

23RD ANNUAL UKSG CONFERENCE

Workshop Reports

Fifteen workshops were held at this year's conference, each repeated three times, generating much interesting debate and discussion. Reports reflecting the content and discussion at some of these workshops are included below.

Customer Support for e-journals

Leader: Richard Gedye

Setting the scene, RG posed the questions, Are customer service and customer support necessarily the same? Is service more appropriate to printed media? Support more appropriate to electronic formats? Does the idea of support imply a more open-ended relationship, with more expected from the support provider, e.g. legal expertise (licensing issues) and technical expertise/experience in both publishing and library systems?

Agreed that we should consider the workshop topic under two headings (1) current failings, and (2) suggestions for improvements.

Current failings

- Journal access not working at all/not working as expected.
- Access control: Subscriber number required for setting up access 'on envelope'.
- Contact point at publisher (library concern); contact point at library (publisher concern).
- Anonymous email addressee (e.g. help@anypublisher.com) at publisher – usually very poor response.
- This is probably the first time that publishers and libraries have had to deal with one another – should they have to? What is the role of the subscription agent?
- Have subscription agents been neglecting the registration aspects of electronic journal

provision? Procedures often very cumbersome, instructions very confusing.

- Lack of transparent terminology on publishers' websites.
- Inappropriateness of IP address ranges for certain types of libraries/organisations (e.g. multi-national companies).
- Dealing through subscription agents adds to complications, at present. While they can help with registration, they may actually add to the confusion with licensing issues (RG, expressing view of some publishers).
- Gateway services: sometimes the content is not all the publisher and/or subscription agent claimed it would be, and not all the bells-and-whistles available on the publisher's site are available via the gateway service.
- Publisher's responsibilities: what compensation is made for failure to deliver online content in a timely manner?
- Problem for publishers of identifying IP addresses of users accessing publication via gateway services (NB CatchWord do provide this information to their publishers, so it can be done).

Suggestions for improvements

- Service level agreements between library and publisher that are different from, or are an addendum to the licence;
- Use of postal codes for access control (NB not valid for all libraries, as makeup of codes varies from country to country);
- Single/standard online registration form for all electronic journals;
- Gateway services: standard interface would substantially lower training and associated costs;

- On publishers' sites, a welcome message to registered IP addresses which (a) shows that the service is delivered courtesy of the institution's library, and (b) makes it clear that individual users are not required to register as this has already been taken care of by the library;
- The publisher's site should show a list of that publisher's titles which the institution/IP address range is entitled to access;
- The publisher's website should list the names of appropriate contacts;
- Libraries should increase their self-help (RG mentioned Yale site: Jake [<http://jake.med.yale.edu/>], which gives information on which databases index or abstract a particular title);
- Publishers must realise that more staff training is required, as well as recruitment of higher calibre staff (publisher's comment);
- Registration procedures should be simplified and speeded up (CatchWord have already speeded up their procedures).

Note: Of those present on 10/04/2000, all were librarians, other than one publisher (Lippincott W & W), and one intermediary (CatchWord); no subscription agents were represented.

Notes on the workshops on 'Benchmarking'

Leader: Tom Chadwick

The room was full for each of the three workshops with a total attendance of around 60 delegates. A short presentation was made illustrating performance monitoring in other areas, and looking at the activities significant in serials acquisition. Illustrations of benchmark measures, like claims per title per agent, claims per issue per publisher, and claims per issue per journal, were provided, with indications of how analysis of these could lead to root cause and corrective action analysis. Emphasis was made on the positive aspects of benchmarking to stimulate monitoring and examination of what the resulting measures might mean, and on always working together and sharing information with others in the supply chain to eliminate waste for mutual benefit.

There was a reasonable level of delegate contribution, but on each occasion a few preferred to listen to the comment and discussion

from others. Librarians and subscription agents were well represented at each, but only on the first day did any representatives of publishers identify themselves. The greatest part of each workshop concentrated on issues of claims for undelivered journals. Very few attendees from libraries had carried out any recorded performance monitoring. Subscription agents do monitor performance by publishers in varying ways, but have not necessarily seen this as suitable to share with librarians.

