

A Plan for the Establishment of a Library Network or Consortium of Management & Engineering Libraries (MELC) in Western India: Preliminary Investigations and Formulations

By

<p>Maitrayee Ghosh <i>Librarian</i> <i>Sardar Patel College of Engineering</i> Mumbai E-mail: mrghose@vsnl.com</p>	<p>Ashok Jambhekar <i>Librarian & Head (NICMAN)</i> <i>Indian Institute of Management</i> <i>Ahmedabad - 380 009</i> E- mail: ashokj@iimahd.ernet.in</p>
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ABSTRACT

This article explores the possibilities of establishing Management and Engineering library consortia of two western Indian states - Gujarat & Maharashtra. It gives an overview of the current status of management and Engineering libraries of the region and examines the possibilities of building up information sharing system, which is of great importance and central to the formation of any consortia. Proposals are made here for a model of library consortia of the 21st century in two western states of India. It focuses on the joint purchase of the resources by IIT Mumbai, IIM Ahmedabad and other engineering and management institute libraries of the region. The theoretical and practical advantages and disadvantages of this form of collaborative approach between management and engineering libraries are described.

KEY WORDS: Library consortia, Information sharing, Library Networks, Library services Collaboration and Partnership

0. BACKGROUND

Over the years, India has built up a strong base for Management & Engineering education and research. This network includes Seven Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Six Indian Institute of Management (IIMs). India is probably the only leading country where no single formal Library Consortia has been established either at national or regional level - elsewhere we find consortia getting increasingly accepted, leading to establishment of, even consortia of consortia. Maharashtra and Gujarat are the two major states in western India. The technology and management library & information system in this region revolves around two national premier institutions viz. Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and nearly 250 Engineering and Management Institutes. Library consortia primarily aimed at fulfilling the educational, intellectual, informational and social aspirations of users; through the cooperative provision of superior quality library resources and services. In today's world, no single library, howsoever, large it may be can organize its services entirely based on its own collection, financial and human resources and achieve objectives of meeting information needs of its users. Inter-dependability, collaborations, partnerships are assuming crucial importance for delivering quality services and services of diverse nature and content.

The development of systematic library automation in this region began in late 1980s and the libraries from both the state began to focus on cooperative efforts by forming networks in the region viz. ADINET (Ahmedabad Library Network), PUNENET (Pune Library Network) and BONET (Bombay Library Network) all three being city Library Networks initiated development of union catalogue of resources available in the libraries. One such attempt was initiated by BONET (union list of journals of libraries in the city), which is, however, discontinued. It is not possible for the small colleges and institutions to acquire all the resources at one place due to storage problems and paucity of funds. Therefore, they are largely dependent on IITs (Indian Institute of Technology) & IIMs (Indian Institute of Management) to satisfy their users' needs. The huge amount of information resources held by IITB (IIT, Bombay) and IIMA (IIM Ahmedabad) could be made available to the entire student community and faculty of both the state, through a formal resource sharing mechanism and networking.

Libraries will continue to experience demands for new resources and services with the same pace as with the pace with which technological and environmental changes are taking place. The impact of these changes has begun to be felt leading to growing demand for e-resources which seem to be the media to bring current information on the desk-tops. What is inhibiting implementation is the issue of prohibitive costs of such e-resources. Consortial initiatives are the likely answer to the issues of providing e-resources and costs. Two distinct consortium have been implemented, one among the IIMs operational for the last two years, and the recent arrangement to be fully funded by MHRD (Ministry of Human Resource Development) for the IITs, RECs (Regional Engineering Colleges) etc where IIMs will be the beneficiary institutions.

1. CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIBRARIES IN THE REGION

In both the states, there are a large number of engineering and management institutions, most of them are affiliated to the state universities, and a few are deemed universities. Most of the institutions are private, set up by educational societies/ trusts, philanthropic organisations etc. These are running post-graduate courses and also doctoral programmes. In both the states together there are about 21 universities. The growth of engineering institutions has been steady whereas there was sudden growth of management institutions particularly in the early 1990s and continued since then. A large number of these institutions have not seriously thought of developing library systems. In fact it would be interesting to study as to how much percentage of the entire allocation, is invested on this most important activity of all the academic activities over the period of their existence. It is

abysmally poor. Market demand governed proliferation of the institutions but due to lack of proper library and other infrastructure, how much the demand is met is an issue of conjecture.

The cumulative collection of management and engineering periodicals held by these libraries is very poor when compared to IITB & IIMA, - both the institutes have a comprehensive collection. Through sharing and co-operation this project will facilitate information access and minimize acquisition costs of international management and technological periodicals, resulting into increased user satisfaction. There is a great need to consider the entire resources of Gujarat and Maharashtra as a single entity that can be made available to the entire user community. Networking or formation of consortia among libraries of the region is the best way to make the resource sharing very effective and also to ensure equitable availability of required information.

The Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, Institute of Rural Management, Anand and Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai are national institutions in their respective areas. The other institutions covered in the project have established reputation of being among the top institutions for example Jamnalal Bajaj Institute of Management Studies has been awarded “Best Management Institute of the Year” trophy or NIRMA is consistently ranked very high by the various agencies doing ranking of business schools each year.

A regional network must communicate frequently and broadly with local and national level networks.

The following factors influence the formation of MELC:

1. Online access to the digital sources of information of all the participating libraries
2. Bridging the gap between information resources rich and information resources deficient libraries
3. Users of all members of the consortia to get equal access to all the information at all time, to work on democratic principle
4. Shared transactions costs and time among participating libraries, and bring in efficiency of costs and time.

1.1 Resources and services available at IIT Mumbai, IIM Ahmedabad and other participating libraries:

Name of the Institution	Software Used	Total collection of Books & Journals	Sub- scribed periodicals	Document Supply & Resource Sharing Activities
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IIT, Mumbai Source: http://www.library.iitb.ac.in/services/	Software has been developed in-house in Fox- pro 2.0 on Novell Netware 3.11 platform	1,90,000	1632 + E-journals	Library has developed “Mehman” the library’s Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), which is a bibliographic database of Books and periodicals.
IIM, Ahmedabad Source: http://www.iimahd.ernet.in	LIBSYS	1,50,000	610+ journals	LAN/OPAC
SVRCET, Surat Source: e-mail message received from librarian on 30.11.02	LIBSYS	80,000 +12,000 Bound volumes	176	LAN/OPAC
REC, Nagpur Source: http://members.tripod.com/~vrce/recinfra.html	LIBSYS	66,000	322	LAN/OPAC
J BIM S Mumbai Source: Telephone Message	Librarian 5.6	36,000+7542 bound volumes	89	LAN/OPAC
Nirma Institute of Management & Research	ALICE for Windows	14000	110 + e-journals	LAN/OPAC

From the above table it is evident that the collection of the books and journals of all the resource provider libraries put together is very large.

2. PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS & MISSION

Looking at the size and volume of efforts that are required to undertake such a huge project, it is better to take up a pilot study, which will result in a prototype product. And this will help understand the potential requirements, processes and above all the costs involved in undertaking this project in a real time environment. To know the users view of various information services with a web- based inter-face, the categories of information required to be made accessible will include:

- Internally generated databases
- Externally purchased databases including CD-ROMs

- **Online services either internally run or externally purchased**

The Mission of this regional consortium (MELC) will be:

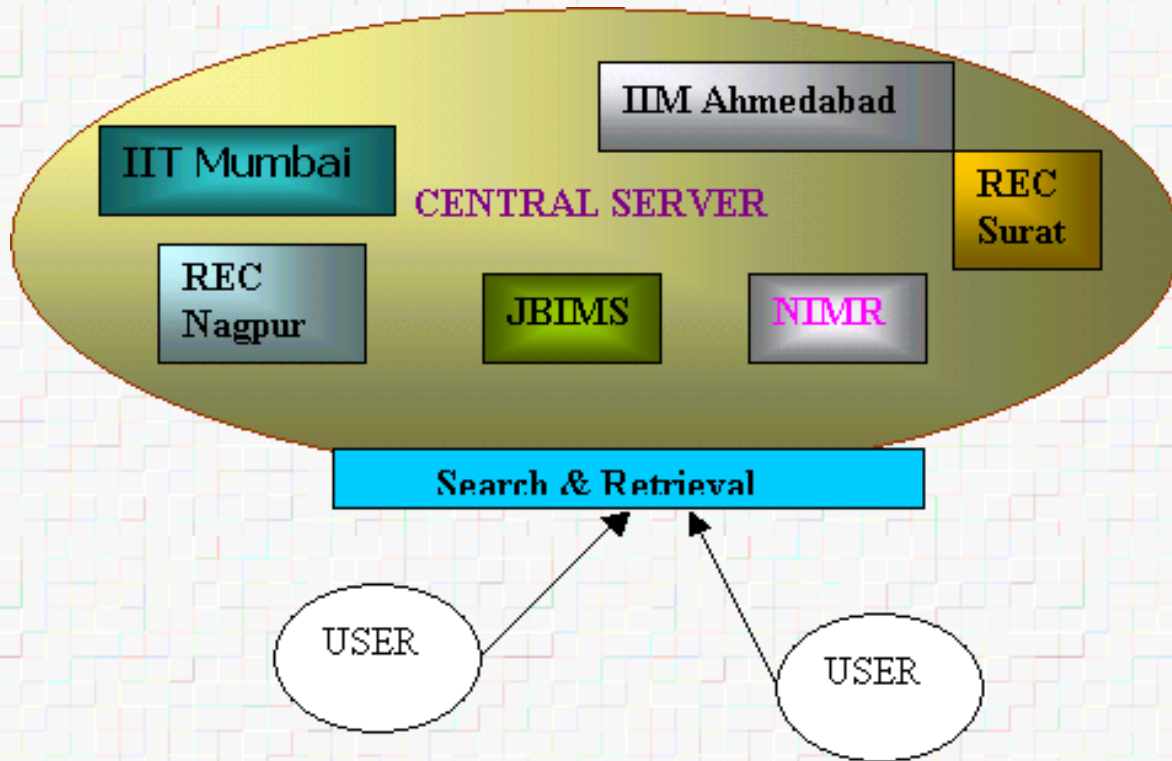
- **To enhance access to information and knowledge through cooperation among member institutions for the benefit of its user communities. Its core activities will include maintaining an integrated library management system including a single bibliographic database of member libraries' holdings, developing innovative approaches to resource sharing and facilitating cooperative collection development.**
- **Achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in fulfilling the libraries responsibility for providing, managing, and maximizing electronic access to information resources of the region through online catalogue and other means of access.**
- **Implement a facility to deliver networked access to CD-ROM products**
- **Look for opportunities to reduce costs and increase access by evaluating products and negotiating directly with publishers**
- **To develop pricing and usage models that includes clear and consistent billing practices, which will allow easy and wide spread distribution of the products to authorized users.**

