

A day in the life of an e-journal librarian

An overview of the UKSG seminar held at the British Library of Political and Economic Science, London, 7 July 2004
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Three papers from the seminar are published in full on the pages following this report

What does an e-journal librarian do? This seminar, through papers and practical workshops, aimed to provide an insight into the strategic and practical issues for acquiring and managing e-journals in the library environment.

The papers presented gave practical examples of how different sectors of the library community deal with e-journals and the workshops gave the opportunity for librarians, publishers and subscription agents to come together to share experiences.

The day started with a welcome and introduction by Jill Taylor-Roe, a UKSG representative and Chair for the day.

Andrew Booth, Director of Information Resources at the School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield, was the first speaker. His paper, 'Strategic overview: the politics of e-access and e-funding in the library environment', looked at the issues surrounding open access and the benefits for the academic community. (*Paper in this issue.*) Whatever the future is for open access publishing this was a thought-provoking session for librarians, subscription agents and publishers alike.

The next speaker, *Carole Woods*, Information Manager at GlaxoSmithKline, gave us an insight into 'A day in the life of an e-journal librarian – a practitioner's view'. Carole started by giving us the background and history of her role. As with many of us, Carole was initially responsible for print journals but gradually her role has evolved until she is now responsible for over 4,000 e-journal titles and approximately 81 global licences. This evolving role is the same in many institutions where there is an increasing shift from print to electronic subscriptions. Carole went on to discuss some of the practical issues that e-journal librarians encounter on a day-to-day basis. These included changing URLs, changes in electronic holdings, missing content and problem solving – issues that many of us are familiar with and can

raise when negotiating deals with publishers. As well as discussing problems, Carole gave some useful tips on how to manage e-journals including making use of listservs, establishing good contact links with providers and building up a good knowledge of the publishers' content and functionality of their web sites. All in all this proved to be an interesting and worthwhile session.

Next on the programme was lunch, which met the usual UKSG high standard! Once we had been fed and watered the afternoon session kicked off with a presentation entitled 'Living up to expectations 1 – local support and promotion' brought to us by *Julie Hall* who is the Reference Services Manager in the public libraries for the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. (*Paper in this issue.*) For someone working with electronic resources in the academic library sector it was refreshing to hear how my contemporaries in the public library sector work. The session finished with a look at what comes next for Richmond and its electronic services and this provoked a discussion about print versus electronic – a subject dear to all our hearts!

Jo White, the Business Development Manager at Swets Information Services, delivered the fourth and final formal session to us. (*Paper in this issue.*) Although, strictly speaking, this was not a session about 'A day in the life of an e-journal librarian', Jo explained how Swets, as a subscription agent, can help an e-journal librarian in their day-to-day work. This session also covered such topics as alerting services, EDI and licensing issues and although it gave an insight into how Swets can work with us it was also a platform to promote new services that

are being introduced. In response to points made in this session there followed a discussion about missing content and grace periods for renewals – issues that appear to be a huge concern to many e-journal librarians and which are not as easy to solve with e-journals as they are with print.

After further refreshment, the seminar continued with workshops (*see below*) and tours of the host library. The tours allowed us to have a walk round the impressive BLPES and hear about its many services while the workshops allowed us to share experiences with colleagues from other sectors of the library community, publishers and subscription agents.

In summing up, Jill Taylor-Roe acknowledged that different sectors are doing different things and this is why it is important for us to come together and discuss issues important to all sectors. As Jill stated: "There is more that unites us than divides us" – a statement I am sure we all agree with.

After a break for tea the attendees were split into small groups for the workshop sessions. The aim of these workshops was to give participants the opportunity to discuss issues raised during the earlier presentations, together with their own experiences, in a small informal group setting. Each group was asked to summarize the key issues raised during their discussion. It soon became apparent that this approach worked well with little facilitation being required. Whilst the discussions that took place covered the whole spectrum of electronic resources and the issues surrounding them, two issues dominated:

- licensing
- the increasing diversity of pricing models and the subscription renewal 'nightmare'.

Licensing

Licensing was seen as a 'nightmare' for the complete novice, which could be helped by the simple introduction of a standard checklist when assessing each licence. There was a plea for an industry-wide standard for e-journal licences through the adoption of an international 'model licence'. There was some concern that licence banks were not always 'in sync' with licences held in-house. With some of the big deals the list of licensed material was not always accurate and timely, leading to confusion about exactly what an

institution was entitled to access. Some publishers that offered online access did not always have a licence. This was a problem for institutions where reviewing and accepting the terms of the licence were part of the acquisition process for a print/online or online-only resource. To assist with licensing issues there was a clear demand for Electronic Resource Management tools for storing licence agreements and all other information relating to the licences, including contract dates, licensed materials and pricing.

The increasing diversity of pricing models and subscription renewal 'nightmare'

It was not surprising that a major area for discussion was e-journal management, especially in relation to subscription renewals. It was agreed that this was a problem shared by librarians, agents and publishers. Nevertheless, many publishers had not published their pricing information at the point when libraries needed to make renewal decisions for the 2004 subscription year.

The result was that in some cases institutional subscriptions had defaulted to 'print only' where publishers had unbundled 'print-with-free-online', whereas in other cases, due to the lack of pricing transparency, payment to publishers had been delayed whilst agents tried to find out the relevant pricing. Other problems had been caused by journals moving to a publisher with a different pricing policy from the one that had previously published the journal. The varying nomenclature of subscription options between publishers was also causing problems when renewing subscriptions. Subdivisions of online access into, e.g. 'premium' and 'standard' meant that an error here could result in one losing access to the whole archive without realizing it at the time. A simple 'yes' or 'no' was no longer enough on the subscription agent's renewal lists. Instead, one had to spell out the exact subscription option required, for example, 'Tier 1 institution online-only with extended backfile' or 'small institution online-only' or 'more than 600 workstations online-only'. It was felt that moving to e-only was being 'foiled' by print-only titles, especially as it became clear that for some agents the default format on their own systems was print only. Picking up the pieces

once renewals had taken place had proved to be an ongoing task for all parties concerned.

It was felt that some publishers were not communicating changes adequately to assist in this process. It was acknowledged that many publishers had risen to the challenge by producing librarian areas on their web sites or newsletters and that this should be applauded. However, this had created a new problem of having to find the time to read all this material for items of relevance to one's own organization. There was a request for more active communication using e-mail alerts, rather than having to keep visiting publishers' sites to see what had changed.

It was great to see all the participants get so involved in the workshops and in the ensuing discussions. It is hoped that future seminars will continue to offer these workshops.

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