CONSORTIUM BASED LIBRARY SUBSCRIPTION : SOME ISSUES

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Abstract

The academic environment is becoming more and more competitive in its dealings and functions and the academic culture is fast transforming as enterprising in nature. The library as the centre for scholarly communication faces many challenges in meeting needs of its users. Among the solutions used in libraries in providing information, an access strategy through web is very much requested by modern users. As such, now-a-days, the consortium-based library purchasing is getting favour. This paper discusses some of the problematic issues in consortium – based library subscription.

Keywords : Information technology, Library consortium and Information use.

1. INTRODUCTION

Information has been a vital resource for communication or dissemination of knowledge of one individual to another from the very early stage of human civilization to till today and thereby has become an inevitable element of all human activities and developments. The rapid progress of information technology through R & D activities all over the world now tries to satisfy the information need of the human being in diverse manner. The explosion of information, in multidimensional form and voluminous development has urged the libraries to adopt new philosophies and technologies for collection development and reduce the costs of information. Today, most of the librarians are faced with economic problems, especially in developing countries to collect all the new generated information and to satisfy the high degree of aspiration for knowledge of the users. The main task of a librarian is to adjust the input resources with the desired output by adopting various alternatives for taking effective decisions and extending the services smoothly.

Present days Librarians, have no time spare for relaxation behind well organized book racks, well polished and efficiently maintained card catalogues with well mannered staff. Time is gone for them to sip their tea while other academics are engaged in hot arguments for grabbing their share or in making justifications in decision making. The librarian himself now is the hot topic in academic meetings. There is a share in almost all the teaching, learning and researching issues for the librarian to answer. The modern librarian finds some answers for these issues through library automation and through electronic library services. The information and communication technology has touched every aspect of life and in last few years, has grown highly user friendly. Publishing industry is also one of the areas where the technology has spread its wings. Today's information technology and new ways of publishing has promoted users as well as librarians to go for electronic publications for the new acquisition. Tremendous advantages provided by IT and the challenges, particularly the funds crunch, forced to resort to consortium initiatives.

2. LIBRARY CONSORTIUM

A Library consortium, is the group of libraries coming together with common interest. It has been emerging as a new concept that facilitates the libraries to get the benefit of wider access to electronic resources at affordable cost and at the best terms of licenses.

In generic term, the library consortia, are used to indicate any group of libraries that are working together toward a common goal, whether to expand cooperation on traditional library services such as collection development, or electronic information services. The term is now used perhaps too broadly, and encompasses everything from formal legal entities such as incorporated or governmental agencies to informal groups that come together solely to achieve better pricing for purchasing electronic information. It is a community of two or more information agencies, which have formally agreed to coordinate, cooperate or consolidate certain functions, to achieve mutual objectives. It is an association of a group of libraries to achieve mutually the joint benefits. The consortia may be formed on a local, regional, national, or international basis; on a functional or format basis; or on a subject basis. The salient features for library consortium are:

(a)   It eliminates the different problems faced by the libraries to provide various services to the users.

(b)   It helps to meet the thrust of information of the vast people due to rapid growth of population all over the world.

(c)   It helps to cope up with the newly generated knowledge published in different forms, such as, printed and non-printed documents, electronic media on various disciplines, multi-disciplinary and new generated subject areas.

(d)   It collects all the documents published at the national and international level, because of the library financial crunch; and

(e)   It helps to overcome to language barriers i.e., primary documents are being published by the developed countries like USA, UK, France, Japan etc. and among them the non-English speaking countries produce majority of scientific literatures in their mother languages.

A consortium provides access to online journals. There are two types of electronic journals, viz., - Electronic version of printed journals and E-journals with no print counter part Major publishers of journals such as Academic Press, Elsevier and Blackwell Scientific provide web access to their journals. E-journals offer quick access to almost all current journals, which are otherwise difficult to subscribe by a library in print media. Electronic form is available much earlier than their print version for distribution. Publishers such as Academic, Springer Verlag and Elsevier offer full text of articles at cost. For examples :

1.   IDEAL articles back to 1993 are now available on-line.

2.   LINK is a visionary information service created for the Internet by the science publisher Springer. It provides an extensive digital library delivered directly to the workplace of scientists, librarians, and information brokers.

