

THE ADONIS EXPERIENCE: SOME VIEWS

compiled by Stella Pilling

ADONIS was originally conceived as a consortium of science publishers with two overriding objectives:

1. to act as an authoritative body for establishing standards and procedures to enable participating publishers to both service the document market and protect interests with regard to the ownership of copyright.
2. to develop and market an electronic document delivery system using the most effective technologies so that customers could print on-site large numbers of scientific articles with the security of an authorised copyright licence.

The following article provides some views of ADONIS from three different perspectives.

**The End User's view of ADONIS at Aston University:
impressions of an academic user
by Peter A Lambert, Senior Lecturer in Microbiology, Aston
University, Birmingham**

ADONIS was originally welcomed by many academics in the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences at Aston. Experience with Medline on CD-ROM had been most encouraging and expectations were high for electronic delivery of the original journal pages. What impression has ADONIS made in its first year at Aston where it functions as the sole source of many of our key journals?

Coverage

There are important omissions of journals which are vital to biomedical sciences: *Nature*; *Science*; *New England Journal of Medicine*; *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*; *Journal of Biological Chemistry*; *Biochemistry and Biophysical Journal*. There is a bias towards European journals while many American journals are not covered. This criticism is partly offset by the great number of additional titles we now have instantly available.

Currency

Most academic users keep up to date in their field by scanning current awareness sources such as Current Contents. Any interesting papers can be consulted immediately if subscriptions are taken, or reprints sought from the author or via interlibrary loan. Here ADONIS should score heavily with its ability to deliver the document immediately. The expected 3-week period between

journal publication and its delivery on CD-ROM has not always materialised.

Performance

I found the user interface unfriendly and uncompromising, requiring a mixture of keyboard and mouse inputs and an intolerance of error. Most users would welcome improvement here. Once one is in the system, the pages are displayed slowly on screen. Only part of each page is visible and scrolling through the article is tedious. The quality of the image is acceptable for text, tables and line graphs, but not for half-tone photographs which may be a crucial element of papers - for example, electron micrographs. The laser printed output is of photocopy quality. ADONIS certainly delivers the documents like an interlibrary loan, but much faster. There are some irritating restrictions on printing the documents: it is not possible to print just part of an article or to abort printing. The system also prints an unnecessary cover page. Reliability has caused problems with over 40 consecutive working days lost recently while new software was installed. This highlights the vulnerability of a library service committed to an all-electronic system based on a single item of technology. However, there is another side to this that should be mentioned. The electronic articles are secure. Unlike their hard copy counterparts, they are not subject to vandalism and do not go missing from the shelves.

Access

With only one workstation there are inevitable problems of access. A single user effectively blocks access to all others while at the terminal. Making the images available over the network is essential for wider use of the system. Users will become increasingly dependant upon the CD-ROM for all primary information as bound copies of journals become outdated.

Conclusion

ADONIS has proved itself as a document delivery system but it has some way to go before it is an effective replacement for our paper journals.

The Librarian's view by Andrew Cameron, Aston University, Birmingham

The implementation of ADONIS at Aston was triggered largely by economics. Faced with a substantial cut in serials expenditure, Aston felt that ADONIS offered some protection to paper copy journals with high subscription prices. From the start, therefore, ADONIS has had some negative connotations here.

Some publishers participating in the ADONIS scheme do not seem to think that ADONIS will affect their printed subscription levels, but with the increased pressure for cost-efficiency, it seems unlikely that any library will want to pay for something twice. If a title is on ADONIS, it will be a candidate for cancellation in printed form unless a high level of use dictates otherwise. Other publishers see the way forward in issuing their own CD-ROMs, rather than joining a conglomerate like ADONIS. I think librarians would balk at the idea of a different system for every journal!

One problem with ADONIS is that you are subscribing to a service, without having a sure idea of its cost. Because you pay royalties for each article you print out - and these are at differing levels - you cannot accurately predict how much the use of the system will cost, since it is impossible to know in advance which articles and how many articles will be printed out in a year. At Aston we have a policy of making all our electronic information services open access. When ADONIS came along we did not change that policy, even though the system was different from other services. Our customers found the ADONIS interface not at all intuitive, and felt that certain features were quite alien when compared with other electronic services. ADONIS have revised their interface to a Windows version, but seem to have learned little from other CD-ROM products on the market.

We try to make as many electronic services available across the network as possible, but because of the size of the bitmapped ADONIS images they are not easily networkable. Instead we have made the indexes available across the network, a step which needs a Computer Officer's input. Academics can check if an article is on the

system and request a copy of that article from their desk.

