PROMOTION OF ELECTRONIC JOURNALS TO USERS BY LIBRARIES: A CASE STUDY OF TILBURG UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

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This paper covers the background of the project, how the service was developed, the results of two user studies, together with a summary of the lessons learnt.

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Background

Tilburg University is a medium sized higher education institution in the Netherlands with about nine thousand students and one thousand faculty. There are five departments: economics; law; social sciences; linguistics, and philosophy. In 1991 its centrally managed library launched a new service, Online Contents (OLC), which gave users desktop access to the table of contents of the library's journal holdings[1]. In 1992, the service was enhanced to include article header information (with keywords and abstracts) of the Elsevier journals in the collection. These data were provided electronically by the publisher. In 1993, an SDI service based on OLC was introduced. In 1995, a new graphical interface, an MS Windows port of the Carnegie Mellon X Windows-based Mercury interface, was added as a front-end to the database, enabling integrated access to full text (images in tiff format) versions of Elsevier Science articles from a little over 100 journals. In 1996 the interface was changed again, now to a Web-based one with full Z39.50 functionality, and full text articles (now in pdf format) from journals of other publishers (Wolters Kluwer, Academic Press, etc.) were added, as well as links to articles in freely available scholarly journals published on the World Wide Web. All in all, about 300 journals, accounting for 9 to 10 percent of the library's journals collection, is now available in full text. Within the scope of the Decomate II project[2] more full text titles will be added. What are the main experiences in the past five years with promotion of these electronic journals?

Not just promotion

When new sophisticated electronic services are introduced, promotion is only one factor which determines use of the service.

In the SuperJournal project, under the eLib framework, the following factors affecting the use of electronic journals were identified[3]:

+ holdings, or the availability of electronic journals;

+ accessibility of the (physical) library;

+ promotion;

+ signalling of availability ;

+ competing electronic services;

+ technical infrastructure;

+ user authentication;

+ training and support.

In other words, you need to have a service that works for your users, and is easy to access. this means having the right software with reliable printing facilities, and sufficient material to be considered a worthwhile resource. Only when those preconditions are met, can promotion, which includes training and support, be a sensible activity. Training and support must also address the needs of library staff.

Activities in 1995

Promotion of the new service was carried out in close cooperation with Elsevier[4] and was carefully aligned with user studies before, during and after the introduction. As in the SuperJournal project mentioned above, it was important to identify the needs of users and to tailor the service to their demands. At the same time, discussions in focus groups offered a possibility to promote the service in the making. Another important preparatory step was close communication with faculty boards and decentralised automation units, in order to be sure that the right software would be installed on faculty desktops and that printing facilities were available near faculty rooms.

When the stage was set, the following promotional activities were undertaken in the departments which would benefit most from the service, given their fields of interest, economics and social sciences:

+ introduction and demonstration of the new service in faculty meetings; attendance at these meetings was disappointing ;

+ flyers ;

+ posters;

+ articles in campus magazines ;

+ stickers on hard copy issues of journals to remind users these issues were also available in electronic form from their desktop.

Similar efforts were made in the Law Department when, a couple of years later, a significant number of law journals came available electronically. From the introduction of the OLC database, we knew that the take up of new services takes time and requires more than the first time activities mentioned above. Structural activities include:

+ introduction of new staff to the library and its services by subject specialists, which does not usually start in the library, but in the room of the newly appointed faculty, by pointing out services of interest available on their desktop. Incidentally, problems with desktops are signalled, and, not incidentally, the subject specialist gets a good idea about the needs of his new customer;

+ from time to time subject specialists join regular meetings of faculty teams to demonstrate and introduce services which might be of importance to them. In this way, longer serving members of staff arealso reached, and the subject specialists have a good opportunity to get to know their customers better;

+ regular workshops for the main services of the library, but attendance of faculty is low, so an alternative is offered;

+ tailor-made workshops for specific groups or even faculty individually;

+ new or enhanced services are announced through e-mail newsletters on a monthly basis;

+ use and user studies.

From these latter studies it is possible to identify critical factors in the introduction of new services. Two such studies, which focussed explicitly on the use of (electronic) journals are discussed in the next section.