Workshop 1

All agreed that the level of claims was a significant problem, though one librarian from the SUPC consortium thought that the accuracy of renewal lists and invoices might be more suitable as a benchmark. One delegate had seen a significant rise in claims as a direct result of changing from one subscription agent to another – a consequence of tendering. Before this institution had joined a consortium, there had been an annual tendering round. It was generally agreed that performance improved with longer term relationships. Credible performance monitoring was important to justify sustaining long contracts.

Representatives from Swets Blackwell felt that it was important that there was agreement at the very start of a contract to establish the specific measures to be recorded. If it was possible, the establishment of industry wide parameters would be useful – could UKSG consider this?

Using a consolidation service had eased the problem for one library – was this just moving the issue down the supply chain, or perhaps to a part of the supply chain better equipped to handle it? As well as author, editorial committee, publisher, subscription agent, library, reader, the supply chain sometimes includes a distributor.

To pre-empt the need for claims, could publishers advise agents to advise libraries? A forum was described involving publishers and agents which had/is discussing this (ICEDIS). To be practicable this would need to interact electronically with the various library information systems in general use – an area for librarians to lobby systems suppliers?

Discussion was held about the publisher being a monopolist, but it was agreed that even a monopolist would benefit from the elimination/

reduction of the unnecessary waste of handling and responding to claims.

On the way out one publisher commented that pilferage was an issue – for instance there were many claims for 'New Scientist' – filching a journal was not seen as morally wrong in some eyes.

Workshop 2

Discussion began around whether it was possible to pre-empt claims by arranging for updated information on journal delivery forecasts to be provided. Swets Blackwell already have some of this data which is generated from their journal consolidation activity. For their customers it can already be accessed on the Swets Blackwell web site. This however would need considerable work by the library to input the data into the library information system to pre-empt automatic claiming activity.

A representative from EBSCO said that they did keep this sort of information on claims but did not see the gain to be had by sharing it with libraries.

Swets Blackwell wondered what the benefits would be for librarians to have this sort of information (claims per publisher etc)? The general response was that it would for a number of reasons: they would be better informed; it could be used to help inform choices (no budget can cover everything requested); it could be used to ask academics to bring pressure, and it would demonstrate that librarians are looking for best value for money.

The British Library, and the Swets consolidation system apparently have management systems which use algorithms based on recent claims history to adjust claim periods accordingly. Would there have to be so many claims, if payment was not received up front, and agents had to deliver something before they could submit invoices? The representative from the British Library said that his purchasing department wanted him to do something 'to change the industry'.

E-journals are a major worry for some. How can libraries check that the journals are all available and provided in a timely mode? Since there is no physical 'receipt and checking in', will links have to be tested using some sort of checklist? Does the whole thing arrive, is it totally accessible?

Workshop 3

Two libraries described how they did in fact keep a monitor of claims but felt that they could not really get much response to it.

The problems of payment in advance removing the main commercial incentive to deliver on time was again raised.

A representative from RoweCom felt that publishers are quite sensitive to being thought to perform less well than their peers. Experience on the books front had shown some evidence of a desire to perform competitively, and to take action to avoid being considered to be near the bottom of a performance table.

The Swets Blackwell attendee felt that it is very hard to capture the interest of publishers. A good subscription agent will search all possible alternative sources, distributors etc., for a journal where the claim on the publisher is proving sticky, but it often comes down to just the one single source.

The concept of trying to establish one set of standard parameters was broadly welcomed, provided these were practicable and that measuring performance against them did not slow things down too much.

One librarian from Ireland described a process they had begun to monitor books delivery by putting tags into a reasonably representative sample of book orders, so that progress could be tracked from start to finish of the acquisition process. Unfortunately, the two-week Christmas break had fallen within the time allocated to the pilot, as had the period of implementation of a new library system – so there had been inevitable backlogs in the cataloguing procedure. What about the service to library users? – 'Oh they don't matter!' This was obviously a joke but maybe with a tiny element of Freudian content?

Conclusions

There appeared to be general agreement that the topic was relevant and interesting. At each session there was a proposal that a short list of key performance parameters could be developed by librarians, subscription agents and publishers working together, and that UKSG would be a good forum to identify these and perhaps publish a monitor of current standards on an ongoing basis.