3.   SCIENCEDIRECT offers a rich electronic environment for multiple content sources including research journals, bibliographic databases and reference works. The world's largest full-text journals database provide for the following:

●   More than 1700 scientific, technical & medical peer-reviewed journals

●   Over 59 million abstracts

●   Over two million full-text scientific journal articles

●   An expanding suite of bibliographic databases

●   Linking to another one million full-text articles via Cross Ref to other publishers' platforms.

It is a known fact that if electronic documents subscribed through consortium or aggregator, it can provide libraries with a single point of access, reference control, and better management of finances for all its electronic periodical subscriptions. Service can utilize the Internet and World Wide Web (WWW) to deliver full text articles direct to users' workstations. Users can carry out searches on a single table contents of database and access, view, download, or print full text electronic periodical articles from any publisher, provided the library has a valid subscription. Service aims to simplify library subscription purchasing of all electronic periodical titles, eliminate the need for different passwords for each title, simplify management of access to these periodicals, supply standard, customized periodicals usage reports to librarians, provide searching facilities, assist librarians in electronic archiving, and enable electronic document delivery to users via the libraries. In fact, it offers more concrete advantages than, if gone alone. The advantages it offers are the scopes for negotiations for lesser price, favourable bargains, easy to handle complicated issues like licensing, archiving, etc. Additionally, the consortia offer an efficient and inexpensive way to purchase an automated library system. In general, a consortium :

(i) Offers low – cost access to information.

(ii) Promotes the rational use of funds.

(iii) Expands the readership of journals and other e-databases by allowing more users access.

(iv) Complements digital collections in the different digital libraries for enhanced access.

(v) Decreases cost for establishing the digital library.

(vi) Ensures the continuous subscription to the periodicals subscribed.

(vii) Guarantees local storage of the information acquired for continuous use by present and future users.

3. POINTS TO BE KEPT IN MIND WHILE GOING FOR CONSORTIA BASED SUBSCRIPTION :

Various consortia have been formed by different groups throughout the world. But there is no single model for consortium, however, various types of consortia may be observed on following points:

(i) From highly decentralized organization to highly centralized ones.

(ii) The degree of centralization of a consortium is the primary factor affecting not only how member institution interact each other, but also relationship with external part i.e., the publisher or vendor.

(iii) More decentralized the consortium, the grater the degree of autonomy each member retains.

(iv) Correlation between the amount of autonomy that the individual institution retains and the ability of the consortium to achieve set goals as a group.

(v) If the authority is highly centralized, the consortium is more likely to have dedicated staff to perform ongoing work.

Whatever, the type of a consortium may be, it should be based on some standards and norms. These may be :

● The consortia should be able to specify the content and the format for resources to be acquired. Consortia should take advice or majority decision from the member libraries.

● Selection decisions should not be compromised by provider-defined linkages between print and electronic versions of the same products.

- An electronic resource should have sufficient content to evaluate its usefulness and to justify its selection.

- Acquisitions should be compatible with the goals of the national consortia purchasing strategic plan.

- In any case, this purchasing should also take the right to archive the whole document at the national consortia site for the access and use by the member library or any of the distributed location depending upon the discipline under which that will fall.

- Consortia purchasing for different disciplines under national consortium should do equal justice to all the disciplines. Overlap should be avoided. How does the grouping of disciplines take place? We cannot do justice, if we take management and technology in one set of groups. This will provide benefit to the one group of library; others will have to manage with minimum resources. The structure should be scalable discipline wise.

Collection Development : Collection Development Guidelines need to be framed. Guidelines given below could be analyzed for the national consortia.

- Principal considerations for the inclusion in national consortium purchasing:
  - Establishing a rationale for the acquisition of each resource
  - Meeting faculty and student information needs
  - Providing access to electronic resources and integrating them into library programs

- Balance should be sought among:
  - Disciplines
  - Instructional and research resources
  - Different needs of each campus

- Priority should be given to those electronic resources, which offer:
  - Integrity of the resource
  - Economies of scale
  - Benefit to the greatest number of users
  - Timely availability
  - Increased functionality
  - Remote Access
  - Improved resource sharing
  - Rights to perpetual access