3. PROPOSED NETWORK MODEL

Based on the resources available, following model is proposed. The simple version of the model will provide an organized web site and search engine, access to databases & journals and support for identifying and obtaining documents. Library Catalogue and Information Service will be made available through Web Interface.

The enhanced and sophisticated version of the model will include the development of databases, a more integrated search interface. The databases of the two main centers and four nodal centers will be merged to form an integrated database hosted on central server. The model will develop on the experiences gained from the previous version.

Fig 1: Proposed network model for MELC



As mentioned above the project while lays emphasis on strengthening resource-sharing mechanism, it also would make efforts to get good price bargains, and expand information resource base.

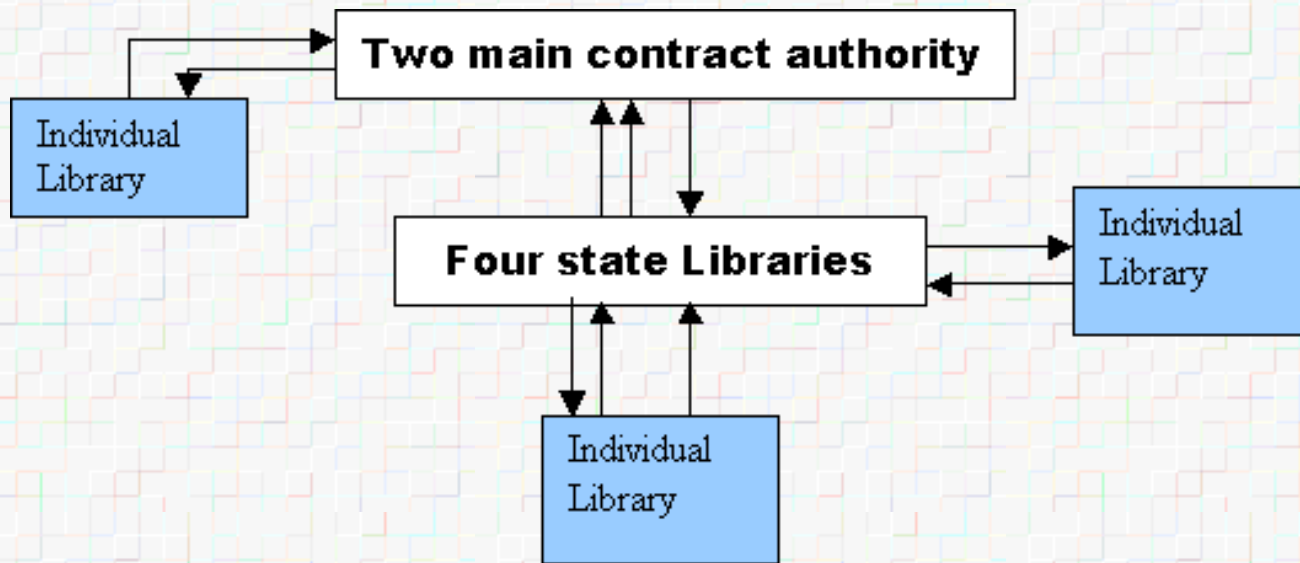
Activity 1: Construction of Virtual Union Catalog and implementation of the Electronic library on the central server

The initial program's emphasis is to create a virtual online union catalog using a Web-based interface. The system will also enable direct borrowing of books by library users between IITB and IIMA libraries and among four nodal libraries. A second goal is to include services like expedited delivery of materials, cooperative programs for preservation and imaging, joint storage facilities. Integrated search interfaces would be developed to provide custom made information. Web content will be created and information will be tailored according to specific groups and needs as well as individualized personal profiles.

