Literature searching and document delivery: organisational issues

MARK PERKINS*

Abstract

An overview of financial, staffing and administrative issues regarding online literature searching and document supply is given in this article. Online literature searching and the requesting of documents have been problematic in the past due to costs and lack of information technology. Electronic document delivery requires better Internet access but MIME compatible email can be used. Institutional issues regarding requests include the question 'who should order?' – the end user or intermediary ordering by the institution, and the need for trained information professionals within medical institutions. Payment mechanisms can be by credit card, institutional subscription, institutional account with the supplying library or by voucher system. Organisational Document Supply Networks (LoansomeDoc) now exist that have set charges for certain services between members or different costs for different member types and with agreed payment mechanisms. An area of increasing importance for document delivery (due to international treaties) is copyright. If such legislation is not to adversely affect information access, professionals must be involved in the creation and amendment of such legislation. Finally, a list of references are given many of which include internet addresses.

Introduction

Although document delivery includes the loan of items such as books, in this paper I will concentrate on the delivery of copies of articles, etc. to be retained by the requester.

Historically searching for health literature has been problematic. Printed indexes have been costly to purchase and time consuming to search. While CD-ROMs have overcome

*Cataloguer, Secretariat of the Pacific Community
PO Box D5, 98848 Noumea, New Caledonia
Ph: +687 262000 – Fax: +687 263818 – Email: Markp@spc.int

the limitations of searchability they are still costly and also suffer from the same production and delivery delays as print publications. Online databases have historically been available only via subscription and have required information and communication technologies beyond the means of many Island states[1]. However, access to computers for online literature searching is now largely available at least at institutional level. Also, there are a growing number of individual users with personal computers accessing the internet. As more bibliographical services become freely available through Web browsers (e.g. Medline[2]), the issue of access for literature search purposes becomes less problematic.

Document requesting and delivery

With the new technology, many institutions supplying documents now accept requests via email or through forms on Internet pages (e.g. British Library Document Supply Centre[3]). Such document requesting requires minimal Internet access as little information is being transmitted or received.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries tend to have good postal services. In regions such as Africa, the development of good postal / delivery service may be more cost-effective than electronic delivery. Electronic document delivery requires much better Internet access however, especially where documents are accessed directly over the Internet. Within the UK there has been much talk of full text document delivery, but not much progress outside of the academic and commercial sectors. This is for a variety of reasons: full text files can often be very large and thus expensive to download for institutions who are paying for their Internet connection by the minute; the cost of subscriptions to full text journals is out of reach for most institutions; the postal service is efficient enough for most requirements. Full text delivery by electronic means can be costly and difficult to sustain without ongoing funds and maintenance of infrastructure[4].

Given the geographical nature of the Pacific region, postal services will never reach the same level as the UK and will not meet the document delivery requirements of most requesters, let alone those in the area of health[5]. As mentioned above, most institutions now have at least minimal Internet access. For some institutions, online interactive access to the full text of journal articles will be an option, given the

speeds of their Internet connection and funds for subscriptions. For others, this is not an option. However, given MIME compatible email, files of scanned images of journal articles can be attached to email messages. Such messages can be 'queued', sent and received at low telecommunication cost times of day. This greatly increases the speed of document delivery[6]. These issues are well understood and documented elsewhere[7], so I will concentrate on administrative and financial issues.

Internal institutional issues regarding requests

End user searching vs. intermediary searching

In the UK, while professional staff may have access to Internet literature searching facilities, there has been some pressure for such searching to be done by support staff (especially librarians) more experienced in this area. This increase in workload has impacted on other areas of their work leading to a reassessment of priorities. The result has been that support staffs have prioritised the training of requesters in literature searching skills and only carry out complex literature searches[8]. Also, often the free access version has a less powerful search facility than the subscription version[9]. Thus it is part of a general move towards training becoming a more important part of librarians' work [10]. Given the changing nature of Internet access in the region, such issues will no doubt also surface here, including the need for trained information professionals within medical institutions and departments.

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End user ordering vs. intermediary ordering

A variety of methods for requesting documents from other institutions exist. They include Post, Fax, Telephone, Email and Direct from databases via webforms[11].

