

## Acquisition of Electronic Information Resources : Some Policy Issues

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*Traditionally, the libraries have print-oriented collections. With the publishing world steadily moving from print to electronic, the libraries are also slowly adopting to the changes. Electronic information environment facilitates enhancement in the speed of service, number of users served, the quantum and exhaustiveness of information provided. However, the libraries need to have a methodical approach to move from print to electronic media. They should have well defined policies in place. This paper specifically focuses on the new policies adopted by Scientific Information Resource Centre (SIRC) of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in acquiring e-resources with particular reference to Electronic Journals.*

**Keywords:** E-resources, Digital Library, Acquisition Policies

### 1. Introduction

Electronic publishing made its beginning in 1985 in Germany when the first electronic book was published. Since then, there has been a steady growth in the number of publishers entering into the electronic publishing field. Electronic publications include electronic journals, electronic books, online bibliographic databases, and other primary (full-text) and secondary publications on CD-ROM. Their entry into the libraries has been a steady affair. The user community has become more familiar with this medium over the time and has started actively bidding for alternative forms of access, especially the electronic journal which has become an important and commonly accepted tool for researcher, faculty and students. Consequently, for libraries, acquisition of these electronic resources and creating a digital library has become a new challenge.

### 2. Tata Institute of Fundamental Research

The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) was established in 1945 and has the mandate of providing leadership in fundamental research. There are about 400 scientists working in the core areas of Physics, Astronomy, Biology, Chemical Sciences, Computer Sciences and Mathematics. The various research departments function under three major schools - the School of Mathematics, the School of Natural Sciences and the School of Technology and Computer Science.

**3. Scientific Information Resource Centre**

A library was also established almost simultaneously with the Institute. The library too grew with its parent organization. Consistent with the latest developments in the field, TIFR library too is using modern information technologies in its endeavour to provide information to users, electronically. Following these developments, in the year 2007, the library was renamed to Scientific Information Resource Centre (SIRC).

**4. Resources**

SIRC currently has a collection of 70000 books and almost an equal number of bound volumes. It subscribes to 650 core journals and has access to over 3000 electronic journals. Most of the journal content is now made available to users in digitized form. The e-books are also making their way into the library, gradually. Thus, the library is progressively moving towards electronic.

**5. Electronic Resources**

In the context of libraries, a right balance of content between the various disciplines should be sought when choosing electronic resources and should respect the different information needs of each section of user community. Priority should be given to resources that will benefit the large number of users. If the e-resource has a print equivalent, the online version should contain the same content as the print version, including any book reviews, editorials, graphs, charts, and illustrations. The illustrations should retain original colors and have a minimum resolution of 600 dpi so that they can be accurately displayed and printed. The online version should be made available concurrently with the print format.

There are some basic advantages of going electronic. Firstly, the scholarly communication needs little intervention from the library staff as most of the users have direct access to the content. Secondly, once the print resources which occupy large shelf space diminish, a lot of space can be saved. Thirdly, the online versions are relatively less expensive (may not be applicable to electronic books) and could help save the cost too.

The two main types of electronic resources viz. electronic journals and electronic books differ to a large extent in terms of their utility value. As such, the policies of the publishers in selling them also differ.

#### 4.2 Electronic Journals: Publishers' General Policies

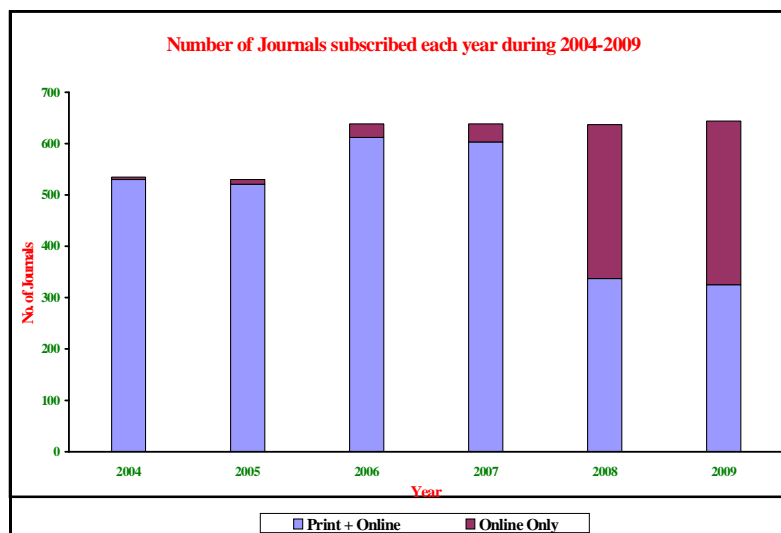
Most of the commercial publishers started bringing out digitized version of their journals along with the print. Initially, the access to electronic version was offered free to subscribers of print version. However, a couple of years later the publishers started charging additionally certain percentage (varying between 10-20%) of amount for electronic access. This pricing model further got modified and one can currently find three options - 'print only', 'online only' and 'print + online'. Generally, the online subscription prices are either lower or equal to the print subscription, but the prices for print + online are relatively higher.

It has also been observed that based on the inputs received from various librarians around the world the publishing companies are also changing their policies regularly. For example, in the beginning publishers suggested of having print subscription with online package subscriptions. However, they later changed their policies to online subscription only without having such condition of keeping print subscription alive, those publishers are Elsevier and Oxford. The policies stated here are only indicative and by no means exhaustive.