Activity 2: Negotiate membership pricing for electronic information services

It is recognised that the joint acquisition of databases can lead to significant price reductions. In this phase the purchase of licenses to databases and journals and integrated access to sources are proposed through standard software. It will also negotiate group discounts from vendors.

E-Journals contract flowchart



4. FUNDING AND MANAGEMENT

The sources of funding for the proposed MELC will be as follows:

- **Government Grants**
- **Subscription Fees received from member libraries**
- **Corporate bodies, Non-Government Organisations & others**

The IITB and IIMA library should co-ordinate the entire management and engineering library consortia through uniform processing of library materials, the uniform way of keeping the catalogues and other documentation on library materials, at the same time will act as Advisory Centers for the region. It is desirable that proposed MELC will be managed by the Managing Agent (MA) and Executive Committee. It will be the responsibility of the Managing Agent to handle day-to-day business and report to the Executive Committee. He will help in cost negotiations and recommend offers received from the publishers, but will have no executive power. It is up to the Executive Committee (which will be constituted by IITB, IIMA, RECs, and other resource provider libraries) to decide and sign agreements. Washington Research Library Consortium (WRLC) is a good example. The university presidents are directly involved in its governance, make decisions and take action at the highest levels of institutional administration.

5. EXPECTED BENEFITS AND DIFFICULTIES

The benefits of collaborative efforts are many. Take a look at the initiatives in USA and UK where cooperative efforts are very effective. Rollo Turner mentioned in his article “NESLI has negotiated some good arrangements on behalf of libraries and has been very effective in explaining the needs of libraries and users to the publishers. This has led to greater understanding in the market place and products are better designed to meet its needs”[1]

This proposed significant regional collaboration will prove beneficial in the following ways:

- 1) The network would particularly benefit the students and faculty members in colleges situated in rural and remote areas as well as researchers who have not, by and large, benefited from the existing resource sharing networks of the region.**
- 2) The proposed network model will provide a management and engineering information portal by bringing together, organizing and disseminating information in a coordinated approach.**
- 3) It will provide integrated access allowing greater search capabilities across multiple databases.**
- 4) By having an integrated interface, the search will be performed on all available sources and be transparent to the user. Time efficiency is gained.**
- 5) Licensing arrangements would allow a greater amount of full text availability and users would thus immediately have access to the articles of choice.**

Participating libraries in MELC will have to consider the following problems, which may arise while implementing the project:

- 1) Budget and funding for individual libraries will continue to be insufficient to support both traditional and electronic access and services.**
- 2) Coordination among partners**
- 3) Workload will increase**
- 4) Pricing policy of Publishers (unsuitable pricing, lack of stable prices)**
- 5) Safeguarding the institutional objectives or work within them.**
- 6) Administrative sluggishness, lack of dynamic reaction by the Executive Committee.**
- 7) Choice of preferred strategies.**
- 8) Administrative difficulties concerning negotiation agreements (factors of time and effort)**
- 9) Availability of efficient staff**

6. OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSION

At the moment, the consortium movement to share electronic resources chiefly involves IITs and IIMs, CSIR laboratories and few prominent scientific libraries of our country .If we look carefully at educational institutions' web-sites of the region, we may find among them some web-pages with bibliographic electronic resources. Now most of the major management and engineering libraries in the region have computerized databases and electronic catalogues, designed to work in a local mode. "It is hard to find one successful program that could be used as a benchmark to replicate... The main factors that affect these kinds of effort are more human and attitudinal than technological or economical"[2]

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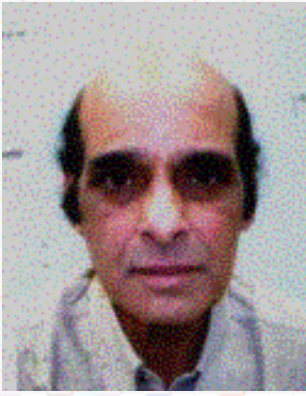
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Maitrayee Ghosh is working as a Librarian in Sardar Patel College of

Engineering, Andheri, Mumbai. She received her MA (History) & MLIS from University of Mumbai. She has passed UGC (NET) and Maharashtra (SET) in Library & Information Science. Her current research includes Library consortia and resource sharing.



Mr. Ashok Jambhekar, Librarian, Vikram Sarabhai Library, Indian Institute of Management, and Head, National Information Centre on Management (NICMAN), Ahmedabad. He has authored/co-authored/edited ten books and published and presented over 25 papers. In connection with the research study he has visited several countries.