While individual requesters can clearly utilise any of these methods (given the relevant technology), institutionally this may not be the best policy. Some of the factors are:
Document location
a) Documents may be ordered that are held within the requesters institution.
b) The document could be available from a nearby institution.
c) The document may not be for professional use.

Supplying institution
a) The supplying institution may not be the cheapest.

b) The supplying institution is perhaps inefficient or slow.

Delivery mechanism
a) The delivery mechanism is expensive (e.g. in terms of communication costs for electronic delivery.
b) Perhaps the delivery mechanism is not supported by the institution (e.g. online interactive access to the full text).

Clearly, some of the above factors may be more important at times than others. For example:
* While a document is physically held at a nearby institution there may not be an agreement for others to use their facilities.
* Although electronic document delivery (email or online interactive access to the full text) may be expensive & difficult, the urgency of the request may outweigh this consideration.
* While a supplying institution may be more expensive it could be more efficient (either in terms of speed or reliability).

Where possible, it is often more efficient and cost-effective to route document requests (together with full bibliographical and location details) to a colleague experienced (& possibly trained) in this area. This again raises the issue of the impact of this on their existing workload and institutional priorities.

An additional reason for routing document requests through a given individual is that this allows for the monitoring of document requests and receipts. The aids in managing budgets, tracks whether documents have been received, alerts institutions to journals to which they should subscribe and identifies cost-efficient suppliers. There are cheap and user-friendly software packages that can aid in this process[12]. An alternative is to train requesters in the choice of delivery mechanisms, making clear the institutional constraints.

Payment mechanisms

* Credit card. E.g. :
    British Library Document Supply Centre[13],
    Uncover[14]
* Institutional subscription. E.g. :
    ScienceDirect - Elsevier Publishers[15]
* Institutional account with supplying library. E.g.:
    KINETICA, Australian Library Network[16]
    British Library Document Supply Centre[17],
    L'Institut de l'Information Scientifique et Technique[18],
    University Guam or other Lonesome Doc resource library [19].

These can be deposit accounts where charges are deducted after each request; credit accounts where request costs are recorded and paid at set intervals; or reciprocal arrangements whereby co-operating institutions balance their requests at set times and the net borrower pays the net lender.

Voucher schemes

One major advantage that the UK and Australian document supply systems have traditionally had are their payment systems.

In the UK this has been on the basis of British Library Document Supply Centre (BLDSC) vouchers[20], which can be purchased or redeemed by institutions registered with BLDSC. They are then exchanged between institutions (registered or not) on the basis of one loan or photocopy for one voucher. Not only does this allow for easy administration and budgeting, but also means that the ILL (document delivery) budget is not available for use by other sections of the institution. As the voucher is based on a voucher number, payment to institutions is possible by including this number with an email request. In the UK this system has started to breakdown, with differential charges being introduced by certain libraries causing complexities and higher administration costs to the system. The BLDSC system vouchers are only available in hard copy where both institutions are non-BLDSC, though plans to allow for a full electronic system for use between all UK libraries are being discussed (See Else, Brian. Banking on BLDSC. *FIL Newsletter*, Issue 24 - March 1997).

The Australian system is based on pre-purchased Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) vouchers[21]. These may come in a variety of Australian dollar denominations and can be purchased or redeemed from ALIA, only by ALIA Institutional or "Voucher Only" members[22]. As in the UK, they are then exchanged between institutions (whether ALIA members or not) for loans or photocopies, but in Australia there is only an ALIA guide to recommended charges[23]. Given that payment is based on charges and not voucher numbers, this payment mechanism relies on the post and cannot be carried out via email, nor automated.

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) also has a voucher system, which is currently using plastic reusable cards that circulate between participating libraries; again, an electronic version is being discussed[24]. In the Pacific region I believe this type of scheme would be invaluable if it could be maintained.

