

ELECTRONIC INFORMATION RESOURCES: A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TOWARDS INTRODUCING USERS

By

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ABSTRACT

The progress in Information Technology and the emergence of Internet and its WWW has given a new face-lift to the information systems. The library collections with the tradition of its holdings are now added with the electronic information resources in various formats. The popularity and ease in use of WWW has lured most of the reputed publishers to host their products on Web. In this changing information environment, the role of information professionals is becoming crucial and challenging. It is becoming important to introduce users to maximum and optimum utilisation of electronic information resources. In this paper, the authors have highlighted the need and importance of user instruction services and suggested user instruction programmes for better utilisation of electronic information resources.

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0. Introduction

Advances in Information Technology have brought about many changes in libraries. Informational professionals have to switch over to new methods and techniques for handling information. In this context the role of information professionals is becoming very challenging. The optical storage technology has brought a sea change in information storage and retrieval systems. Library collections are growing multifold and electronic information resources are becoming vague. Almost entire gamut of primary, secondary and tertiary information resources hitherto embodied in print format are now available in the form of electronic databases. The Internet and its World Wide Web (WWW) have provided a platform to access information from remote databases. As a result, information resources available on web are increasing. In this changing scenario of handling information, the role of information professional is very crucial, as he has to act as a bridge between information and its end users. Information professionals have to coordinate and manage the task of introducing the users to electronic information resources.

1. Electronic Information Resources:

The libraries with their traditional holdings in print format, are now being added with electronic information resources in various formats like CD-ROM and DVD-ROM databases, On-line databases, E-journals and plenty of Internet or Web resources. The content of these sources varies from bibliographic or factual to full text.

1.1 CD-ROM databases

CD-ROM databases are increasing day by day in almost all fields due to their many advantages in information storage and retrieval. Majority of publishers of books and journals, on-line vendors and various learned societies are bringing out new titles in CD format with powerful, user-friendly retrieval software. Electronic information resources in CD format include abstracting and indexing services, encyclopedias, dictionaries, directories, yearbooks, back volumes, patents, standards and many other reference works. The CD-ROM technology has given ample opportunities for information professionals to introduce more information services to end-users.

1.2 DVD-ROM databases

The advent of DVD- Digital Video Disc or Digital Versatile Disc, with its 17 GB of high data storage capacity, has made it possible to include more multimedia elements like video and sound and to integrate many reference sources on a single disc. "The other features like higher quality of sound and video, higher rate of data transfer, data security etc., are making DVD more viable option than CD-ROM. But, at present due to some problems like lack of standards among the manufacturers of DVDs and drives, need for extra hardware on PCs and their higher prices are making the growth of DVD technology slow"¹. Some DVD reference sources include Britannica DVD 99, Webster's International DVD Encyclopedia-2000, Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia, Eyewitness World Atlas DVD-ROM Deluxe Edition, The Complete National Geographic on DVD-ROM etc.

1.3 Online Databases

The recent growth of Internet and the popularity and ease in use of Web are making libraries to subscribe to online information services. The online database services like Dialog (KR Information) and STN are now moving towards being webcentric. The usage of online databases against their CD-ROM counterparts has to be evaluated and decided on the basis of cost effectiveness and timeliness. Few Online information services are KR ScienceBase and STN. The KRScienceBase, which includes information sources like BIOSIS, CA Search, Elsevier Science Publishers, Reuters, NTIS etc. The STN international provides a complete collection of in-depth databases in science and technology which gives quick, direct links to the literature, patents and chemical catalogues. Chemical Abstract Service, producer of the world's largest and most comprehensive database of chemical information, offers several databases on STN like CAPLUS, INSPEC, MEDLINE, SCISEARCH, TOXLIT etc.

1.4 E-journals

E-journals or Electronic Journals are gaining more importance with the emergence of Internet. The publishing world is undergoing a revolutionary change as more and more publications are becoming WEB centric. “Most of the publishers are choosing WEB as an access medium using HTML to mark up the journal content so that it can be read using a web browser. These are also called as networked E-journals. Other publishers have chosen to use additional access software in conjunction with the WEB, the most popular being Adobe Acrobat and its associated Portable Document Format (PDF) file type’².

1.5 INTERNET as an Electronic Information Resource

The INTERNET and its World Wide Web (WWW) have given a paradigm shift to information management. The information available on net is increasing rapidly and the task of providing relevant information to patrons is gaining paramount importance in all types of libraries. Most of the reputed publishers, learned and commercial societies are hosting their products on net and also all libraries are sharing their internal and external information resources by means of web pages and Web-OPACs. The powerful search engines over net are aiding the information location quite efficiently. The Internet services like E-mail, Bulletin Boards, Newsgroups, Discussion Lists, etc are gaining importance in libraries and are becoming indispensable resources for the users. Due to impact of Internet, there is a swift migration from offline to online, as Web is becoming a popular user interface for providing access to remote and frequently updated resources.

2. Instruction Services for the use of Electronic Information Resources

The money and efforts involved in the procurement of electronic information resources are going in vain due to their under utilisation. The reasons may be attributed to lack of awareness among users and intermediaries, training and orientation and less interest on part of information facilitators. “Despite tremendous publicity and excited curiosity about Information Technology in general and electronic information in particular, substantial underutilisation of imported IT products, services, tools and means can be seen everywhere. One of the important reasons for underutilisation of electronic information is lack of requisite level of working knowledge and consumption skills among users and information intermediaries’³. User education or instruction in most of the libraries has lost its credibility, as there are no definite user orientation programmes except providing a copy of rules and regulations of the library. There is a pressing need for methodological approach towards instructing the users for maximum and optimum utilisation of electronic information resources.

3. Planning of a User Instruction Programme

There should be proper planning and definite programmes for the introduction of electronic information resources to users. The programmes must be intended to assist information professionals who provide and publicise new electronic information resources to users. With increasing influx of electronic information to libraries, the user orientation programmes must be implemented specifically to electronic information resources. There must be proper set guidelines for information service providers, who coordinate and manage the introduction of new electronic information resources and these guidelines must offer practical guidance to library staff who are concerned with strategies for implementation, policy, procedure, education and or direct provision of electronic information services. While planning for user instruction programme, specifically for the maximum and optimum use of electronic information sources, following factors must be considered.

1. After procurement of new electronic information resource, the library should determine which staff will be involved and what their specific responsibilities and assignments will be in the user instruction programme;
2. The level of need for formal and informal user instructions must be ascertained and planning for user instruction should accommodate various learning styles like individual and group assistance, peer assistance, system tutorials, documentation etc.
3. The information professionals who are part of user instruction programme must acquire in-depth knowledge of the electronic information resources. This must include hands-on practice, system tutorials, peer instruction and study of appropriate manuals and other related documentation. The possibility of outside trainers or experts must also be considered;
4. Proper publicity of various electronic information resources must be done to draw the attention of users. The publicity or extension programmes must incorporate a variety of communication modes and formats including print and electronic ones;
5. The library should conduct regular evaluations and assessments to determine the effectiveness of the electronic resources in meeting information needs of the users.

4. Conclusion

The dramatic and swift changes in information management have given a new face-lift to most of the libraries. The users, who form the integral part of information system, have to be given due importance in achieving the pinnacle of success. New strategies and vistas have to be explored from time to time for user education and instruction programmes. A methodological approach for better and optimum use of electronic information resources must be adopted.

5. References

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