User studies

The first user study was carried out at the London School of Economics as part of the European Decomate I project, led by Tilburg University. Jenkins[5] concluded from preliminary studies that the following factors were of critical importance when introducing electronic journals:

◆ users want hardcopy of articles: just as they made photocopies in the past, they want to make prints of electronic articles for their own use - paper is in a sense an interactive medium, you can highlight and annotate very easily;

◆ timeliness: electronic versions should be available preferably before the print version arrives - unfortunately this is only recently being achieved;

◆ critical mass needs not only a subject field to be sufficiently covered, but also retrospective availability of articles;

◆ system performance and the quality of images;

◆ impact on print collections and end users costs.

In short, scholars want a service for electronic journals to work easily and to contain enough material of interest. The final factor points to the uneasiness which is common in a transition, you do not want to throw away old shoes before you have got new ones. These findings were corroborated at Tilburg.

A second user study[6], carried out at Tilburg and Maastricht University in the period 1996 - 1998, with a grant from IWI (which can best be viewed as the Dutch equivalent of eLib), had a broader scope. It examined the use of paper and electronic journals among different disciplines, law and economics in Tilburg, and medicine, health sciences and psychology in Maastricht, with a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods. Main findings of interest were the following:

◆ 24 to 37 percent of the journals in the collections under study accounted for 80 percent of the use, a confirmation of the well-known 20/80 rule. The implication is that if you want to achieve critical mass quickly, you should concentrate on the high use titles. Unfortunately the market for electronic journals is supply rather than demand driven.

◆ The study also found a high use of older volumes, up to five to ten years old articles are still in frequent demand. This corroborates Jenkins' result mentioned above and could also be used as important feedback for electronic collection development, but, again, the market is highly supply driven.

◆ A closer examination of the use of 83 economics journals which were available in both electronic and print form seems to indicate that the electronic versions were slightly better used than the print versions. Comparison is tricky, though, because of the different methods used (slip survey on journal level, log analysis on article level) and the difference in scope (more volumes in print than electronic form).

The survey also included interviews of researchers, log analysis showed that a little more than 50 percent of the researchers in the economics faculty had at least retrieved an electronic article once in 1997. We were of course interested in the reasons for not using the system. The following answers came out strongly:

◆ technical problems, mainly to do with printing, which stresses again the importance of the technical infrastructure, and, as an aside, do not expect electronic journals to lead to less paper;

◆ preference for browsing the journal shelves;

◆ lack of sufficient titles in a specific subject field - the critical mass problem;

◆ incompetence - which points to the importance of user training and support.

In the same interview, researchers were asked what in their view would be factors promoting the use of electronic journals:

◆ timely availability;

◆ easy access: one interface/one password;

◆ full text search possibilities;

◆ access from home.

One important conclusion which we drew from this survey was that we can only consider a move to electronic for the Economics Department and we will start doing so from 2001 onwards, on the precondition that archiving is ensured. For the Law Faculty, we are still a long way from such a move. This has mainly to do with the recent and limited exposure to electronic articles in this department.

Conclusions

Before starting to promote electronic journals it is important that technical matters are dealt with, which often implies working closely together with

the computer department and decentralised automation units. Be sure that users have the right equipment and software: recent Web browser; Acrobat reader installed, and easy printingin order to be able to make use of the service. Test the service thoroughly in the library and train your staff at the same time. Introducing a bad service will make users turn away and it will take a lot more effort to get them back in the future.

Users want easy access through one interface with as little authentication hassle as possible. Not only do they want this at your institution, they also want it at home and while working elsewhere. Balancing these two demands is a technical challenge.

Time and again it is proven that critical mass as well as timeliness are important factors for users. Consider a phased introduction by subject field and review your contracts with publishers on the basis of timely delivery of electronic versions.

Promotion is not a one time activity, but an ongoing concern for innovating libraries. From the literature[7] it is known that researchers form their information seeking behaviour in an early stage of their career. The best way to keep them up with ever innovating services is to encourage your subject specialists to build strong customer relationships with them. As a side benefit, this generates user feedback which no user study is able to give you. In a sense one might say that bringing the library to the faculty desktop implies in the end to bring the subject specialist to the faculty as well.

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