Organisational document supply networks

Initially within countries, and now increasingly internationally (e.g. OCLC (25), LoansomeDoc[26]), many institutions are entering into formal arrangements for document supply. These networks have varying institutional arrangements and there may be differing commitments between members of the same network. Some of the variables are:

- Members who only request documents but do not supply,
- Members who supply only to other members,
- Networks with set charges for certain services between members,
- Networks who have different costs for different member types (e.g. supplying vs. non supplying members, for members within a given region vs. outside, commercial vs. non commercial members),
- Agreed payment mechanisms
- Agreed performance criteria (response to request times)

The advantages of such networks include:
- Mechanisms to balance the workload and costs of document supply between net suppliers and net requesters. This helps prevent individual institutions becoming overloaded & so unable to sustain their participation. (Where such institutions are central members of such networks, such mechanisms become essential)[27].
- Networks can also make joint approaches to other (especially commercial) suppliers for reduced journal or database subscription rates; such networks are often known as "Consortia"[28]. Such joint approaches could also be made to donors (e.g. for subsidising IFLA vouchers or for technical assistance).
- Network membership can also lead to better access to technical assistance & advice from fellow members in various areas, from IT support to information skills support [29].

As with all networks, members get to know more about each other's constraints. This inter-institutional knowledge can make requesting documents much less problematic; e.g. requests are made to institutions which are known to have a policy of supplying documents.

Staffing and funding issues

As stated above, many technical issues regarding access to literature search and document supply services are well understood and over the coming years will be addressed. However, the implications of such access for staff workloads, funding priorities and organisational arrangements are not considered. This can lead to situations where such services can be seen as a drain on existing resources, unsustainable after initial commitments to other institutions or missed opportunities[30]. Addressing these issues in advance allows institutions to take full advantage of such services when they become financially & technically available.

Copyright

A final issue, which is the subject of much dispute in the OECD countries, is copyright. Due to international treaties, legislation is changing rapidly[31]. Professionals in the United States & the European Union have been actively lobbying to minimise the damage done by any such changes to document delivery services[32]. Traditionally copyright has not been a major issue within the Pacific Islands. Given their isolation, researchers have copied documents at will (photocopiers permitting). Given the World Trade Organisation TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property) treaty[33], this could change especially if document supply in the Pacific becomes more organised and thus visible. Many Pacific Islands currently have no copyright legislation. This means that professional staff within the region have the opportunity to influence such laws from the start, rather than try and minimise adverse effects. A conference on Pacific Island intellectual property legislation was held at the Secretariat in February 1998[34].

To illustrate the impact of copyright on document delivery, the following details the legal limits on document delivery in the UK.

UK copyright and document delivery

There are limits on what can be provided without contacting publishers for permission[35]. Where publisher permission has not been sought, a declaration form must be signed by the individual requester, for each request, and held for 7 years by either the requesting or supplying library. (Under UK law, certain types of libraries have special legal privileges, allowing them to more easily request and supply documents).

Library initiated requests

LOAN   *No requirements*
PHOTOCOPY
      Single journal article/section of book or unpublished
      material: *Declaration form is the responsibility
      of the requesting library*
      Other: *Publisher permission is required*

Individual initiated requests

LOAN   *No requirements*
PHOTOCOPY
      Single journal article/section of book or unpublished
      material: *Declaration form is the responsibility
      of the supplying library*
      Other: *Publisher permission is required*

Notes:
- Electronic signatures are not yet recognised by UK Copyright Law; thus all Copyright declarations must be in hard copy. Electronic signatures are being discussed at European Union level, it should be permissible in the near future (36), so allowing for electronic copyright declarations.
- BLDSC has an arrangement with the Copyright Licensing Authority (CLA) and various publishers whereby the BLDSC supplies "other" material but charge requesters a copyright fee (set by the publisher) and passes this on via the CLA[37].

Another major concern in OCED countries has been that professionals have been unable to obtain documents written by members of their own institutions - this has led to moves for the copyright in such documents to be held by the institutions rather than transferred to the journal publishers.

Traditionally copyright has not been a major issue within many non-OECD countries. Given their isolation, researchers have copied documents at will (photocopiers permitting). Given the World Trade Organisation TRIPS (Trade related intellectual property) treaty, this could change especially if document supply in such countries becomes more organised and thus visible.

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