

Electronic Resource Sharing in Libraries

Dr.S.R. Bodkurwar

Librarian, Shri. Gajanan Maharaj Mahavidyalaya, Mukutban, Dist. Yavatmal

Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the application of Electronic resource sharing in libraries. 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 libraries.

Keywords : Resource Sharing, Technical Advancement, Digital Format.

1. 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 1990's 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. [1]

Electronic resource sharing is not interlibrary loan (ILL). Interlibrary loan itself is not collection development, but only a supplement to library collection development. Though still a very important library function, interlibrary loan by itself can no longer meet the information needs of today's library users. Traditional interlibrary loan is increasingly becoming a labor intensive activity which involves constant checking, verification and shifting of library collections. With users' growing demands for materials not locally available, libraries across the country are forced to either charge high fees for ILL, or further allocate limited budget and personnel resources to support such services. However, users simply can no longer live with the delays inherent in traditional ILL, especially for timely academic information. It is time to develop new means of information access and resource sharing, and the fast growing computer and telecommunication technologies have provided such a platform. [2]

2. Needs for Electronic Resource Sharing

The need for resource sharing stems from three underlying trends of a modern society: the growth of all forms of literature; increasing reliance on information to enable society to function effectively; inflation in the cost of materials coupled with increasing availability of technology. These trends have made it economically imperative to consider sharing resources. Nevertheless the key to successful library information services has changed from ownership to shared access, especially the sharing of electronic resources. No single library can be self-sufficiency any longer; and, no longer can libraries afford to build up huge collections in anticipation of users' demands. New technology has provided the profession the new playing-field of resource sharing. As computer applications continue to increase in importance in library information services, capabilities for information access will continue to improve, issues of ownership and specific document location will eventually fade into irrelevancy. Shared access to electronic information resources will allow large libraries to focus their acquisitions budgets on specialized resources, while smaller institutions will gain enhanced information access that could not otherwise be afforded. Since the start of computer revolution the impact of electronic networking on education in general and library services in particular has been profound. High-speed transmission of information through electronic networks is

reducing the physical boundaries to information and is changing the role of the publisher and the library intermediaries in the chain of scholarly communication. The development of Z39.50 standard, World Wide Web (WWW) browsers and client/server technology has revolutionized the way information is being transferred. With the rise of the Internet and the National Information Infrastructure (NII), geographic barriers are finally broken and equal access to electronic information is increasingly affordable. For library users the information super highway is becoming a primary way of accessing information. [3]

3. 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:

1. Financial stringencies or lack of institutional funding makes libraries to look at alternative ways of improving and extending library resources.
2. How to make the existing library resources readily accessible to the members and other interested parties.
3. Skyrocketing journal subscription rates.
4. Publishers' restrictions on electronic dissemination.[4]

4. 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 player's 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.

1. There is need for electronic catalogues and indexes for print resources available in the library.
2. The technology or equipment to link libraries and to make users aware of collection of own library and other libraries.
3. Standardized software, hardware and databases.
4. Operating policies on the type of information and archives, which users can access (books, journals, reports, catalogues, indexes, publications etc.)
5. Operating manuals or documentation for consistency in operations.
6. Training of own staff members and end users for effective use of electronic media.
7. Above all, a commitment from the management to provide such facilities and appropriate budget allocation for installation and operating expenses.[5]

5. Planning for Resource Sharing in Libraries

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.

1. 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.
2. Discussion with collaborative institutes for the type of resources to be shared.Seminars of participating libraries to formalize the process.
3. To effect a substantial degree of cost containment through collaboration.
4. Identify the overlap of periodical holdings to decide index coverage.

5. Determine the availability of core collection of full text periodicals to identify hardware and software requirements for electronic library.
6. Archiving of holdings on standard platform would allow libraries to share information through network.
7. Identification of specific needs of internet access of member libraries and network configuration for bibliographic files to online catalogues.[6]

Benefits of Sharing Of Resources

1. Martey (2002) identified some benefits for sharing resources to include:
2. Individual Library User and Staff
3. Enhancement service through access to more information services available in consortia member libraries.
4. Cheaper and more effective services.
5. Document delivery services.
6. Selective Dissemination of Information and Current Awareness Services.
7. Electronic Conferences.
8. Increased Human Cooperation.
9. Skills Development for opportunities available through cooperative arrangements.
10. Institution Library
11. Increased cooperation and sharing.
12. Improved purchase of electronic information and library collection management.
13. Reduced library subscription.
14. Provision of education and library services.
15. Increased support for the library especially partners in development (donors) that prefer groups rather than individual institutions.
16. Institutional library exposure at national and international levels.
17. Reduced costs for sustaining the library services.
18. Increased value (quality and quantity) of information resources available to both staff and students, thus supporting the mission of the institution.
19. Increased growth of a national information society.
20. Improvement on Technology development.
21. Standardization of library services across the country.
22. Standardization of library training facilities. [7]

Categories of Resource Sharing

Ikpahindi (2006) quoted Oladapo (2005) categorizing resource sharing into three main categories thus:

1. Self-standing
2. Functional collaboration
3. Partnership

If the three categories are compared, the differences, according to Ikpahindi (2006), will essentially be related to factors such as:

1. Ownership
2. Branding and
3. Financing

In the first category, all of the three factors above belong to one organization or library. In the second, the costs may be shared and the branding may indicate this. Ownership is equally with the lead organization/library. In the third case, the cooperating organizations/libraries share the ownership; contribute resources and 'co-brand' the resulting product or service. It is important that no library serves as a coordinating centre. As much as possible, it should be decentralized, but there is a need for a monitoring committee. The committee will consist of at least one member from each of the participating libraries. The task of this committee is to ensure that the project is effective; hence there will be a need for the committee

to meet regularly. The committee will determine the broad guidelines for operating resource sharing among users in the consortium. [8]

6. ICT As a driving force for Resource Sharing

There is no doubt that recent developments in information access and retrieval has posed a major challenge on the viability of our libraries. The nature of information science and the evolution of scholarly communication, with all the technologies it brought, are changing rapidly. And this continues to force libraries to face the challenge of remaining integral participants in research and educational process. One observable trend in the information environment is that more and more resources are moving to the electronic formats, in some cases being made available only in electronic form and would never be published in any other form. Earlier on, paper union catalogues were developed so that the location of library resources would be known. This method was viewed to be extensive and cumbersome. Advances were later made in the use of web and storage technologies by libraries to automate their resources and services. The use of a standard information retrieval system like Z39.50 allows:

- Library collection from different libraries.
- Connection of member libraries via the Internet.
- No single location to host distributed library collection.

The use of a common search form; the search module goes to the different databases and does a local search and pools all the harvested search results, which are then returned to the user's screen. When a query is typed into the distributed search screen (from the Z39.50 server) using a web browser, the browser passes the query to Z39.50 server to be distributed to the member library servers, with Z39.50 client installed. The clients' responds with results are now passed back to the initiating Z39.50 server to be delivered to the initiating browser client. [9]

7. 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. The traditional concept of ownership in collection development is gradually being replaced by access to information and knowledge without regard to location and format. Resource sharing among libraries has become the common desire and practice. Increase in the volume of library materials and information, the increasing costs of acquiring and processing them, the need for trained personnel, storage space, and the increasing demands by users are motivating factors for libraries to share books, journals, preprints, catalogues, list of publications, recent additions, newsletters, policy decisions, current events, news flash, etc.

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