

CONSORTIA LICENSING: IMPLICATIONS FOR DIGITAL COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT*

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Introduction

The developments in scientific publishing and the pricing policies of publishers offer new challenges and opportunities for academic libraries. A proper strategy can take advantage of the new developments and contribute to solve the ongoing serials crisis, if the libraries manage to change themselves.

The current situation

It is a well known fact that the traditional mode of operation of academic libraries is in deep crisis. Several developments have contributed to this crisis. Firstly, the continuous price increase for scientific information combined with the lack of funding for academic libraries has led to massive yearly cancellations of scientific journals.

Secondly, the exponential growth in the production of knowledge has made it more and more impossible for the individual library to purchase all the relevant information. The effect has been that libraries have become more and more dependent on interlending in order to fulfil the requirements of their users. Thirdly, the rapid technological developments have resulted in a constant pressure for new hardware, software and education and training of library staff. And finally, the overwhelming application of new technologies --especially the World Wide Web-- in all media has contributed to rapid escalating user expectations in the sense that the users expect library information to be delivered just as fast as any other information they need in their daily lives. However, precisely the same technological developments seem to include the opportunity to solve the crisis.

Scientific publishing

Commercial publishers and scholarly societies are trying to implement the new technologies in their productions processes and services. During the past few years all the major publishers have produced electronic editions of their scientific

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journals on a large scale. A number of new journals are only available in electronic format.

Publishers, database producers, subscription agents and other intermediaries are already on the market with their own "integrated electronic libraries" - many of these targeted and tailored towards the end user. These products have the potential of bypassing the academic libraries; some of the producers won't even deal with libraries! Some publishers offer discount to customers who go for electronic products only. This pricing strategy aims at eliminating the print edition in order to save costs in the future. What we are witnessing here is a dramatic change in the production processes and services. These changes require investments on a significant scale both from the producers and the customers.

Furthermore at the same time an increased co-operation and competition among publishers, database producers, agents and other intermediaries are taking place. Co-operation in the sense that publishers offer bibliographic data to database producers in order to increase the demand for their electronic full text journals. And competition often leading to mergers or as one can put it: cannibalism where large redundancy operations are taking place.

There is no sign whatsoever that this will not happen to libraries as well! It is to foresee, that if academic libraries want to survive as institutions, they will have to change their production processes and services as well, that the competition - and co-operation - between libraries and indeed co-operation between libraries and publishers, database producers, agents and other intermediaries will be increased.

Consortia purchasing

The technological developments in scientific publishing -- so far primarily in publishing of scholarly journals -- and the pricing models of the publishers display new opportunities for libraries to give their users instant access to information.

A number of publishers offer consortia -- if their purchase power is big enough -- access to the whole range of their journals. That is, every member of the consortium will have electronic access not only to the journals currently subscribed to but all the journals. As we all know libraries currently subscribe only to those journals that they can afford on any specific time of date, and there will be a number of other journals of the specific publisher the library occasionally will have to interlend as well. Such a consortium agreement will give the library, and therefore also the user, extended access --that is better service-- and reduce the costs --that is staff costs and document delivery costs-- in interlending

procedures. In my opinion, the costs for this is usually a modest increase in payments to the publisher.

Consortia purchasing offers for the single library the opportunity to get access to more journals than they currently have subscriptions to, thus eliminating the continuous cancellation operations. For the consortia members -the specific group of libraries- it offers reduced costs in the interinstitutional document delivery processes for those specific journals.

However there are a number of obstacles for the libraries to take advantage of this development. Firstly, there is the ever present funding problem. Entering consortia requires initial investments in licenses and information and communication technology. Here we face the problem, that most libraries at the beginning of the year have allocated nearly 100% of their funds to the day to day operations and services which means that there are little if any space for decisions during the course of the year. In the rapid changing environment of electronic publishing this is a very dangerous thing to do.

Secondly libraries are not prepared to cash in the savings offered by not handling the print edition of the journals. Their work procedures are still centred around the physical document, staff are not trained in handling electronic documents etc. Therefore many libraries are reluctant in entering consortia agreements especially where publishers impose payments for off-consortia delivery of documents, either in electronic or paper format.

Thirdly there will often be investments to be made in local - consortium based - central hardware set up, mounting of data, development of interfaces, administration of access etc. However those problems are precisely to be solved not by the single library but in co-operation between the participating libraries.

