

ELECTRONIC JOURNALS - THE LIBRARIAN'S VIEWPOINT

Hazel Woodward

Paper presented at the ASA seminar The Internet: opportunities for agents and publishers, London, February 1998, based on a presentation to the International Symposium on E-journals, Berlin, February 1998

Librarians are adapting to the new methods of communication. Information must be quickly and easily available to support research teaching and learning. The current situation is reviewed followed by some thoughts about the way forward.



Hazel Woodward was Academic Services Manager, Pilkington Library, Loughborough University at the time of this presentation.

Her current e-mail address is: H.Woodward@Cranfield.ac.uk

There are a growing number of academics and publishers who believe quite firmly that once the transition from print to electronic journals has been made - particularly within the scientific, medical and technical (STM) sector of the journals market - there will be no role for libraries in the scholarly communication chain. E-journals can be delivered directly from the publisher (who may be a small research group, a learned society or a major international publishing conglomerate) to the user's desktop. Such a scenario is certainly possible, but in the short to medium term I think it is unlikely for a number of reasons. Even assuming that all academics and researchers had the technical expertise to deal with the range of hardware and software required to access a variety of relevant electronic products, individuals will not wish to purchase out of their own pockets, the range of titles required for their research and therefore some form of departmental/ faculty or central purchasing will be required. Moreover, an individual academic will have scant regard that the titles they are interested in having delivered to their desktop may be of interest to other colleagues on campus. Will they read and sign a complex licence agreement so that the title can be networked across the campus? I think not. Even if they did, who would be responsible for implementing the security requirements imposed by most publishers? Currently librarians perform a valuable service to their academic and research colleagues by facilitating quick and easy access to information. It matters little to the researcher that behind the scenes the librarians are dealing with selection, acquisition, licences, hardware requirements and software. What really matters is that relevant information is quickly and easily available to support research, teaching and learning. And librarians are currently playing a pivotal role in this process.

In an attempt to give a perspective to this presentation, I would like to start by examining the role of the librarian in the print environment. The main tasks of the librarian can be summarized as:

- ♦ to provide and facilitate quick and easy access to information
- ♦ to select and purchase material - printed journals, abstracts and indexes, monographs etc.
- ♦ to organize and provide access to information - physically and via lists and catalogues
- ♦ to provide information skills training
- ♦ to archive, preserve and conserve

It seems to me, that all the above tasks are equally as relevant in the electronic environment as they are in the print environment. What does seem to have changed are the levels of complexity and diversity associated with library provision of e-journals. Let us examine some of the issues in more depth.

Selection

Selecting printed journals subscriptions is reasonably straightforward in that there are recognized sources for bibliographical information (publishers catalogues, subscription agents catalogues, printed and electronic databases of titles etc.) and most publishers actively market printed journals. E-journals, on the other hand, are much more difficult to find out about. Those made freely available on the Internet have little or no marketing budget and rarely find their way in traditional bibliographic sources. Even titles emanating from commercial publishers are currently, notoriously difficult to track down. The best, and most comprehensive source is the Association of Research Libraries, Directory of Electronic Journals and Newsletters¹ backed up by the New Jour electronic announcement service and Web site². Individual publishers Web sites can sometimes be a useful source³ and the major agents are slowly beginning to provide e-journal information to libraries.

Once relevant titles have been identified, selection criteria should follow the principles established for printed subscriptions, such as quality/peer-review, and relevance to research, teaching and learning. Freely available e-journals may have a zero subscription cost but they do have an upkeep cost once added to an e-journal service and they are more likely to move Web site without notice than their commercial counterparts.

Purchasing

Just as identifying titles for selection can be problematical, so can purchasing. The first challenge facing the librarian is to establish which of several subscription models applies to a title. Most e-journals, particularly those from commercial publishers, are currently tied to the print subscription. Subscription models include: free with a print subscription; a surcharge on the cost of the print subscription (typically between 10% and 25%); available as part of a regional/national consortia deal; available through a local regional/national site licence agreement. An example of a national site licence is the Pilot Site Licence Initiative - PSLI⁴ in the UK involving both printed journals and e-journals from three publishers for a three year period. This is likely to be superseded in 1999 by the National Site Licence Initiative - NESLI⁵.

