The Prospects for an Electronic Office in Nigerian Libraries

F.P. Abifarin

An office has been described by Newman[1] as "an organizational unit that handles the information on which the organization depends". This means that the office is responsible for receiving, recording, processing, storing, filing, retrieving and releasing information to support organizational functions. These functions take place in one form or the other in every office depending on the size of the organization.

An electronic office is an automated system designed specifically for these office tasks. According to Anderson[2], it is an administrative system based on computing, word processing and data transmission facilities. The integration of these facilities to form an electronic office results in an environment in which information is created, received and transmitted on video screens or produced, if desired, on paper-based medium.

The idea of an electronic office was first mooted in 1947 by Lyons, the British firm of tea shops which considered the use of computers for office work. The firm's own computer system called Lyons Electronic Office (LEO 1), became operational in 1951. Since then, the application of computers to office work has become a reality, resulting in a number of benefits to the users. These benefits, according to Cole[3], include:

(1) easier and quicker access to information;

(2) substantial saving on staff, overheads, etc.;

(3) speed of obtaining, processing, storing and retrieving information aids decision-making;

(4) improved communication between individual executives and their offices;

(5) Improved productivity in processing documents, reports and letters.

From the definition earlier provided it can be deduced that the basic components of an electronic office are computers (micros, minis and microframes), wordprocessors (stand-alone or multi-user systems) and data transmission facilities (telephones, modems, data communication terminals). These devices can be integrated with reference facilities (databases stored on magnetic discs), to form an electronic office as shown in Figure 1, which can be used to support office functions.

Publications on the subject have tended to be biased towards business applications. Davis[4] and Popyk[5] fall within this category.
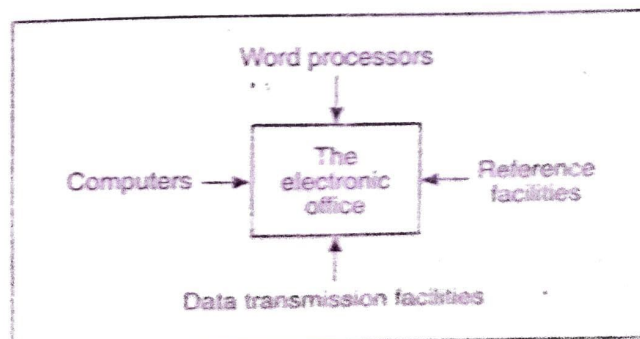
It is only comparatively recently that the use of the term "office automation" has

FIGURE 1.
An Electronic Office