uses for these resources, and in turn, new users of these resources are demonstrating its further capabilities. Government organizations, business and industry, as well as academic institutions have come to view themselves as publishers of grey literature. Their reports, working papers, and policy statements are no longer available only to a limited few in printed form, but are published electronically and are available in networked environments for unlimited retrieval. These new resources, stored in a host of electronic formats, have lured new user groups worldwide, and the exploitation of these resources have not only been made for economic gain, but have greatly contributed to the knowledge base in many fields and disciplines, to the decision making in local and (inter)national government agencies, and in information forecasts for businesses. The rise of this new grey phoenix has emerged over the past quarter of a century from an uncontrolled mass of information to new meta-information applicable for science and industry.

**Developments in the Production, Processing, and Use of Grey Literature**

More grey literature is being produced than ever before. The ratio is estimated at three to four times that of conventional/commercial literature. Individual authors, as well as, corporate authors have now come to view themselves as publishers. Due to the varied and different types of documents and producers of grey literature, the task of collection-forming for librarians has become a veritable challenge. The grey literature that they add to their collections is based on whether they have the budget and staff to process it.

The information retrieval of grey literature cannot be limited to searching grey literature databases. Searches must also be conducted in databases where conventional literature is available. Search techniques for grey literature are

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comparable to those techniques used to search conventional/commercial literature, such as journal articles (see note 2).

There are well-established centers and systems for the document delivery of grey literature. BLDSC (UK), INIST (FR), NTIS (USA), and JST (Japan) are fine examples. However, with the rapid increase of more electronic grey literature as seen on the Internet, the existence of the very source, at a given moment, is an even more preeminent problem then accessing a given document.4

Based on bibliometric studies, when we compare the number of grey literature references, citations, and loan requests with non-grey materials, we find a significant and increased use of grey literature. If we compare these same references, citations, and loan requests by age of the documents, we find much less difference with commercial materials than one might expect.5 Other studies show that the more empirical a subject of research, the more grey literature is used; while inversely, the more theoretical the subject investigated, the less communication there is among researchers, hence the less grey literature used and produced (see note 1).

**Developments and Challenges for Grey Literature Brought on by Networked Environments**

While the Internet and other network environments provide (corporate) authors with a new way of collaborating and exchanging ideas and information, not everything available on the Internet is grey. In much the same way that traditional grey literature is a product of joint/team effort,6 so is new grey literature. This collaboration often has an (inter)national character. These efforts are ongoing to the extent that a final version or end-product may never be completely available.

While librarians are willing to utilize the Internet in the exercise of their duties, the explosive increase in electronic and printed grey literature makes it difficult for them to index and catalog much of it. Tools on the Internet, such as WAIS and WWW, are supporting them in this task. However, librarians should explore the possibility of creating formats, whereby producers/authors can document their own (electronic) publications.

Information handling and access is replacing the traditional accent/policy of collection-forming in libraries. As such, information transfer or switching takes on a more central role for the librarian. This area is so technology driven that it is difficult to determine which medium—disc, CD-ROM, online, Internet, etc.—is the most feasible and economical. In fact, to adequately meet all the needs of such a wide range of user groups, a combination of media and mediums for the transfer of grey literature is required. One cannot solely rely on the Internet for the transfer of electronic grey literature.

New types of grey literature are emerging as a result of networked environments. Examples of these are e-prints,7 grey files,8 and technical documentation (see note 3) retrievable on the Web. Technical documentation must not be confused with technical reports. This new type of grey literature is characterized