Tailoring Licensed Rights to Users' Requirements: a librarian's view

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Paper presented at the UKSG Consortium and Site Licensing seminar, London, October 1997

Examples from a multi-site library with several categories of user are used to highlight the problems in providing access to electronic information, which are caused by the variety and restrictive nature of the licensing arrangements. The solution is a co-ordinated effort by suppliers to understand the nature of access to requirements and to simplify licensing.

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This will be a whistle-stop tour round some of the major issues which concern librarians with regard to the licensing for electronic resources. I was asked to be controversial so I will throw out some simplistic questions in the hope that they will be provocative - I do not promise to be fair!

My first question, which I shall just leave hanging, is: why is it that licences for the use of electronic resources should be so much more restrictive than those for printed resources?

Users, membership and sites

The first area of concern to librarians, which I am highlighting, relates to users, membership and sites. Firstly there is the problem of the definition of a site. To illustrate the problems, let me describe the situation at the University of York. From a traditional University operating effectively on one site for many years, we have changed into a scattered multi-site institution as a result of the merger with the North Yorkshire College of Health. Now the University Library has a branch at Harrogate General Hospital and an interest in York District Hospital and the hospitals of Scarborough and Northallerton, through our health studies students' use of them. Each of the hospital libraries is tri-partite because they serve the interests of the Trusts and postgraduate medical education (PGME), as well as the University of York's Department of Health Studies. Therefore we have to ensure that our licences serve our outlying students. Since some of the sites are several miles away and there is a five-mile limit on some of the licences, we have to make a supplementary arrangement. From another angle, as we network the databases wherever possible and the licences permit access only for our own students in these libraries, the hospital libraries have to purchase separate CD-ROMs to meet the needs of the Trusts and PGME. Both aspects of the situation illustrate that clarification and new thinking are overdue.

The problems of drop-in or casual users with regard to membership and access are well known. As evidence of the difficulty facing us, I refer to the newspapers, which formerly

could be read by anyone whom we allowed in, but which are no longer accessible to non-members of the University. When the Open University Summer School visits each year, one or two courses previously made use of *Psychological Abstracts*. From the time when we changed to *PsycLIT* on CD-ROM, that was no longer possible. These are unfortunate consequences of what, for our own users, has been an improved service. Similar complexities of membership arising from consortia agreements and institutional affiliations are also well known, so I will do no more here than endorse the view that change in licensing is necessary to take account of the changes in the user community.

Authentication and right of access

Various means of identification and authentication are employed at the moment, most of which cause libraries quite a lot of extra management. For instance, issuing separate usernames and passwords to all individuals for each database is quite clearly an unacceptable burden. Nor is the use of IP addresses to identify the individual machines a viable proposition on sites where IP addresses are assigned virtually. The implication, in the proposed *Model Licence* of the Working Party of the JISC and the Publishers' Association[1], that every three months updated lists of all the individuals eligible to access a particular database should be sent to the publishers, would not receive universal acclaim from libraries or managers of access to databases. The latest suggestion from the suppliers of the journal *Science* is to restrict access to a number of specified PCs in the library. They have their reason, which is to safeguard personal subscriptions, but nevertheless libraries would prefer not to be at the receiving end of such a restriction. Even with Athens 3 authentication imminent, the burden of administration is a not inconsiderable extra load on libraries which have no spare staff for this new work.

Networking limits

The variation on permitted access over networks is enormous. We are given the choice of:

- standalone;
- one user on a network;
- various multiples of users on a network, each with an increased licence fee.

The methods used to regulate network access include:

- concurrent users;
- the number of PCs or other devices on a network, which is totally unrealistic to calculate in a university, where staff and students may be scattered over different sites and their PC use is not regulated (nor would we wish it to be);
- the volume of access;
- the number of references downloaded.

In this particular jungle the preference from most libraries is likely to be a flat fee, based on a reasonable calculation of the size of the institution.

Data handling

There are restrictions on data handling which libraries find irksome. For instance, if we are subscribing to a CD-ROM I think most of us would not expect to have to pay a premium rate to cache the data onto a server. Also there might be perfectly good technical or performance reasons why redistribution of data within an institution, perhaps owing to the scattering of sites, is reasonable, and we would wish to do this without penalty. A variety of restrictions on downloading and printing seems to us to be artificial and unnecessary. ILL and document delivery are dealt with in Fred Friend's paper elsewhere in this issue of *Serials*, so I will say no more on this topic other than to compare it to the relative freedom of the regular delivery of documents in paper copy under fair dealing.

Archiving and an exit strategy

Clearly archiving is a very big issue for libraries. What will happen to the data over a period of 20, 30 or 50 years? Once we have paid for the right of access to data, we do not expect to have to pay for it again, if, for instance, it is re-issued on CD-ROM, which, you will remember, has been referred to in the past as a

transient technology[2]. We need to be sure that the data will continue to be accessible in years to come. We also need clarification on the issue of continuing access to data for which we have paid, if we decide to cancel subscriptions. After all, we have never been expected to return printed copies of material to the originators once our subscription ceases. Incidentally, we can well do without the nuisance of having to return some CD-ROMs to the suppliers upon receipt of the latest version of a continuing subscription.

Management information

As with other information provision, libraries are constantly having to justify increased spending on databases, as a result of special arrangements such as the Pilot Site Licensing Initiative (PSLI). We stand in crying need of better management information to support the decision-making processes, and we hope that suppliers will soon be able to give us, at least, much better statistics of use. Managing the licences has now become an enormous task as the number of databases available has increased, and the variety of licensing restrictions and special clauses seems to be ever growing. The subscription agents among others are offering to take on this management, which is a welcome step, but with the undesirable though understandable downside that we have to subscribe through them in order to benefit.

Further random thoughts

Here I am going to take the opportunity to mention two of my particular hobby horses. The first is: could this at last be an opportunity to resolve the old conundrum whereby the academic produces a piece of research, and gives it to the publisher who then sells it back to the institution? The second is my own special dream, which is for electronic copyright

signatures to become acceptable. I wish that the user could send an application for a document to the library via a Web form, and could simply enter a PIN or other unique identifier as a formal and acceptable acknowledgement of the intention to abide by the law of copyright, fair dealing and all, instead of the current and old-fashioned need to sign a piece of paper. It could be made so simple, and wouldn't it be nice?

What we really really want

I understand that there was a suggestion that today's seminar be called 'What we really really want', but for some reason that was rejected. So in conclusion may I say, "this is what we want, what we really really want": simplicity, co-ordination, consistency and understanding. Let suppliers try to simplify the procedures, co-ordinate with each other to produce consistency, and, finally, try to understand us. Libraries are not hidden behind barbed wire fences, seeking to prevent readers coming in or taking anything away. Modern libraries do not feel threatened by the prospect of users not needing to come in; rather we are excited by the fact that a researcher can receive on the desk-top the information that we are providing over the network. What libraries are trying to do is to be in a position to offer to our users a better networked information service to take us into the twenty-first century in good style.

References

1.   Joint Information Systems Committee & Publishers' Association Working Party. *Proposed 'model license' between UK Universities and Publishers*. July 1997. p.15

2.   McSean, Tony and Law, Derek. Is CD-ROM a transient technology? In *Library Association Record* 92 (11), November 1990, pp. 837-838, 841.