License Agreements and Archiving *:* Although types of licenses have improved considerably since the early years, a number of parameters used are clearly unfavorable and too complex at present for some consortia. One of the challenges that the libraries have to face is the trend towards turning information into a commodity for use through generalized expansion of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). Libraries have basically formed consortia in order to gain stronger negotiating positions and obtain better conditions. When all types of libraries in a state join together it can pay off in better license agreements and library consortia can buy access to resources that small libraries could never afford. On the down side by relinquishing negotiation to a consortium a library can sometimes relinquish its power to choose the

system or database and could end up with the lowest cost product rather than the best one. Experiences of Canadian National Site Licensing Project, Schneider, California State University and the Guidelines of ICOLC may be considered for license agreements:

- Statement of Current Perspective and Preferred Practices for the Selection and Purchase of Electronic Information could in Toto be adopted.

- Permanent rights to use information purchased even in case of cancellation.

- Authorization and authentication are the shared responsibilities of library and vendor.

- Fair use provisions for educational, and research programs for viewing, downloading and printing.

- Holds the right for reformatting within the fair use.

- Adequate delivery of usage information of electronic product licensed.

- Easy access to archival electronic material.

- Hold the right to maintain archival access.

- Ask for "most favored Customer Status".

4.   RESPONSIBILITY OF CONSORTIA AND ITS MEMBERS :

We know the democracy is the greatest asset and principle for equality, this should also be the norm for the consortium. All initiatives and efforts should be taken in the same spirit. The system should be very transparent and need to be flexible for the benefit of all the involved community. At the same time it should be strong enough that no one group or part of group utilizes its benefits only for itself.

Consortia system should have strong bylaws, MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) for its members with clear guidelines and instructions, based on the democratic principle. MOU need to be signed by the Institution Head with all terms and conditions unambiguously stated. The institutions will be bound to follow all terms and conditions in letter and spirit.

5.   MAJOR INITIATIVES

Many international and national consortia of various types as stated above are working in the field of library science. To name few on international level are: *Arizona University Libraries Consortium* (United States), *Consortium of Academic Libraries in Manchester* (United Kingdom), *Co-operative Action by Victorian Academic Libraries Limited* (Australia), *Illinois Library Computer Systems Organizations* (United States), *Missouri Research Consortium of Libraries* (United States) and *Pennsylvania Academic Library Connection Initiative* (United States). As far as, the national level is concerned, some of important consortia are:

- Science Direct-Elsevier

- Gale Group-A Thmoson Company

- INDEST Consortium for IITs and IIMs

- J-Gate – the e-Journal Gateway and

- UGC-INFONET : E- Journals Consortium

UGC – INFONET is the largest emerging library consortium, which is funded by the University Grants Commission and is being executed by INFLIBNET Centre, an Inter-University Centre of UGC at

Ahemdabad. All universities come under the preview of UGC and are being covered under this consortium. This consortium is the result of better understanding and cooperation between the UGC and ERNET (Education and Research Network), the Inter – University Centres IUCAA, CEC, INFLIBNET and the national and international publishers.

6.   CONCLUSION

No doubt, in a developing country like India, different steps are being taken to disseminate information more or less in all subject areas, specially in science and technology and any set of objectives will only be achieved, if there is a willingness to join together and to believe that more will be achieved through the efforts of the whole than at the individual level. Allen Kent has rightly said "the success and survival of libraries will much depend on how much and to what extent the libraries cooperate with each other in future". As such library consortia are essential facet of modern library management in most developed countries of the world. Though in our country, these are in the normative stage, yet they are supposed to play a major role in the coming years of information technology.

But the overall success of these projects i.e., the library consortia in reality will be fruitful attempt if information contained therein could be utilized properly. Otherwise, there will remain be a fear of not accessing of information for which amount already have been paid in advance and the information is never used.

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Dr. Anil Kumar Dhiman holds M.A., M.Sc., MLISc., B.Ed., P.G.D.C.A. and Ph.D. Degree in Botany. He is Fellow and Life member of various professional associations and has 60 papers and 21 books to his credit in both field of his study, i.e., in Library & Information Science and Botany. Presently, he is working as Information Scientist in the Central Library of Gurukul Kangri Univeristy, Hardwar. He has also been awarded with APSI Young Scientist Award and Gold Medal in 1999.