

DESKTOP LIBRARY VIS-À-VIS VIRTUAL REFERENCE DESK EMPOWER THE END USER TO MAP THE INFINITE ETEXTS

By

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Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; and small minds discuss people.

— *Mastermind?*

ABSTRACT

There has been steady erosion of sole custodial authority of the library on the heritage of human kind ever since the Information Technology brought about a media revolution in the content and access of human knowledge. Metaphorically, the library has triumphantly crossed the physical barriers of time and space. The library automation has reached, but, the first milestone of providing multiple bibliographical-access to the printed documents mostly, but has not penetrated further into the full-texts. The library needs to look beyond automation. Admittedly, the library has to effectively carry on its mission with new stock-in-trade of e-books/e-journals. It has to redefine its services by way of responding constructively and imaginatively to the challenges. Days are not very far off when the library will be brought to the desktop of each user for collaborative virtual reference service. The organization of the Internet resources in inter- and intra disciplinary areas for the prospective community of scholars rests with the library professionals.

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0. Introduction

The Automated Library has removed certain rigid operational constraints on the bibliographical-access in the Paper-Library, but has not changed the static nature of the library documents. Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs) have reigned supreme over the last two decades in the library world. The advent of the Internet and the concomitant electronic publications has reoriented the libraries from the collection to the access. A new dynamic linking library (DLL) world has emerged. Electronic books are emerging as the latest frontier for libraries. There are several advantages of e-reserves over their paper-based counterpart—simultaneous availability to all students in the class, imperviousness of materials from the wear caused by numerous students handling and photocopying them, and when e-reserves are networked or mounted on the Web, availability that is not limited by time or place. Catalogues, collections, buildings, and library staff are the familiar means for providing library services. Computers, networks,

and electronic documents provide additional means with interesting possibilities. The trend is to digitise everything for storage and manipulation: sound, image, moving images, text, and numeric data. Documents of all kinds are becoming more homogeneous in their physical media. Confining libraries to printed documents makes less and less sense. The functions of the library, the computer centre, and the telecommunications office are converging, overlapping, or, at least, more closely related. It is high time that the library looked beyond automation, and look forward to coordinated collection development and cooperative, shared access to collections—both local and global.

1. Library at the Desktop

Paper and pen are being supplemented by desktop workstations, capable of using a multiplicity of remote sources. This leads to an entirely different perspective: from a library-centered world-view to one that is user-centered. Let us look at the best electronic access services offered by the OhioLINK consortium, which empowers the clients of 74 academic and medical institutions to search a central statewide catalogue of over 7 million unique titles held by its member libraries, and place online requests for desired items to be delivered to their local libraries within 2-3 days. Through licensing agreements with Academic Press and Elsevier publishers, the OhioLINK Electronic Journal Center (EJC) provides the full-text contents, in PDF format via the Web, of 1300+ scholarly journals. OhioLINK end users, who download 9,000 to 10,000 articles per week, are becoming proficient in searching and accessing articles pertinent to their own specific interests without entering a library building or opening a book. The option of downloading several articles to a SoftBook device promises the advantages of portability, readability and personalization over monitor reading. It would be greatly appreciated if the INFLIBNET could make such an attempt at offering full-texts of electronic Indian periodicals through some arrangement with the Indian publishers. The libraries have to go a long way to digitize their documents. While many libraries have not properly completed the automation process, the establishment of digital library may not be well received by the management. But they could provide facility for free access to thousands of digital documents available on the Internet.

2. Bridging the Information Gap

Libraries in the information economy require access to the huge amounts of already-available digital information in various disciplines. Library planners and directors should have a deep understanding of connectivity. It is rather impossible to meet the information needs of the user community within the available documents in the library. Nor is it desirable to direct the users to a possible alternate source. For certain queries, we have to make an exhaustive search over the printed and electronic documents for the complete answers. How to bridge the information gap without providing free and fair access to the electronic documents? For instance, there might be hardly a few libraries that could boast of all the collections of the great novelists like Mark Twain. Suppose that a particular title is not available. Do we ever care to look for Etexts available in the Project Gutenberg? (<http://www.promo.net/pg>)

Unless the library professionals are aware of resources on the Internet, how could they satisfy the user's demands? You could download e-texts and deliver to the library user for academic purpose. Library professionals should update themselves with the latest trends in their fields. Even if the library cannot afford to subscribe to all the leading journals, it can provide access to the electronic versions of the journals at free of cost. It is most unlikely that many librarians have ever tried guest access to Emerald Intelligence & Fulltext (<http://www.Emerald-library.com>) of the journals (on Library Management and Library & Information Science). The library professionals should discover more and more and classify them for the prospective users.

3. Virtual Reference Desks

A virtual reference desk may consist of a set of links to online reference resources, and/or provide the opportunity to send questions electronically to librarians or other experts. It is an excellent, annotated collection of ready reference links and pathfinders to research on specific topics, including the chance to ask a reference question via email. It is a network of the best brains—for eliciting the tacit knowledge on particular subjects.