Reaction at Aston to ADONIS has been unanimously unfavourable. This situation might have been different had we introduced it in other circumstances. If we had run it as a service whereby customers requested articles and library staff operated the system - a sort of in-house interlibrary loan system - we might have had a more favourable response. However, this would have meant withdrawing the browsing facility completely, something much missed in electronic format.

The other main concern is timeliness. ADONIS disc production was at one time fragmented, leading to delays in seeing journals. Since then their disc operations have been streamlined and it is hoped that currency will improve significantly. In my opinion ADONIS will never be able to compete with the BIDS ISI service, for example. Nothing can match that for speed. Some people may indeed forget that journal titles in paper copy were not always speedy in getting onto library shelves.

To conclude, ADONIS has been a very chastening experience for Aston. Any library thinking of implementing ADONIS should consider very thoroughly exactly how it will fit into the library's strategy for information provision: how will the users perceive the system? how will the system be made available? what technical support will be needed for such a service?

The Document Supplier's view
by Gillian Riley, British Library Document
Supply Centre

BLDSC has been involved with the ADONIS system since its earliest days. It was one of the designated document supply centres for the early trials and began to process requests using the system in 1988. The original ADONIS concept was based on the hypothesis that if new technology could be used to fulfil requests more cheaply than the current labour-intensive photocopying procedures, the money saved could be shared with the copyright holders without substantially changing the price that the centres charged for the supply of documents.

Today BLDSC is using ADONIS operationally to satisfy over 200 requests each day. The vast majority of these requests received from customers in automated format are automatically streamed from BLDSC's ARTTel system to the ADONIS workstation. Postal requests which have not been satisfied from the hard copy version of the journal title are manually directed to the ADONIS workstation, and only account for 5-10 requests a day.

BLDSC has noted a number of operational advantages and disadvantages in using ADONIS.

Operational advantages

We find that requests can be satisfied more quickly from ADONIS than from using the hard copy issues, together with the associated manual procedures. There are no delays on waiting lists, a situation that can arise when the hard copy version of a serial is on loan. One member of staff can handle the complete retrieval and printing process, with the result that there is less scope for error. In addition, the automated processing also reduces the error risk. BLDSC has benefited from savings in accommodation and space requirements through the use of ADONIS. Although BLDSC still takes one hard copy version of each ADONIS title, it no longer takes duplicate copies.

Staff have found that the system is easier to search through than the hard copy. There is more variety in searching strategies and this leads to higher success rates than when using traditional paper copies. Finally, the quality of the printed article is superior to photocopy quality.

Operational disadvantages

As BLDSC is using only one PC to provide input to the system, requests cannot be input while documents are being printed out. We have, as yet, not perfected the simultaneous working of the two PCs which are available.

Dispatch of the articles to BLDSC customers is still through traditional methods such as post. This can slow down what has been up to that stage a quicker method of processing. It is common to experience delays in receiving new discs from ADONIS. The expected period of three weeks after the availability of the hard copy

is not regularly achieved. This lowers potential satisfaction rates on customers' requests.

Satisfying over 200 requests a day means that the equipment is kept working all day. This puts particular pressure on the printer, and it is fairly common for us to receive the error message: "Printing aborted". As a result we usually have to recirculate the requests to be satisfied in the main storage areas by use of the paper copy.

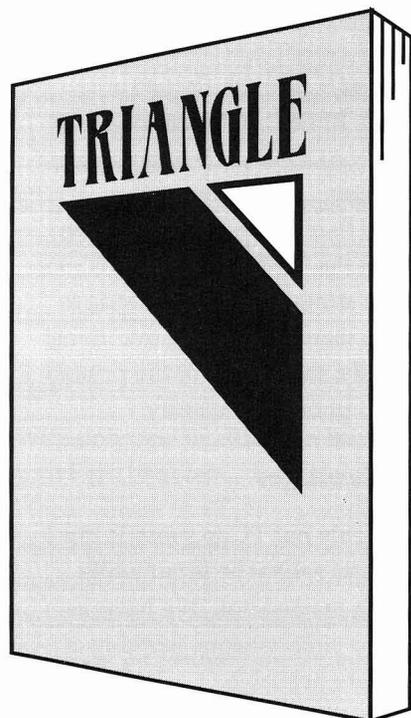
Looking to the future

In 1993 ADONIS carried out extensive market research using input from existing and potential customers and publishers to determine how well

they were doing. As a result enhancements have been developed so that the needs of the marketplace would be better served. New software has been introduced, a more efficient production process has been put in place and the number of journal titles has been increased.

More information about ADONIS can be obtained from: ADONIS B.V., Molenwerf 1, 1014 AG Amsterdam, The Netherlands, fax: + 31 (20) 684 0241; or from: ADONIS USA, 238 Main Street, 5th Floor, Cambridge, MA 02142, USA, fax: +1 (617) 876 7022.

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