



## IMPLEMENTING E-JOURNALS AT THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

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*In a survey on library services in the Environment Agency, 60% of respondents asked for e-journals. It took two years to formulate policies of access, licensing and selection criteria, and to get funding. Lessons learnt with this experience may be of value to those starting an e-journal service.*

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### Introduction

The Environment Agency is the public body for protecting and enhancing the environment in England and Wales. Agency staff need access to vast amounts of information covering many subject areas such as air, land and water quality, flood defence, conservation, fisheries, recreation, navigation, water resources and waste. Nearly 9000 staff are employed in the Agency at more than 100 sites across England and Wales. We have estimated that approximately 6000 of these are potential users of electronic resources.

The National Library and Information Service (NLIS) delivers information across the Agency via a network of nine Information Centres – one in each of the regions and one in Head Office. It was created in 1998 to bring together libraries and collections of books and journals that had been set up by predecessor bodies of the Environment Agency. We have a centralised publications budget and acquisitions team. Our key users are the policy makers, the national centres of expertise, our R&D department and operational staff, many of whom are remote users of the service.

From its inception the NLIS has been trying to make the most efficient use of resources. Electronic services are fundamental to our philosophy of providing equitable and easy access for all staff to a wide range of scientific and technical material. Our strategy is to introduce electronic information resources where appropriate as soon as possible, and e-journals are considered a major part of these resources.

We knew that many of our users wanted us to implement e-journals. As part of our marketing strategy, we had commissioned a survey of our users. One of the questions asked was "What other services would you like to see?" Sixty per cent

of respondents asked for electronic journals to be provided. We also knew that the provision of electronic resources fitted in with our own Director's wishes as well as with the Agency's philosophy and moves towards e-government and other e-commerce initiatives.

### Planning

The planning for e-journals began two years ago with the tender for the supply of periodicals to the Agency. The provision of electronic journals as well as printed journals became mandatory and it also became essential for our agent to provide us with a reliable and easy-to-use service. We took advantage of free trials given by agents and the findings from these were incorporated into the final decisions on the tender. Universal Internet access was the key to fulfilling our strategy, and although this was not yet available, the project was nearing completion. At this time we were also formulating our policies on licensing, access and selection criteria.

### Licensing

One of the most important issues we had to resolve was licensing. As we had so many different sites we knew that licensing would be a problem. We had to decide whether to consider licensing each site for the journals they subscribed to, or to look at titles that were universal and have a single licence covering all sites. The implications on staff time for administering the licences also had to be taken into consideration.

### Access

Access to e-journals, we decided, should be similar to the other electronic resources provided and should be as seamless as possible. We were using the Agency Intranet to provide legislation and health and safety information on-line and access to selected databases. These services were still restricted to those staff who had Internet access, but were well received by our users, especially those who worked in offices where they did not have access to an Information Centre. We were keen to build on this success and also to exploit the functionality that allowed us to

link from Cambridge Scientific Abstracts (an abstracting database that provided desktop literature searching) to e-journals.

Our electronic services providers used our IP address to give users silent authentication. This meant that they could link to the product they wanted without having to remember passwords or logins. We knew that we could use the Intranet in the same way to provide access to electronic journals.

### Selection

Selecting titles for electronic subscriptions posed problems. Because the collections inherited by NLIS had developed separately and there had been no overall selection policy, there were more than 2500 subscriptions to over 600 different titles. Some of these were taken across all sites, others were specific to one or two sites, and there was a lot of duplication.

We began a programme of rationalising our subscriptions in the hope that these savings would cover the cost of electronic subscriptions. We asked staff to share copies, to use tables of contents rather than be circulated with the whole issue, and to come into the Information Centres to read articles. At the same time, we began to collect information on the use of our titles. We checked which titles were used most and also monitored which journals we requested from the British Library to identify gaps in our collections. From this work we began to formulate a list of core journals, and from this list we identified titles that we would like to provide electronically. We decided that we would only subscribe to e-journals that were of relevance to large sections of Agency staff and that we would provide access to these journals across all Agency sites.

### Funding

With these policies decided, we were now ready to pilot e-journals but we were unable to go further without extra funding. Knowing exactly how much money would be needed was difficult to establish. Although the cost of each journal is reasonably easy to find out, establishing the costs of site licences and any publishers' deals which may reduce the overall cost will only be covered when negotiations begin.

Our budget was fully committed for the present year and the rationalisation programme had not yet produced the savings anticipated. It was apparent that if we wanted to go ahead we would have to seek funding from outside the service. We approached our Customer Board to ask for their support to find the cash needed for a pilot study. Customer Boards are set up for each national service to monitor the progress of the service and to offer guidance on service delivery.

