

ER: promoting and managing e-resources without the trauma

An overview of the UKSG seminar held at the Scientific Societies Lecture Theatre, London, 14 November 2002



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Introduction

Many of us have had first hand experience of the difficulties our users face navigating the complex maze of electronic resources they are expected to use. Those of us who purchase these electronic resources on their behalf can see highly relevant resources under-utilised because our users aren't aware of their existence. There is an urgent need for the information environment presented to our users to be simplified into a single interface.

Portal management and resource discovery systems offer answers to these problems, and were the main theme of this timely and valuable seminar organised by the UKSG, offering users easier access to the variety of electronic resources available to them through a single and simple interface. For the purchasers they provide the opportunity to maximise the use of their resources, carry out better collection management, and get better value for money. The active involvement of publishers and aggregators in these developments is crucial in making this 'joined-up' information realise its potential. Otherwise, the future is Google!

Paul Harwood, Regional Director, Swets Blackwell, chaired the seminar. Three of the papers mentioned here are published in full in this issue.

Implementing electronic journal access in the British Library Reading Rooms: the challenges and successes

Julia Stocken, The British Library

Julia's paper provided an insight into the challenges that the British Library faced in its attempts to improve the access of its Reading Room visitors to its increasing number of electronic journals, now around 2,600 and

expected to grow to 4,000 by the middle of 2003.

Its ESTAR (Electronic Storage and Retrieval System), which has been in operation since 1989, has provided its Reading Room users with the ability to search across all journals held within the ESTAR system, together with faster access than through the web, as all the servers were hosted in house.

The usage of electronic journals has increased rapidly within the Reading Rooms, up 57% in 2001 compared to 2000, and up by 65% in 2002 compared to 2001.

Julia highlighted a number of factors which currently limited the expansion in the use of electronic journals within the British Library:

Few British Library catalogue records have links to the electronic version of the journals, meaning that users were usually directed to the paper versions of journals, and weren't necessarily aware that some titles were also available electronically. The fact that the British Library had recently gone out to tender for a new catalogue system would hopefully resolve this problem.

Users were now faced with an increasing number of different electronic journal systems e.g. ESTAR and JSTOR.

Poor browsability on screen remained a constraining factor for users who wished to scan recent journal issues.

The need for increasing numbers of PCs had led to the situation where users often had to book to use the PCs.

The relatively high cost of printing for users of the Reading Rooms was a barrier

Complex licensing requirements had led to the need for the British Library to create its own licence for negotiating licences with publishers. The need for some journals to be retained in paper format because e.g. spectral images in the *Journal of Chromatography* are clearer in paper than in electronic format.

Missing components in electronic journals compared to their printed counterparts e.g. additional notes, some supplements, adverts.

The session prompted a number of questions, including:

Whose responsibility was the archiving of electronic journals, the publisher's or the British Library's? The consensus was the British Library's.

What determined which electronic journals were available? This was dependent on reaching agreements with publishers. At present this meant that there was no access to Business Source Premier.

Promoting remote use of e-journals by RCN members across the UK and abroad

Jackie Lord, Royal College of Nursing

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Portals for mortals: maximising value from investment in digital resources

Robin Murray, Fretwell-Downing Informatics

Robin's excellent presentation was all about the use of Portals to integrate and maximise the use of our otherwise scattered electronic resources and collections. In other words, to reduce the barriers to the use of information that our users are faced with daily. As so many institutions have invested significantly in electronic resources, there could be serious problems in retaining or increasing that investment if our electronic resources cannot be demonstrated to be 'value for money'.

Robin began the talk using two examples, one anecdotal and one a formal study carried out by JISC. The JISC study showed that databases and electronic journals were down at the bottom in terms of usage compared to other resources. The anecdotal example involved each of us thinking about the different information tools/resources that our users were expected to interact with and

their many different interfaces, and what we saw as their most common solution to the problem of finding information. Yes, it's Google! This was seen to be a big and serious problem for all the parties. If what we buy is not seen as relevant, then we are unlikely to be able to sustain the investment that makes it possible to buy those resources in the first place. .

Some of the underlying issues relating to information discovery and delivery for our users were then presented and solutions proposed. These included the work that users themselves had to do to manually join up the disparate services e.g. a reference in a database with no full text links means that the user has to leave one service and go use another. In the web age users expected the environment to be simple and easy to understand. And what is the answer? Yes, you've guessed it, we mortals need Portals!

Robin then went on to talk about the idea of D2D (Discovery to Delivery), where users are provided with a single interface, which can be personalised and contextualised, that can search across different appropriate resources in order to locate the appropriate copy, request the copy and have it delivered.

