

Feature Article : New Age Librarianship: A Librarian for the Future

Dr. H Anil Kumar, Librarian and Head, NICMAN, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad has written an article for this issue of newsletter. Dr. Anil Kumar, in his article, entitled "New age librarianship: a librarian for the future", explains about the new age librarianship in the Google era while describing the current trends and practices of the librarianship. Dr. Anil Kumar can be reached at anilkumar@iimahd.ernet.in.

Technology developments and managerial practices in the e-environment have led to gradual and steady changes in functioning of libraries in India. The changes have forced a re-look at skills and competencies of library professionals from not only the point of view of departments of library and information science of various universities but also the short-term education programmes like conferences, workshops, seminars, etc. It is no longer a mystery as to why library professionals need to retrain themselves and why our library school curriculum needs continuous revision. In this context, a selection of three such trends that have had an impact on current functioning of libraries, are described below:

Searching in Libraries

In the past a simple card catalogue search would suffice the needs of a user of the library. Later, with the objective of improving user services, we went on to create library automation systems that provide much more effective and efficient OPAC to the users. The integrated library systems then gave away the limelight to digital library software like Dspace, Greenstone, Eprints, etc. The search function as a service from the library then changed into an entirely facet of federated search across library database and institutional repositories.

The next important development was the increasing shift from print to digital resources, books and periodicals. This added another dimension to existing search as a service from libraries.

The need for federated search across OPAC, institutional repositories and subscriptions is making the search a much more complex and sophisticated service from the stable of libraries. To add to this, complexity was the increasing availability of open access resources that made librarians look at web-based searching integrate with online subscriptions and in-house developed databases. The extension of this need was to access the library subscriptions remotely since many of the non-campus users could benefit from them. This leads to products for remote

log-in that would allow authorized users to access online resources when travelling or when they are based out of campus on official work for a temporary duration. The other area that has caught attention of Indian libraries is the AtoZ listing service (of journals), federated search services. Earlier, these services were available individually, but now integrated into a single product. The development of these technologies are now maturing into discovery engines wherein the focus is on discovery rather than searching processes. In federated search services, we have searches being shot to various databases whereas in discovery services, we can expect much more comprehensive and relevant results.

The future of these products like remote log-in solutions, AtoZ listing, federated searching and discovery engines are now maturing to accept a single sign-on platform. Further, we will see cloud-based services in this domain wherein users log-in to remote servers to be authorized to access remote resources leading to a situation when there would be no role for library servers at all in providing online services.

Procurement in Libraries

The traditional procurement materials in libraries were books. Buying books has today changed into a different ball game wherein dealing with online vendors is gaining momentum. The conventional buying sources for libraries were vendors, who

were retailing books, where seldom purchases were made from the publishers or wholesale book distributors. Today, with online vendors making their presence felt, like Flipkart, Infibeam, Amazon (making an entry into India), etc provide alternative channel to buying books. Though, the initial experience of libraries has been good with the online vendors, we need to exercise caution and develop systems that replicate the robustness of conventional buying systems in libraries. The delivery time of books has improved considerably so as the complexity of the issues involved. Some of the issues are:

- The online vendors have little or no experience of institutional buying;
- They are not interested in institutional buying as time spent in tuning into the different institutional policies and processes at different institutions is varied and is quite long;
- The retail or individual buyers constitute, presently, a large portion of their business and the experience of selling to individuals is simple and fast; and
- Books form only a part of their businesses and online vendors do have other products to sell.

The advantages of dealing with online buying is that in future it would be easy to integrate your library systems with online vendors so that bibliographic records along with books are imported into our library software. It would also make sense to link your library catalogue to the inventory of online vendors so that users get much more than what is available in your own library. This would lead to suggesting, recommending, approving and purchasing being made online within seconds, saving time and efforts for the library while improving its efficiency. At a later date, such systems could get converted to document delivery systems that support existing inter-library loan system of libraries and also become a platform for buying and selling second-hand books, which is said to be a major market.

Outsourcing in Libraries

In libraries, traditionally, the mindset was to recruit staff for every possible activity and this included many tasks that were not core to library functioning. On a personal note, librarianship should aim to serve the information needs of the user, in terms of identifying, organising and retrieving needed information. Tasks that are routine or need specialized skills or knowledge

could be outsourced. It is in this context that many libraries are now looking to outsource support jobs like security, cleaning, photocopying, maintenance of equipment, binding, etc.

Trends also indicate that core library functions can be outsourced. In an interesting instance, we had witnessed management outsourcing the entire library systems, like in the case of public libraries of Santa Clarita, USA. The outsourcing services were offered by Library Systems and Services LLC., USA. It generated a lot of debate of pros and cons of outsourcing core library functions and in this case collection analysis, staffing, automation systems management, users surveys, long range planning, etc. Whether we like it or not it would be a reality that libraries will be in the future run by specialist companies that are managed by library management experts. This trend holds promise for large library systems like government run public libraries, departmental libraries, etc, especially because they need a greater improvement in what they currently offer and their poor staffing. Outsourcing such systems may be viable once we have organisations that are established with the objective of offering such specialized services.

Summary

Searching, procurement and outsourcing are three most interesting trends that librarianship practices in libraries are witness and will face in India. These are not predictions or forecasts, but represent changes in practice that we witness currently. Trends, especially, outsourcing in libraries, may generate debate on various advantages and disadvantages that this option may offer. However, the purpose of this write-up is to generate interest in practicing librarianship and force library professionals to take a hard look at developments around us so that we can be prepared to face the challenges of 'New age librarianship'. The New age librarianship demands different skills and competencies among library professionals and some of them include effective communication, knowledge and application of professional management tools and techniques, technology management skills, ability to measure and disseminate the return on investment in libraries. The underlying principles of success would be team work, strategic thinking and effective marketing. This would call for going beyond traditionally accepted measure of qualifications, experience, exposure and IQ. **IN**