The Documents Direct Project at the University of Leeds: increasing access

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The aim of the project is to examine alternatives to the established collection management model at the University of Leeds, the feasibility of a just-in-time policy, and the likely costs and benefits of on-demand single article supply.

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'Documents Direct' at the University of Leeds is an internally funded twelve-month project, involving four S chools within the University: Biology, Chemistry, Electrical and Electronic Engineering and Civil Engineering.

The Library manages the project and has appointed a full-time project officer. The project's Steering Group meets quarterly and consists of the project officer, the Library's Director of Strategic Development (Chair), a systems librarian and a subject librarian, and one representative for each of the Schools involved in the project.

Context

The Library of the University of Leeds is one of the largest university libraries in the United Kingdom, with a stock of over 2.3 million volumes. The University is highly research active and the Library's role in providing access to journal literature is an important one. Traditionally, this has been achieved through printed journal subscriptions and using inter-library loans to obtain items not held locally. The Library currently provides access to journal literature required by the University's research community in two forms. Firstly, and most traditionally, this is achieved through journal subscriptions, and secondly, ordering copies of those journal articles not held locally, via inter-library loan. In recent years a number of factors have demanded that alternatives to this model be examined:

- periodical prices continue to rise annually above the rate of inflation;
- an increasing number of journal titles are published each year;
- the current economic climate in higher education and subsequent constraints on library budgets;
- advances in information technology now make a just-in-time model technically possible;
- an increasing number of companies offering individual article supply make this a growing and competitive market.

Project's aim

Our aim is to examine alternatives to the established collection management model at the University of Leeds. We will investigate the feasibility of offering a just-in-time policy as an alternative to the

Library's long-established holdings or just-in-case policy. We will assess the costs and benefits of on-demand single article supply, compared to full subscription to journals.

We will offer unmediated document ordering of individual articles by academics and research staff, with delivery directly to their desktop. While the Library will not be involved in document ordering, it will maintain an important role as budget manager, training provider, troubleshooter , and service monitor and evaluation

The project started in March 1999 and the first three months were used to decide on the document suppliers, and establish a user group within the four Schools taking part in the project.

Deciding on suppliers

The project started with extensive desk research evaluating commercial document suppliers. It was important to assess the suppliers according to a range of criteria, not merely delivery format, cost and speed of delivery. Suppliers were initially selected for their subject coverage as we wanted to offer a range of both multi-disciplinary and subject specialist suppliers to provide a good cross-section of services offered.

We wanted to offer a variety of delivery formats including: traditional delivery by post; fax; download of articles from the Web; e-mail delivery.

We were determined to take advantage of the World Wide Web to enable users to order articles. The project's Web pages would act as a gateway to these services and given that those participating in the project would be placing requests for articles themselves ease of ordering was a primary factor. Two possible methods of document ordering were decided on:

- via a database with linked document delivery;
- by completing a Web-based form.

Two of the chosen suppliers (Inside and UnCover) offer current awareness services with linked document delivery. The Library currently has access to UnCover's Reveal service through a NEYAL (North East and Yorkshire Academic Libraries) consortia agreement. However, document delivery was only available if users paid by credit card. In using UnCover as a document supplier, we would be creating a seamless service for academics through receipt of current awareness via e-mail, ordering and document delivery.

User identification was necessary for each of the suppliers because of billing methods. For UnCover and Inside, users will have their own usernames and passwords. This will enable them to take advantage of the value-added services, which are available from each supplier, such as current awareness and tracking their own orders. Other suppliers have customer numbers, which must be quoted on their Web-based forms when ordering documents. We decided to design a password protected Web page, which would hold account information so that users could obtain this information at any time without contacting the project officer.

Charges vary greatly and are dependent on up to four elements: service charge; copyright fee; delivery charge; VAT.

Each supplier has very different charging models and prices vary significantly and in some cases, price also varies according to the delivery format selected by the user. These pricing variables make it difficult to develop an effective pricing strategy or model for document delivery services, particularly if the model is offering unmediated document delivery of full-text articles. We have estimated an average cost of £15 per article, but this price will vary according to the four elements and is therefore likely to fluctuate significantly. Careful monitoring of costs and usage is essential and reserve funding was felt desirable to cover any over-spending. The Schools involved have been given an estimated figure of 465 requests for the project's duration.

We needed to establish billing or deposit accounts with suppliers as users would be placing requests directly and detailed information regarding each document was needed for the project's evaluation. Deposit accounts have various implications, as funds needed to be permanently available to avoid user frustration at the order stage. As a project, it may be necessary for refunds to be made and this had to be clarified with suppliers.

We decided to use six suppliers who offer a range of services:

- AskIEEE
- BioMedNet
- Inside
- Royal Society of Chemistry's 3D service

- Technology University of Delft's DocUTrans service
- UnCover

Decisions regarding suppliers have to be considered carefully and taken with assistance from users. It could be argued that the project is offering access to similar collection and comparable services through a variety of commercial companies. The Library's primary suppliers of documents are currently LAMDA and BLDSC. One of our objectives during evaluation will be to consider whether the large, multi-disciplinary services (UnCover, DocUTrans and Inside) are able to satisfy requests for research-focused, subject specialist documents.

Use of the Library's journal stock

The project is offering a new and value-added service to a group of users within the University, with the intention of offering substitution rather than duplication. As our aim is to offer unmediated document delivery, we are unable to track requests to ensure use of stock already held by the Library. At the same time we want to offer an enhanced service to the project's users. We therefore decided to offer an internal request form on the project's Web pages so that users could order articles from journals held by the Library. The article would be photocopied and delivered using internal mail. A £3 charge (taken from the project's budget) would be made for each article to cover costs such as staff time.

It is difficult to predict what the uptake of this service will be as many of our journal titles (particularly in science and engineering) are increasingly available electronically via the WWW, in addition to the Library's traditional journal holdings.

Establishing a user group

Four Schools are involved in the project and initial liaison was channelled through Library representatives and faculty librarians. The project's first Steering Group meeting proved highly productive as decisions were taken regarding suppliers and recruiting users to take part in the project.

A registration form was mounted on the project's Web pages and an e-mail sent to the Library representative with URLs for the project's Web pages and the registration form. Users were asked to complete the form and send an e-mail to the project officer. This took place over a two week period and seventy-eight users registered with the project officer. The breakdown by School is:

- Biology: 29 (37%)
- Chemistry: 22 (28%)
- Electrical and electronic engineering: 12 (15%)
- Civil engineering: 12 (19%)

Training and documentation

Everyone who had registered with the project was invited to attend the project's launch. This was an informal, awareness-raising session, which was held after working hours. A presentation introduced both the project and the services available. Additional training took place within the Schools and was more focused with a more in-depth look at the suppliers and the services available.

Help and guidance on using specific suppliers was produced in two formats, firstly, on the project's Web pages and, secondly, in hard-copy as a short manual for all users.

Evaluation

The evaluation of Documents Direct will be user-oriented and the process will take account of the interests and perspectives of all the users. A range of data collection techniques will be used to gather data for analysis.

Evaluation sessions (focus groups) will collate qualitative data. This will give in-depth feedback on the extent to which patterns of keeping abreast of current literature and obtaining journal articles has changed and the value to research of the service.

Quantitative data will be gathered in two ways: by a Web-based questionnaire; and analysis of requests made to suppliers in terms of article availability, speed of supply, mode of supply and cost.

Conclusion

The project's trial started in June 1999 and will run for a minimum period of six months. The project's final report will assess the costs and benefits of this service and will inform strategic Library decision-making on the balance of spending on providing hard-copy journals, and the provision of wider access to journals via on-demand single article supply.