
FIGHTING YOUR WAY THROUGH THE ELECTRONIC JUNGLE : WHO MANAGES E-JOURNALS ?

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1. TARGET OF PRESENTATION

When I was asked to give this presentation I decided that it should not to be too technical. It is therefore aimed at Managers of library services who don't believe how difficult it is to provide constant and reliable access to e-journals: I hope that they will see why serials are not always available as they should be; and those at the coal-face who provide access to e-journals so that they will see that they are not the only people struggling through the jungle. Incidentally the jungle is not confined to journal literature but time requires that my presentation is.

I want to explain the environment (the jungle) that e-journals are in and then I will talk about the tasks which have to be done to maintain the environment and then I will ask the question Who should do these tasks.

Firstly it is important for you to know that I am speaking from my own experience of a complex learning resource service delivered across 12 campuses; six of these have periodicals assistants, the others have staff who check in the periodicals. There is a senior serials librarian (whose appointment was spurred on by the computerisation of serials, but who is invaluable in dealing with e-journals) and a serials cataloguer, whose job includes dealing with URLs. There is a systems team which includes a webmaster for the pages on the library and information side of the service and we (I say we because I am in charge of the team) also write and adapt programs to facilitate the serials activity as well as looking after our integrated library management system, Horizon, which has a serials checkin module. We have an Athens administrator who also is the person who looks after CHEST contracts (contracts organised through the Consortium of Higher Education Sites) and a deputy Athens administrator (Athens is an authentication system used in UK Higher Education). There are 20 subject librarians who should be looking after the journals in their subject area. Then we have our subscription agent, EBSCO.

2. THE E-ENVIRONMENT

The e-environment we are talking about consists of e-journals on remote computers. We do not host any ourselves except for the Economist and archives of the New Internationalist and some newspaper archives (now current ones are found on Proquest) which we keep on our CD-ROM caching server.

These e-journals can be categorised. Some are freely available (though the problem with those is that they are not always the same as their hard copy. Sometimes they have more ads, sometimes fewer ads but we have rather shrunk from being that precise in our catalogue and may put full text when it is not really the full text.) Some are freely available without any hard copy equivalent, these can be called born digital but some born digital are only available on subscription, and of course that is probably the way many learned journals would go if the publishers were confident in all the issues involved (technical and legal). A third category is those journals with free access to subscribers of the hard copy and this is the biggest by far. Many print journals annoyingly contain inside the covers some statement like 'Ask your librarian how you can access the contents of this journal online'. Your friendly librarian would in some

cases have only to go through the procedures I am going to describe. In other cases your librarian might have to change the subscription. One publisher provided all its digitised humanities journals to subscribers of the hard copy but for its science collection required a library to subscribe to both at 110% of the hard copy or digital only at 90%. That leads me on to conditional access: one condition is that you have to pay a small flat fee for the right to access digitised material; another is that you can only see only the last year or two. Other journals are provided through packages.. Emerald is a good example and there is Ovid too. We do not subscribe to NESLI or JSTOR. These packages cause their own problems. We do not necessarily know what journals are available to us from the packages and since many do not interest us we do not have time to catalogue those.. But which traditional library ever decided not to catalogue something it had in its collection though it might not be very interesting (and don't tell me that it would have been discarded: of course it was catalogued!). Another problem that arises is with value-added services such as the ability to search for individual words in journal articles which is provided by some of the journal hosts. The hosts would be pleased for students to find articles which were not subscribed to and would be pleased if they paid to see them but the students become annoyed. Luckily most hosts now allow you to search just for those articles you are subscribed to but users will ignore this and search for articles in all journals. Then, of course, they complain when they can't see for free the articles they have found. Then there are publishers' websites which you can reach via Google and which will take you to journals to which you do not have free access. Of course there are no solutions to the fact that students can find what we do not subscribe to, other than training of the users to know when they are in our university's site and when they are not, but it all goes to show what a jungle we are treading in !

3. WHO ARE THE PLAYERS IN THE E-ENVIRONMENT

The main players in the game are the publishers who are anxious for a financial return. If this were not the case their journals could be hosted on the web like many other resources and links made to them and that would be all. Much of the infrastructure set up by the publishers is designed to protect their property. However we are also dealing with a new medium and publishers have not always been very competent in using new technology. Moreover publishers are among the first in the field to want to sell large quantities of data over the web to a large number of individuals who are not paying individually for it. So some of the systems I will describe later are a little ropy. Publishers may or may not host their own journals.