The whole question of libraries signing licences for electronic products - whether they be e-journals, CD-ROMs or networked databases - is fraught with difficulty. The terms of each licence vary considerably and the 'small print' has to be read thoroughly to ensure that we are not committing our institutions to terms which are unenforceable. A very useful forum for discussion of this topic is the electronic list Liblicense⁶.

Access

Once titles have been selected and purchased - and necessary licences agreed to and signed - it is the job of the librarian to provide easy access to the e-journals. Underpinning the whole question of access is the suitability of the organization's IT infrastructure. What is the level of hardware provision with the organization? This does not just mean how many machines, but also their age and state of maintenance. It may be that, in a university for example, each academic and researcher has a machine on his or her desk but what about undergraduates? If we are moving to electronic only journals it must not be more difficult for undergraduates to gain access to electronic information than printed information. Another question is what software is made available on the network? Currently most e-journals require Adobe Acrobat to be loaded to view text and, although this is freely available for individuals to download onto their own machines,

it will automatically be made available across an institutional network. The updating of software - including browsers - is quite critical to the provision of an e-journals service. Close cooperation between the library and computing services is essential for a successful service.

Once we are assured that appropriate hardware and software is in place, we need to turn our attention to access to titles. Many libraries have already set up e-journal Web sites to provide one starting place for access to a range of different titles - and also to provide information on passwords etc. Freely available Internet titles are, superficially, the easiest titles to access. They do not require passwords (although some do require registration) and a hypertext link can be set up to the title page. However, such titles tend to be unstable in that they move sites without notice and it is advisable to instigate some system of URL monitoring to prevent the frustration of repeated error messages.

E-journals from commercial publishers can be tedious to access. Although most publishers are moving away from password authorization to IP address checking, it is still the case that for many publishers, access to their titles is via their Web pages. This means that not only must the user know who the publisher of a title is (and how many of us know that for a range of our favourite journals?) but they must also work their way down a series of Web pages before they actually find the title they wish to consult. In my own organization - like many others - we have overcome the first problem by providing an A-Z listing of all e-journals. When a title is selected from this list it will take the user to the appropriate starting point - either the journal title page or, more frequently, to the publisher's Web site. We are also working on providing access to e-journals from the Library's Web OPAC. Users searching for a journal will be alerted to the fact that the title they want is available in printed and/or electronic format and where there is access to the full electronic text a hypertext link is set up within OPAC to take them to the appropriate Web page.

A potential solution to the problems outlined above, is to use one of the many aggregator e-journal services e.g. Blackwell's Electronic Journal Navigator, SwetsNet, BIDS JournalsOnline. These services are intended to be a 'one stop shop' for

e-journals. The aggregators negotiate with publishers to make all their e-titles available and they develop appropriate software so that users can access the service with one common password and then search either for individual titles or across all titles using subject and keyword searches. The drawback with these services at present is that not all publishers are participating - a notable exception being Elsevier who provide their own e-journal service Science Direct. Until aggregator services can offer access to a critical mass of titles we cannot attain the dream of the 'one stop shop'.

Hybrid services

To add a further dimension of confusion for the user, there are also a range of services that offer partial access to text and information. Into this category I would place:

- ♦ table of contents services (TOCs)
- ♦ partial electronic publishing
- ♦ bibliographic databases offering access to selected full text documents

Publisher and aggregator TOC services, often backed up by on-screen access to selected full text or document delivery, provide a valuable current awareness service to the academic community.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to explain to users why they can access the full-text of some journals but not others (usually dependent upon whether a print subscription is held) and that the library does, or does not, financially support the document delivery option on offer. The same holds true for bibliographic databases offering similar functions - but many of these are at least developing interfaces which provide locally tailored information on document availability to the end user. Partial electronic publishing is possibly the most frustrating of all options. Such publications are set up as 'tasters' for the full publication and provide access to the full text of only selected articles. Librarians offering an e-journal service would be well advised to flag such incomplete publications very clearly.