We prepared a paper outlining the benefits to the Agency. We also listed the perceived benefits to the NLIS. It would reduce the administrative work involved in checking in and circulating copies of journals, it would reduce the need to photocopy articles, and claiming for missing issues would be done once rather than for each copy subscribed to. Our bid for extra funding was unsuccessful. Although the Customer Board agreed that there were many advantages and that it was the way forward for the Agency, they could not support it.

Reflecting on our lack of success, several points stood out. The Board members had assumed that electronic journals would be cheaper because publishers would not be producing so many paper copies; site licences were also a new concept to most of the Board members but the biggest stumbling block was that we were unable to demonstrate cost savings across the Agency. We could estimate our own savings in time and efficiency, but it was impossible for us to quantify, with any certainty, how much time a scientist or pollution inspector would save by being able to access the information from journals directly.

The Customer Board also felt that stronger costings were needed. They were unhappy that we could not say categorically how much the project would cost. We had made an estimate but as we had already discovered, the true cost of e-journals can only be established after negotiations with each publisher. Even if we were unable to proceed in this financial year, we would still need accurate costings so we asked our subscription agent to begin negotiations on our behalf.

### Implementation

In January 2002, we had some good fortune. Funds were made available to us to implement electronic journals. The transferred money had to

be used by March, so we needed to move quickly.

Our criteria for journal selection became a very short process. It had to be something that we already subscribed to. It had to have widespread demand in the Agency – it could be subject specific but it must be of importance to many users. It had to be from one of the major publishers – we did not have time to negotiate with lots of small publishers. We had the choice of going for a publisher's package or subscribing to individual titles. It was tempting to opt for the package. We would have more titles than we subscribed to in print, it would help to fill gaps in our collection and taking a whole package meant that it would be quicker and easier to negotiate. But the disadvantages were that many of the titles were not relevant to our core subjects and the costs were high.

One way we could save money was to take electronic only titles and not maintain our print subscriptions. We felt that this option was too risky. We needed to maintain our hard copies in case we did not continue with electronic delivery of the title in the future. We opted for print plus electronic access for our existing Elsevier and Blackwell Science titles. We made one exception to our major publisher rule. *The Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences* is very widely used across the Agency. Although it was from a small publisher, it was relatively cheap to implement and negotiations were quick and fairly easy.

After all of our planning, the setbacks, and then the final rush, we managed to implement electronic journals by the beginning of April. We delivered them to our users, as we had anticipated, via the Intranet using our IP address to link seamlessly through to SwetsNet Navigator.

### Lessons learnt

Delivering electronic journals to the Environment Agency has been a learning experience for all who have been involved. What lessons have we learned?

- Monitor access to your hard copy journals as a first step so that you know which ones are most widely used and which are most suitable for electronic delivery.
- The IT infrastructure needs to be in place and working well before starting implementation. Access to electronic journals needs to be as

simple and seamless as possible. Network speed is crucial. If the time taken to download information is not reasonably quick, people will stop using it.

- Publishers can be slow. Allow plenty of time for negotiations. Each one seems to have a different way of packaging titles or different deals that may suit your needs. Site licences also take time to negotiate. You need time to decide which deals or licences suit your service best.
- Use an agent. Their experience was invaluable to us. We do not have a dedicated serials librarian so there could be no question of our trying to negotiate each licence separately or linking to each individual subscription and maintaining those links in the future. Consider how you will monitor your usage of electronic journals. Good subscription agents will provide access to these statistics for you.
- Access to archives and back issues are problematical. There is no consistent policy amongst publishers. Access to back issues usually has to be negotiated separately and the problem of access to archives if you stop subscribing to a title has not been adequately resolved yet. We would be reluctant to abandon our hard copy archives unless we had an agreement to electronic access for a long period.
- Timing of implementation needs to be considered. Subscriptions run from January to December. Plan implementation to make the best use of your subscription period.

- Active marketing and promotion of the service is vital. We began our publicity through the Intranet, then used posters, the national cascade briefing and e-mails to groups of users. Where users request copies of articles which are available electronically, Information Centre staff either ring the users and talk them through the links to the electronic journal, or e-mail the link and offer training if it is needed. We also have a rolling programme for delivering end-user training to all staff across the Agency. Our aim is to give one to one training on all electronic resources including electronic journals to anyone who requests it.
- Monitor the use of electronic journals. We have accurate usage statistics provided for each title so that we can now make informed decisions on future provision. Decisions on whether to renew titles will be made on the basis of these figures.
- Secure sustainable funding for electronic journals. Expectations within the Agency have been raised by the provision of electronic journals. It would be a great blow not to be able to continue the project.

### Conclusion

All indications show that electronic journals in the Agency have been a success. Feedback from our users shows that they value having instant access to material. Electronic journals are fast becoming a core part of our service and I cannot see us being without them. However, the range of titles that we take will depend on the funding available and the other pressures on this funding