#### 4.3 Policies adopted by TIFR

Acquiring e-journals stemmed from the fact that TIFR was totally running out of shelf space and the digitized version of the journals was thought as an immediate solution to overcome the situation. However, any switch over always needs a great bit of thinking. After studying the general policies of the publishers in detail, TIFR laid down some policy guidelines for acquiring e-journals. Covered under the e-journals are three different categories viz. current journals, current journal packages and journal archives. Depending upon the policies of the publishers, acquisition policy of these three categories of materials also differs.

**Current Journals:** Considering the advantages, TIFR, in the year 2004, initiated steps to switch over from print to electronic. When an opinion was sought from the users for converting journals to 'electronic only', there had been a mixed response. While a majority of them were for moving to electronic, a section of the academic community was not so favourable to the idea. Considering the opinions given by the faculty, some general policies were laid down. Two important decisions were made. The first decision was that, henceforth, subscription to any new journal would be electronic only. The second most important point was that only those journals that offer perpetual access to the subscribed content even after the termination of the subscription would only be chosen for conversion. This switch over commenced in the year 2004 and the number of converted journals has progressively increased. (See the graph below)



(Graph showing the rise in the no. of e-journals for the past 5 years.)

Proper license agreements incorporating the clauses that protect the interests of the Institute are being signed with the publisher. These clauses included guaranteeing perpetual access to the subscribed content. In case the publishing body winds up its operations for some reasons, it is ensured that a third party would be responsible for providing continuous access to the subscribed content. Many of the publishers are now having an agreement with third parties such as Portico, CLOCKSS, etc. for hosting subscribed content on their site for making content secure from the disastrous events in future. Some publishers also bring out year-end CDs and make it available to subscribers at a nominal cost. The AIP supplies such CDs at a cost of \$50.00 per year per title to the subscribers of their journals. TIFR has decided to acquire such CDs as additional back-up.

**Current Journal Packages:** Besides individual journals, many publishers are now offering online journals package subscriptions. Typically, the publishers offer journals as subject bundles and in a few cases the 'pick and choose' model. In the latter case, however, publishers generally insist for certain minimum number of journals. Irrespective of the models, the publishers insist maintaining current subscriptions. The advantage of these packages is that by paying little more money libraries can have access to many journals which they would not have otherwise afforded. TIFR has gone for many such package subscriptions notably, Elsevier Science, Springer, American Chemical Society, American Institute of Physics, Oxford, and John Wiley, etc.

**Journal Archives:** Access to journal archives is equally important. Publishers are currently offering these archives on 'outright purchase' as well as subscription basis. Some of the publishers are now offering free access to their entire archives with package subscription to current journals. Even if libraries go for

outright purchase, they may have to pay some Annual Maintenance Fee. Depending upon the affordability, individual libraries can decide on the option. In many cases, TIFR has gone for one-time purchase of archives and in a few cases get access to these archives by virtue of subscription to package subscriptions.

#### 4.4 Electronic Books

In TIFR, experimentation of making available books to users in digitized form began first in the year 2005 when it made M.Sc. and Ph.D theses on CDs through a CD-Mirror Server over a Local Area Network.

A serious consideration to acquire scientific books in electronic form began in the year 2008. TIFR made one-time purchase of a complete package of e-books published by Springer in the field of Physics/ Astronomy and Mathematics/ Statistics during the period 2005-2008. The idea of buying such package was in a way advantageous due to the fact that Springer publishes a large number of books in the field of Physics and Mathematics which are of core interest to academicians in TIFR. The package deal, besides covering these books, also included many others that have peripheral interest. It was, however, not without pitfalls. All the publications which were expected to be in the above subject collections were not found, apparently due to some arbitrary classification adopted by the publishers in classifying the books. To avoid this situation, it is now decided to go for certain stand alone book series (with perpetual access) on a yearly subscription basis. Almost 80%-85% of the books published under these series are generally of high relevance to the work done in TIFR. This way it was ensured that the e-content procured is worth the money.

TIFR has also gone for package subscription offered by Annual Reviews Inc. This publisher offers perpetual access to current and complete archives of all the titles published by them. Besides, a reference tool entitled "Handbook on the Physics & Chemistry of Rare Earths" published by Elsevier is also subscribed which entails access from the year 1978. TIFR is currently considering proposals for e-books from publishers like Cambridge University Press, World Scientific and Wiley Interscience.

One basic problem that hinders acquisition of e-books is the restrictions imposed by the publishers on downloading facility. Most of the publishers do not allow complete downloading of books. Unlike journal articles, many of the books are read from cover to cover. In the absence of complete content, the reader is often disappointed.

#### 5. Conclusion

If one is to compare the print version with that of online, print always scores. Similarly, if one is to compare the e-journal with e-book, then e-journal is the clear winner. While the electronic version is more popular for browsing purposes, users still prefer the print edition for archiving purpose. Interruption

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in electronic access due to any reasons is often frustrating for users. The budget constraint also makes it difficult for the librarians to maintain both the print and electronic version of journals and books. Availability of digital version of books and journals has ensured simultaneous access to them from large member of users. Besides, the availability of current journals and their archives in digital format have provided the libraries with an opportunity to overcome the budget problem to some extent and space problem to a large extent. While acquiring e-resources, librarians need to thoroughly study the policies of each publisher as they differ substantially. It must be ensured that the interests of the organization are fully protected.

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