Then we have librarians of all kinds (I described who participated in this game earlier as far as my own university is concerned. Librarians have been intermediaries in on-line searching for a long time; but this is different. We never had to help people to the same extent in finding what they needed in print journals. Additionally all students at whatever level have access to indexes to journal articles and will tax the librarian's expertise in finding what they need much more often than was the case in the days of printed indexes and journals.

Finally we have users with high expectations. We also have because of the constraints on universities and on society in general a much larger number of distance learners, students who do not often come to the campus, and because we can sometimes provide them with services remotely it is natural that they should seek to obtain everything remotely and at all times.

The e-environment has to be policed and this is done using a number of different methodologies;

IP authentication: every computer on the internet has an identifier and the library registers the range it has with the database host so that the database will only allow access to those from registered addresses. The main problem here is that users cannot get to the resources from home unless they go through our university dial-up service which has been registered as part of our university range. Another problem is that sometimes we are allowed only one individual IP address. This has been found to be the case with professional association journals which are usually intended for one member to see.

The Athens Access Management System is an authentication system developed for the Joint Information Systems Committee of the UK Higher Education Funding Council but used also by the NHS and universities in some other countries. Universities give their users usernames and passwords and the databases have a list of usernames which are acceptable. Some publishers do not regard that as secure enough. It is outside their direct control and anyone can give their password to a friend in a non-subscribing institution.

So some publishers (in order to feel more secure) like to set up their own passwords which they can change whenever they feel it is necessary. Our problem is how we communicate these to our users. Finally, if you can't get access as a subscriber (which may be because the complex system has failed somewhere) a page will appear telling you that you can use your credit card to pay for access to an article you want to see.

4. TASKS TO BE DONE : ACCESS

This brings us now to the tasks to be done:

First we have to provide a route to the e-journal via in our case the catalogue, a journals list and a database. Our software package used not to have the possibility of links to electronic resources so we set up journals lists on the web and still retain access to these even though our catalogue has now implemented links. Additionally some subject pages have links to electronic resources. We also have an experimental database which we generate from the catalogue at frequent intervals. Currently if anyone finds an incorrect URL (usually after a complaint from a library user) they email either the serials cataloguer or the library webmaster. The systems team and serials cataloguers exchange information between themselves. Sometimes subject librarians inform one or both of them of journals to which we are entitled but have neither in the catalogue nor on the journals list nor on both. Of course the problem is what to include. Some journals particularly those we gave up some years ago may have only one year's access to the electronic form. Is it worth putting them on? And now with Science Direct WebEditions we have available a rolling two year period. In some cases we have access through different information providers to different runs. As I mentioned, some journals we have as part of packages and are not of general interest. Similarly with the free journals: where do we draw the line about what we catalogue. How do we keep the catalogue and list aligned; with difficulty so we hope to switch to the database generated by the catalogue or possibly to have a separate index in the catalogue just for electronic resources.

Sometimes there may be more than one route to the journal or to different electronic copies of one journal hosted on different external computers. Do we provide both or just one? My inclination is to provide as many access routes as we can just in case one does not work. Some of the user services librarians feel though that having more than one route confuses the students.

5. HOW DO WE ENABLE THE JOURNAL ?

Then we have to inform the hosts. Our journal subscription agents have agreed to do this for us for the journals they offer us in hard copy and even for journals they do not provide. Often journals fall between stools and we do not have access when we should. Then we have to register these with the database hosts. This is one of our biggest problem areas. At times the agents have tried to help us with the registration of our IP address ranges but in my experience it is best to communicate this directly. Another problem is ensuring that they register exactly our entitlement, the actual range of volumes we have paid for, and that the host is aware that we have paid our subscription for the current year.

6. REGISTERING JOURNALS

In order to give you a flavour of the problems, here's an account of some recent activities I have undertaken. Every time I need to register a journal I find different problems. Our Serials Cataloguer had recently received a list from one of our campuses of journals which apparently did not have access set up. The staff on the campus sending this list would probably not have known why these journals were not working so it could be merely that the journals had no link from the catalogue or the journals list. I therefore began by going down the list looking on Ingenta's website to see if they hosted these journals. For those that were Ingenta's I sent off the PID (Publication Identifier) using Ingenta's web form and received a message to say that they would be available when added to our Ingenta list. I or someone in my team need to remember to check this in future or at least the serials cataloguer has to remember to do this.