The way forward

Many libraries now offer a Web-based e-journal service to their users. At Loughborough University we set up our pilot service some two

years ago to provide a simple access route to a range of freely available Internet journals and the e-journals made available via the nationally negotiated PSLI - in the first instance these included titles from the Institute of Physics Publishing (IOPP) and Academic Press (the Ideal service). At the same time, we began a British Library funded research project entitled 'Cafe Jus: Commercial and Free Electronic Journals User Study'^{7,8}. The finding of this research project considerably informed our thinking on the development of the Loughborough service⁹ and the e-journals home page currently has the following links:

- A-Z listing of all full-text e-journals accessible via the Pilkington Library;
- commercially produced full-text e-journals;
- freely available full-text e-journals;
- sample issues of e-journals (often with abstracts of articles);
- e-journal collections at other sites;
- e-journal passwords (Loughborough only).

Clearly, as discussed above, many issues still remain to be resolved but progress is being made. Some of this (in the UK) is due to the various research projects funded by the Electronic Libraries Programme (eLib). Arising out of the Follett Report¹⁰ £15 million was allocated to research which would "transform the use and storage of knowledge in higher education institutions". eLib project areas¹¹ which impact upon the provision of serials information include

- digitization
- electronic document delivery
- electronic journals
- electronic short loan
- on-demand publishing

The SuperJournal Project¹² and Project ACORN¹³, both based at Loughborough University, are examples of research which is moving forward our knowledge of e-journals and articles. SuperJournal is working with 21 publishers, investigating what authors and readers want from e-journals. Journals - many incorporating multimedia elements - are organised in subject clusters and 9 university partners are feeding back information about the project. ACORN (Access to Course Readings via

Networks) is delivering full-text high demand journals articles over the campus network via the Web OPAC and departmental Web pages. The main challenges facing the project are concerned with obtaining electronic copyright permissions and creating digital copies. A fuller examination of electronic serials within eLib is given by Woodward¹⁴.

Progress needed

I would like to conclude this presentation with a list of issues relating to e-journals where I feel that progress is needed. These include:

General issues

- ♦ more collaboration between publishers
- ♦ easy access - IP addresses *not* passwords
- ♦ user driven *not* technology driven
- ♦ long term archiving
- ♦ focus on librarians as information providers, academics as users

Pricing

- ♦ e-journals must be affordable to libraries
- ♦ flexible pricing
- ♦ print and/or electronic subscriptions
- ♦ individual subscriptions; discounts for packages

Licences

- ♦ need for simple, understandable licence agreements
- ♦ reasonable conditions of use
- ♦ site licences not individual machine registration
- ♦ concern over multi-year licences

We would like

- ♦ move to the 'one-stop shop' for information
 - access to full-text from Library OPAC
 - access to full-text from bibliographic databases
 - access to full-text via 'virtual scholarly community' Web sites
- ♦ customized services for individual academics
 - current alerting services
 - full text access
 - document delivery option

References and notes

1. Association of Research Libraries Directory of Electronic Journals and Newsletters
<http://www.arl.org/scomm/edir/index.html>
2. New Jour Web site
<http://gort.ucsd.edu/newjour/>
3. AcqWeb's Directory of Publishers and Vendors
<http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/law/acqs/pubr.html>
4. Bekhradnia, B. Pilot national site licence initiative for academic journals, *Serials*, 8 (4), 1995, 247-50
5. Friedgood, Beverley, The National Electronic Site Licence Initiative - NESLI, *Serials*, 11 (1), 1998, 37-39
6. liblicense discussion list and Web site
<http://www.library.yale.edu/~Llicense/index.shtml>
7. Woodward, Hazel and others. Cafe Jus: Commercial and Free Electronic Journals User Study. *British Library Research and Innovation Report* 55, BLRIC, September 1997
8. Woodward, Hazel and others, Electronic journals: myths and realities, *Library management*, 18 (3), 1997, 155-162
9. Loughborough University, Electronic Journals Service Web site
<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/library/ejournal.html>
10. Joint Funding Councils' Libraries Review Group, Report, Higher Education Funding Council for England and others, HEFCE, 1993.
11. Electronic Libraries Programme (eLib) Web site
<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/elib/>
12. SuperJournal Project Web site
<http://www.superjournal.ac.uk/sj/>
13. ACORN Web site <http://acorn.lboro.ac.uk/>
14. Woodward, Hazel, Electronic Serials: the UK Electronic Libraries Programme, *Serials Review*, 24 (1), 1998, 15-20.