A forward oriented strategy for taking advantage of consortia licensing

Given that no additional funding is available, libraries will have to change strategy and implement a number of changes in order to fight the current crisis and at the same time take advantage of the new opportunities offered by scientific publishing and consortia licensing.

It is a common feature these days that national library authorities or university agencies establish programmes such as Electronic Libraries Programme, National Electronic Library programmes etc. Those programmes have often seed money to help libraries enter the new age by subsidising the first generation of consortia licenses or national licenses. It is in my opinion very important to stress that it is nothing but seed money - and that I so far haven't seen any signs that national

agencies or universities have committed themselves to a long term increase in their funding of academic libraries. On the contrary, the seed money is expected to pay off in the sense that it is expected that libraries will be able to provide more, better, faster and cheaper services for less money in the future. What is expected is nothing but that libraries be able to change themselves and reengineer their services and operations in such a way that they meet user expectations better for less money.

The question is: how can this be done?

The answer to this simple question is quite simple too. The library must - in co-operation with other libraries - develop and implement a strategy consisting of a combination of the following features:

Funds have to be made available from the library budget. This can be done the following way: Firstly reduce the library "paper work" - that is whenever there is an electronic edition of a journal, the library will not handle the printed version. This is meant very literally. The printed edition will not be registered, bar coded and made shelf ready: the printed edition will be non-existent in the library. This means that internal work procedures have to change accordingly.

Secondly prepare an adjustment of staff numbers - the reduction of the "paper work" must be followed by reducing the staff involved in those operations. What is suggested here is really, that you up front cash in the cost savings by not providing *both* print and electronic versions of specific journals

Thirdly invest in education and training for the staff to perform new work processes.

The library management must invest significant efforts in building consortia with other libraries in the region, on the national and international level. The available funds from the above manoeuvres can be used for buying access to electronic journals and databases.

Establish co-operation with other libraries in building local hardware set-ups and interfaces that can handle large amounts of databases and electronic journals. Groups of libraries can - if they are determined - establish digital libraries with lots and lots of content available instantly for their users.

New forms of inter-institutional co-operation and division of labour:

The above scenario requires a whole new approach to library co-operation. So far library co-operation has mainly been established in order to handle interlibrary lending and document delivery on the individual document level. The new

opportunities offered by the technological developments requires much more commitment and indeed much more ability from the management to give in on institutional autonomy in the sense that core library operations and services must be driven in co-operation with other libraries or even outsourced to other libraries.

If the libraries really want to fight the current crisis they must interact in new ways. In reality what eventually must happen is that the concept of the single - primarily - self dependent library must fade away and the larger virtual library must be in place. We have for a number of years now talked about the virtual library. Now it must be in place very quickly.

Furthermore, what we will discover is a decreasing specialisation among libraries: the purchase of whole packages of journals has the effect that a given library suddenly will be in the position where it can provide service in other scientific disciplines.

This will eventually lead to an increased competition among libraries: the above development will push the competition between libraries due to the fact that the purchase dealing with publishers can be often made in such a manner that the library can resale documents on a pay per view or pay as you go basis. As a matter of fact libraries can develop into local or regional document delivery centres on a commercial basis.

Academic libraries will not only have to co-operate in whole new ways but will also have to engage with one another in more vendor-customer like relations.

Recommendations and concluding remarks

Do not wait for seed money to facilitate development towards the electronic or hybrid library. We are living in very turbulent times where things change rapidly in our nearest environment. The commercial publishers and intermediaries offer already today their own integrated electronic libraries. If your library does not make significant progress towards making instant access for the users to a significant amount of electronic information resources, you run the risk that your university decision makers and key users will shop elsewhere for satisfaction of their information needs. Therefore it is very important that library managers take the necessary steps in paving the way towards the digital library - and that has to take place very fast.

The most important things here are making funds available for this development by reducing the library "paper work" and adjusting staff numbers involved in those processes.

Universities must change their primary operations drastically in the coming years. Conventional educational strategies are way too expensive to meet the demands for further education and lifelong learning in our societies. I cannot see any signs why libraries can avoid to change their operations drastically as well - if they want to survive.

With the developments in scientific publishing and implementation of new technologies we have a historical and unique opportunity to use technology - not to do old things differently, but for the first time to do different things.

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