Sometimes the PID is not accepted and we are told our subscription cannot be traced. We then have to begin to engage in an exchange of emails with the host who on occasions continues to say they cannot trace our subscription. Sometimes this results in a great many emails or phone calls.

On this occasion, I found via Google that one journal was Taylor and Francis who host their own online journals. I found our administration login in our internal manual and tried entering the PID as the required Access Activation Code. It did not work so our serials librarian logged on to EBSCO's journal administration website, to see what we could use to activate our subscription.

In all these cases there are times when the hosts do not update their records of what we have, to take into account the latest issues and so we are unable to view the latest though the system will let us see the earlier ones. Then we have to try and register the latest and often have to resort to email since the normal registration forms do not allow us to specify that we are lacking only a part of the journal.

7. EBSCO A/Z

EBSCO are a great help in ensuring that our journals are available; of course since we purchase most through them, they ought to know the situation. However, they also hold on their server data which is of use to our users and they make it available through EBSCO A/Z. This service provides library users with a single list of titles to which they have access. With A-to-Z, users can quickly locate and link to journals of interest. Users can search for journals by keyword or browse an alphabetical list by title or subject. The library can customise the access to the list including matching the style of the library's other Web-based services. The master A-to-Z title database provides link and coverage information to more than 94,000 unique titles from more than 870 database and e-journal packages from approximately 175 different providers.

8. WHO DOES THESE TASKS ?

Correcting inaccessible serials or those for which users are being asked to pay and doing the detective work to get the problems resolved is done usually by the systems team who have to refer to the serials librarian who in turn may have to refer to the serials assistant on the campus which takes the hard copy of the journal since the PID often appears only on journal wrappers and no one records them elsewhere.

The Systems Team also check up to ensure that the journal hosts know our IP ranges or inform new hosts of the ranges. At Middlesex, this is felt to be a systems task because knowing about IP addresses is 'technical'. The nightmare here is that some are only available at certain sites.

HTML bad links are initially discovered by users and enquiry desks pass on the information to the systems team and serials cataloguer. The systems team can also do an exercise to extract all the fields in the records with links, produce a file and submit this file to <http://validator.w3.org/checklink>. This reports any bad links.

The links are corrected by the serials cataloguer for the catalogue and the library webmaster and the library systems team for the list. Not all links are in both. We do not systematically look through the subject librarians' pages to make corrections.

At Middlesex we have wavered between having an electronic resources librarian post and doing it the way we do now. You can see that a large number of the tasks could be done by such a person but in our multi-site environment there are also tasks such as those relating to the non-electronic versions which have to be done locally. Furthermore though one person can be a champion for electronic journals no one can keep track of their continuing accessibility. So no one person or role can achieve everything needed for electronic journals.

9. CONCLUSION

There are a few features I have not mentioned and these could be in the province of the electronic services librarian.

Purchasing of e-journals: It would be good to have a champion for this. This is particularly the case with journals which are not provided on a print subscription.

Other tools such as Open URL : Of course an e-resources librarian would be the natural person to look at these and other software packages which make use, for example, of Open URLs and the links that can be obtained from them. This post could also be responsible for ensuring we were all informed of new developments in e-journals.

And finally it would be of interest to sort out our current journals purchasing : many journals are purchased across more than one campus but if we subscribed to the electronic form we would be able to abandon multiple copies of some journals and save money — though would the rights to our existing files be in jeopardy if we ceased to subscribe?

So, I have told you who manages e-journals at Middlesex and how an electronic resources librarian might be able to help further. But I have not put forward an ideal solution to the problems that we have perhaps because there is not one. At least I hope that I have stimulated your thinking if these problems are relevant to you.

About Author



Alan Hopkinson is Head of Library Systems at Middlesex University and is responsible for running the library system and for the University library's Bibliographical Services and so manages cataloguing and acquisitions of journals and the tools that are used to make electronic journals available to the users. He has previously installed library automation at the Tate Gallery and the Institute of Development Studies after working in the British Library on MARC formats and in the MERLIN project. He is chair of both the British Standards Committee Computer Applications in Documentation (IST/2/7) which entitles him to sit on ISO TC 46 SC 4, the ISO Committee in the same subject area, and of IFLA's Permanent UNIMARC Committee.

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