There are two parts to this problem: how to provide seamless discovery across multiple content providers and how to deal with the appropriate copy problem.

The problems associated with providing an Information Portal that allows a single search across a range of resources are complex. Various technical issues were described, including multiple search protocols, different record formats, variable cataloguing standards, and variable search capabilities. The idea is to provide a single consistent result set. The next problem is how the appropriate copy is delivered. Again there are various technical issues including dynamic linking, open URLs, DOIs, CrossRef and full text databases.

By solving these issues Robin said that there would be benefits to the user, to the institution and to the information professional. Of course we must not forget the benefits to the producers of all this information.

This highly topical session understandably prompted a host of questions. There was debate about whether JISC should be lobbied to create a national portal that institutions could then personalise. It was also suggested that publishers

need to be active in this process otherwise their business will suffer. Some publishers were concerned about the loss of branding, but in many cases it's the different branding of products that can cause so much angst amongst users. The issue of digital rights management and the war of technology e.g. between Microsoft and Sony was also raised. This lively debate was followed by a very satisfying lunch.

E-texts – a targeted approach

Sue Roberts and Leo Appleton, Edge Hill College of HE

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Delivering moving image resources: the work of the BUFVC

Luke McKernan, British Universities Film & Video Council

Unfortunately we were not to be treated to a pastiche of moving images. Luke and everyone else were frustrated to find that the computer didn't have Windows Media Player loaded. In many ways that demonstrated some of the uphill struggles that moving images face in being exploited to the full.

Nick began by talking about the functions of the BUFVC, which provides an information service, databases and an off-air recording and backup service for UK Higher Education. The lack of a statutory deposit of film in the UK was a serious hindrance.

It soon became clear that delivering moving images in education is a complex and developing operation. Firstly, there are differing standards for film e.g. 8mm, 9.5mm, 16mm, 35mm, etc. as well as for video. Secondly, the resources themselves are located in a wide variety of places including national and regional film archives, television libraries, private collections, specialist collections such as the John Grierson archive at the University of Stirling, online resources etc. Thirdly, they are dependent on safe, practical and affordable hardware.

Other interesting issues emerged regarding the information that a moving image provided and the need for context. Many of the moving images we see as real and accurate portrayals of specific events, are often not that at all. This was illustrated by reference to the Titanic, of which there is only a very small piece of film taken in Belfast where it was built, yet I'm sure most of us would think that

there was more.

Problems in delivering online moving images were reflected in the variety of formats and the different software that was required to be able to deliver the moving images e.g. Windows Media Player, Real Player, QuickTime etc.

I would certainly recommend a visit to the BUFVC website to help you find more about moving images, to identify specialist collections in your area of interest or uncover documentary moving images of important world events. It's not yet a portal, but an important gateway into the field of moving images.

"I want it all and I want it now!" – managing expectations with MetaLib and SFX

Nick Lewis, University of East Anglia

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The demonstration of a live portal (management system) with SFX at UEA changed my own up to now negative thoughts on cross searching of resources. My recent experiences with training undergraduate students has shown they have an inclination to see Google as their sole portal on the world of information, and are increasingly hard to persuade to use databases and electronic journals. It's easy to see why: so many sites offering different things, and the desire to use one site for everything. This has made the need for a single interface to cross search all resources, as and when one pleases, essential. So I am now a convert. Thanks, Nick!

Stakeholders in success – the electronic publisher, the librarian and the scholar

Julie Carroll-Davis and Roger Tritton, ProQuest

Roger Tritton and Julie Carroll-Davis presented the final session of the day. Roger kicked off with a discussion of the stakeholders involved in ensuring the success of any electronic resources within an academic institution: the scholars (users), the librarians, and the electronic publishers.

The users want:

access to most appropriate resources to meet study and research needs

high quality access tools to enable the location of all relevant content

'joined-up' and linked research environment

intuitive and easy to use resources
personalisation mechanisms
context and supporting tools when and wherever the users need them.

The librarian was seen as the 'piggy in the middle' and faced many challenges including:

making long term choices in a world of short-term change
balancing priorities
integrating resources
providing users with the resources that they need

The session then moved on to look at how the publishers were dealing with this, using examples from ProQuest products. Linkage, interoperability and providing context were seen as the key to dealing with many of the issues.

Roger concluded by saying that the key challenge for electronic publishers was to try to deal with the fact that things were changing at different speeds in different disciplines and different institutions, requiring publishers to try and straddle both camps. Whilst Portal Management Systems and open linking protocols such as SFX offered solutions, not all institutions were yet in a position to implement these.

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