The aims of the Virtual Reference Desk should include, inter alia, the following:

- ? To provide 'mediated access' electronically to sources of information available online.
- ? To develop an integrated reference service using both printed and electronic resources by classifying the selected Internet sites and drawing attention to the library's holdings of printed resources.
- ? To develop a FAQ service by providing access to the selected Internet resources through a subject query list.
- ? To encourage and facilitate the use of gateways, directories and catalogues of the Internet by mapping subject classes.

Components of a virtual reference service would include: OPACs that list informational materials in all formats; digitized library resources that can be readily viewed by users in the library, at home, or at work; and direct access to electronic books, journals, full-text databases, and other sources of information.

The Library of Congress has introduced Collaborative Digital Reference Service (CDRS) for providing professional reference service to researchers any time anywhere, through an international, digital network of libraries and related institutions. The service will use new technologies to provide the best answers in the best context, by taking advantage not only of the millions of Internet resources but also of the many more millions of resources that are not online and that are held by libraries (cdrs@loc.gov). Many libraries have created their own Virtual Reference Desk by way of outreach service.

4. New Stock-in-Trade

The number of documents on the net was estimated to be 400 million in 1998 and was expected to double by 2000 (Naughton 1999, p.28). In fact, it has reached two billion. There are about eight million web sites (Net, April 2000, p. 13). The world wide popularity of the web could be attributed to its inventor's vision "a system in which sharing what you knew or thought was as easy as learning what someone else knew" (Berlers-Lee 2000, p. 36). A word about the 'Project Gutenberg' cannot be dispensed with. According to its Executive Director's statement, "the goal of Project Gutenberg is to give away one trillion (=10,000 x 100,000,000!) Etext files by December 31, 2001 (Hart 2000, p.2)." If you are a bibliophile making an attempt at browsing the PG web site, you will not fail to experience the unfathomable ocean of Etexts virtually thrown open for your unending treasure-trove expedition. The library could ill afford to let untapped the e-world of library. The very fact that one trillion Etexts constitute a magnificent (invisible!) library at the desktop makes our traditional library dwarfed. Distinct advantages of electronic publishing overwhelmingly outweigh transient disadvantages of standards or portable reading device. To put it again in the words of Michael Hart, the Director of Project Gutenberg,

For the first time, we have the capability for everyone on an universal scale, literally, to have information, education, and literacy at their fingertips, should they choose to be informed, educated, or literate.... Perhaps the best use of the Internet is to fight this epidemic and to make the cures for illiteracy and ignorance available so cheaply that there can never again be an excuse for ignorance and illiteracy—forever.

Information Resources are plenty and free, and tools are innumerable and economic, and what else do we lack: Management and Leadership?

5. Management and Leadership

Leadership and management are two distinctive and complementary systems of action. Each has its own functions and characteristic activities. Management is about coping with complexity, and brings a degree of order, rationality and consistency to key dimensions like the quality and profitability of products. Leadership, by contrast, is about coping with change. Leaders produce constructive or adaptive change to help universities and departments to survive and grow. They foresee and enable, establish direction, and align and motivate people. What models of leadership are required—Transactional, Representational or Transformational? Transformational leadership sees the leader as an agent for change. Five leadership practices of successful leaders may be summarized as follows (Kouzes & Posner 1987):

1. Challenging the process. Recognition of good ideas and support for good ideas.
2. Inspiring a shared vision. Vision is the force that invents the future. You cannot command commitment, you can only inspire it.
3. Enabling others to act. Leaders emphasize teamwork, collaboration, and empowerment as essential.

4. Modelling the way. Vision needs management and planning. Leaders set themselves as a role-model.
5. Encouraging the heart. Individual recognition and group celebration.

Innovation has become an essential ingredient for a successful career. The concept of an organization itself learning transforms the basis of what leadership is about. Organizations have two types of knowledge: explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge consists of documents, processes and systems. Tacit knowledge is the experience, skill and relationships of the people who work there. This combined knowledge is what determines competitive edge. A key leadership task is to ensure that this knowledge is used in the most effective way. The values and vision provide the stability that is embedded in constant change (Bagshaw and Bagshaw 1999). By participating in institutional planning and decision-making, librarians are better able to ensure that library goals, services, and collections reflect and support the institutional mission and priorities. The scope and character of library resources are essential components in delivering quality education, and institutional services enable librarians to manage those resources effectively as a result of thorough understanding of the institution's curricular goals and requirements, teaching methods, faculty research interests, and student learning abilities and styles.

6. Conclusion

- ? The library collections in the printed media and in the electronic media should be supplementary and complementary.
- ? The library can hardly afford to neglect the vast and fast growing digital information resources on the Internet.
- ? It should be the prime objective of the library to provide a portal for the valuable digital information resources available at the scholar's desk.
- ? Virtual Reference Desks should be provided along with the OPAC terminals.
- ? The components of LIS programs should include more of the Internet technology—like classifying information resources, web publishing and virtual reference services.
- ? Every library should create a home page listing all possible linked resources of the subjects being taught.
- ? The library could pool all the resources for designing a better comprehensive curriculum of the courses.
- ? Knowledge management, TQM and Team Management should become the core component of training programme for the in-service librarians.
- ? Librarians should design a beautiful Home Page not only for advertising their resources and services, but also for providing classified Internet resources on the relevant subjects.

7. References

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