

ELECTRONIC RESOURCE SHARING IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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In the age of digital evolution and escalating price of electronic information, resource sharing is critical for effective functioning of libraries. Increased availability of information in digital format and high costs of journal subscription compels the libraries to work together. Technical advancements provide a platform for digital resource sharing and offer many opportunities for librarians to become more technical and professional. This paper attempts to identify the needs and factors influencing the electronic resource sharing. Also presents the requirements and strategies for effective resource sharing in academic libraries.

INTRODUCTION

The networked environment has enabled the use of libraries that is increasingly free of time and location constraints. The rise of remote access to information increases an academic library's obligation to realign its resources and services to meet the needs of its customers wherever they are located. The library and information services environment has witnessed great changes in 1990s as computing and telecommunications rapidly advanced and matured. Library catalogues and reference tools were the first to move online, and full-text documents and multimedia resources followed them soon on institutional intranets or the Internet. Of late, one can clearly see the increased user preferences to access computer based information resources; library use of networks and dependency on CD based information resources.

Librarians have talked a great deal about resource sharing. It is a mode of operation whereby many libraries share their resources and services. Resource sharing between libraries has a long history. Every now and then, the academic community and the management encourages

librarians to cooperate, as if it is a new idea. As a matter of fact librarians have always shared information about the library holdings and encouraged users to visit other libraries. Union Catalogue of library holdings and interlibrary loans are the classic examples. Digital resources and networking, although not without their own challenges, have created new opportunities for the organization of services, maintaining virtual/digital libraries and venturing to co-operative arrangements in collection development. The goals of resource sharing include:

- ❖ Facilitating users to have better access to library holdings or services.
- ❖ Positive effect on library budget in terms of cost or more services at lesser cost than can be undertaken individually.
- ❖ Exchanging of library resources and information to benefit users.
- ❖ Enabling the users to be more aware regarding the resources not available in their own library.
- ❖ Advocate and support creative use of library/information resources.
- ❖ Develop shared policies for ILL, borrowing and reciprocal agreements for special collections and non-circulating materials.

FACTORS INFLUENCING RESOURCE SHARING

The effectiveness of library services depends on the ability of librarians to provide quick delivery of

documents requested by customers either from physical stock or through networks. The electronic resource sharing is often mentioned, as an effective way for meeting customer needs. On one hand the availability of voluminous data in electronic format and its cost presents challenges for libraries to meet the growing demands of users; on the other hand, the information and communication technologies provide library professionals an opportunity to bring virtual library into reality. The other factors influencing resource sharing could be:

- ❖ Financial stringencies or lack of institutional funding makes libraries to look at alternative ways of improving and extending library resources
- ❖ How to make the existing library resources readily accessible to the members and other interested parties
- ❖ Skyrocketing journal subscription rates
- ❖ Publishers' restrictions on electronic dissemination

NEED FOR RESOURCE SHARING

The tradition of cooperative collection development and resource sharing among libraries stays alive as means to alleviate problems of space and costly duplication, in particular for little used materials. The need for resource sharing stems from:

- i) the explosive growth of all forms of literature;
- ii) increasing reliance or demands on information;
- iii) inflation in the cost of materials;
- iv) increasing cost of information;
- v) reduced or stagnated budget provisions;
- vi) impossible to be self-sufficient to meet increasing demands of its users from own collection and it is not desirable to develop huge collections anticipating future demands.

Economics and technology are the main driving forces of electronic resource sharing. Now with

networks facilitating cooperation, the lines are blurring as to what constitutes ownership and resource sharing. Collection building is no longer an issue to be addressed by librarians rather it is the access to electronic information that will play a critical role. Electronic networks facilitate effective resource sharing with speedy document delivery directly to the users at reduced cost. With rise of Internet, the geographical barriers are broken and equal access to electronic information is increasingly affordable.

Electronic resource sharing is not interlibrary loan. Although interlibrary loan (ILL) is an important function, ILL by itself can no longer meet the information needs of today's users. Traditional ILL is labour-intensive and costly. High-speed transmission of information through networks reduces the physical boundaries and operating expenses.

REQUIREMENTS FOR RESOURCE SHARING

The process of an exchange or sharing involves two major elements. One is resource and the other is player. First there has to be resources to share and then there should be needy players/ collaborators for exchange. The Library Consortia, Professional Associations and University Libraries play a major role in creating and sharing electronic resources. The following are the some of the basic requirements for effective resource sharing.

- There is need for electronic catalogues and indexes for print resources available in the library.
- The technology or equipment to link libraries and to make users aware of collection of own library and other libraries.
- Standardised software, hardware and databases.
- Operating policies on the type of information and archives, which users can access (books, journals, reports, catalogues, indexes, publications etc.).
- Operating manuals or documentation for consistency in operations

- Training of own staff members and end users for effective use of electronic media.

Above all, a commitment from the management to provide such facilities and appropriate budget allocation for installation and operating expenses.

PLANNING RESOURCE SHARING

The execution of any action requires careful planning. Successful sharing requires willingness to cooperate by all institutions involved. The collaborative spirit should take full advantage of electronic networking. The planning has to start at the library level. It is recommended that the following issues should be addressed or considered for effective resource sharing. The issues are presented with an assumption that management is interested and ready to provide the required finances for the venture.

- ❖ The electronic online catalogues and indexes of print resources should be made accessible over intranet to the internal users to check the speed, performance integrity, and data security.
- ❖ Identification of players who are willing to participate in the venture.
- ❖ Discussion with collaborative institutes for the type of resources to be shared. Seminars of participating libraries to formalize the process.
- ❖ To effect a substantial degree of cost containment through collaboration.
- ❖ Identify the overlap of periodical holdings to decide index coverage.
- ❖ Determine the availability of core collection of full text periodicals to identify hardware and software requirements for electronic library.
- ❖ Archiving of holdings on standard platform would allow libraries to share information through network.
- ❖ Identification of specific needs of Internet access of member libraries and network configuration for bibliographic files to online catalogues
- ❖ Gateway (Internet) that organizes and integrates access to library/information services available from the central system and individual participating libraries.
- ❖ Analysis of commercial databases available in the field. This could reduce the effort of indexing.
- ❖ Training of staff members and end users.

The above-mentioned issues are challenging and calls for sincere efforts to pool the resources. To start with, the library consortia or associations can start the activity through following steps:

- ❖ providing links to websites of participating libraries.
- ❖ provide online links to integrated online catalogues and indexes
- ❖ provide links to useful reference sources
- ❖ develop an organized collection of full-text, multimedia documents from academic, governmental, and commercial publishers that are of common interest to participating libraries;
- ❖ initiate online and telephone reference services linked to document delivery services,
- ❖ current awareness services linked to abstracts, full-text, and document delivery services; and
- ❖ install a document delivery service that quickly brings needed digital and print materials to users of the network.

CONCLUSION

Resource sharing is the mainstay of customer satisfaction. Libraries survive through the support of satisfied customers. Always a too often talked about cooperation does not lead to action. The fiscal concerns outline the rethinking priorities

towards planning, cooperative collection development, and evaluating the efficiency. The issues and strategies discussed in this paper call attention from fellow librarians to convince management and get their fullest cooperation for collaborative venture.

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