E-Libraries: Tools for Accessing Information

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ABSTRACT

Libraries must fulfill two important requirements of users means it must have good resource base and an efficient mechanism to share the resources. To provide access to information through networking and supplying through a suitable document delivery mechanism such as fax, e-mail, and file transfer or through interlibrary loan are the modes generally followed by e-libraries for resource sharing to meet the requirements of the users. The impact of e-media on the research users is such that they expect access to information from wherever they are, free of any charges and wish to get not merely bibliographic information, but full original text. Users perceive the Internet as an information goldmine and the answer to all their information problems. However, when they attempt to use electronic resources, they sometimes change their perspective. Quite often they realize that to exploit these resources effectively they need training. The users do not really get the benefits from the technology unless they are trained to have a right perspective and understanding of the electronic resources.

Keywords: e-Library, e-medium, resource provider, Quality of service, copyright.

1.0   Introduction

A library is an organized collection of books, manuscripts, articles and other sources of information. This collection can be in any form like printing, audio-visual material, including CDs, DVDs, e-books, e-journals, audio books, videotapes, games and many other types of electronic resource. The places where this material is stored include district libraries, public libraries, personal libraries or national libraries. The material in theses libraries can be on paper or in digital form, stored on computers or accessible over the Internet. Libraries range in size is from a few shelves of books in a small organization's library to collections of several million items in the larger national and academic libraries. The laborious, time-consuming conventional publishing is giving way to the instant e-publishing resulting in digital and online publications. The functions of the librarians also shifted from that of custodian of books to provider of service-oriented information. Some of the new approaches made and steps taken by librarians to cope up with the changing situation include the shift from possessing documents to providing access to information, appropriation of budget to infrastructure creation and maintenance, gradual increase in the electronic/digital component in the library collections, training staff in handling new technologies, increasing use of e-mail, fax, Internet, etc.

2.0   LIBRARY AS RESOURCE PROVIDER

The libraries, for effective resource sharing, must fulfill two important requirements, i.e. having good resource base and an efficient

mechanism to share the resources. Providing access to information through networking and supplying through a suitable document delivery mechanism such as fax, e-mail, and file transfer or through interlibrary loan are the modes generally followed by libraries for resource sharing to meet the requirements of the users. If the distance between lending and receiving library and a user is large, it would take more time for providing the document. E-media and communication tools play a crucial role here. It is needless to say that the databases of library book holdings and union catalogues of periodicals would greatly help in quickly locating the required document.

3.0   DOCUMENT   DELIVERY THROUGH ELECTRONIC MEDIUM

Electronic transfer of information reduces preparation and delivery costs compared to the traditional services such as telex, letter or courier. One of the important functions of an information system is to provide material requested by its users. When the required material is not available in-house, the system may try to obtain the same from other information centers or document supply centers. An electronic document delivery system can provide immediate access of the needed information to the user provided that the system is connected to the document supply centre and the required information is stored in e-me.dia. Magnetic tape, video tape, videodisc, CD-ROM, etc can effectively be used in an electronic document delivery system to offer instant and convenient access to the electronic documents. Transmission of information is achieved by several means. Telefax or facsimile transmission can be used to transmit both textual and graphical material over telecommunication links.

When the material is downloaded from CD-ROM databases or Internet or taken from hard disc drive, the same can be transmitted through e-mail or FTP. Even pictures, scanned images and pages of a document can be sent as separate files dove-tailed with e-mail messages. Computers can transmit electronic information to fax machines using a suitable fax modem card/software. Electronic document delivery systems offer several innovative features useful to a library.

4.0   IMPROVEMENTS IN QUALITY OF SERVICE

Many factors led to the improvement of information services which include

(i) the ever increasing number of users of information, (ii) the large geographic distances that make information acquisition slower, (iii) the developments in the field of IT, (iv) the increasing role of information in shaping the economy of a society, and (v) the changing notion of the information from something to know to something to have as any other commodity. E-media came in handy for librarians to overcome these hurdles. The benefits of e-media in general and e-publications in particular in libraries is four-fold. These facilitate easy searching, enable faster information access, offer savings in storage, space, maintenance, etc. and are more useful due to their inherent characteristics.

These offer a variety of capabilities to enhance the quality and effectiveness of services offered by the libraries.

(A)   ADMITTANCE OF INFORMATION

Unlike printed documents which offer unlimited personal access, the e-publications facilitate simultaneous, multiple access to users distributed over local, regional, national and international boundaries as well as varied time zones. In a campus or LAN environment, access and dissemination of information is instantaneous. Electronic publications provide both direct access by individuals as well as access through intermediaries.

(B) QUALITY OF INFORMATION SERVICES

As printing and distribution is immediate on Internet, the e-journals are available much faster on the Net. Because e-publications are precursors to the printed journals, they would be available before the actual printing process is undertaken. The downloaded information can be edited, revised or repackaged as per the user requirements. Electronic media facilitate (i) faster and better quality of services including value-added products, (ii) enhancement in the number of clientele served with little or no extra inputs, (iii) marketability of information services, and (iv) networking and remote login for geographically distributed users. These factors certainly will enhance the image of the library.

(D) AVALAIBILITY OF REFERENCE SERVICES

Some virtual reference collections have been developed and made available on Internet For example, for those who cannot afford Books-in-Print. Many websites are excellent source of current evaluative information on publishers and prices of books which can be useful for determining interlibrary loan needs, collection development policies, etc. As Internet is gaining

popularity, even commercial reference sources are becoming increasingly available to subscribers or authorized users through a variety of passwords and authorization systems [6]. Many authors have listed Internet sites of librarians' interest for a librarian to choose appropriate sites for offering these services. Electronic Reference Library of the Defense Scientific Information & Documentation Centre, Delhi; Virtual Information Centre of the Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad.

(E) VIRTUAL LIBRARY SERVICES

In a virtual library environment, apart from the services offered in traditional libraries, new types of services are possible. Corporate and business information headlines are searched, retrieved and e-mailed to the desktops of individual clients who, on opening their e-mail box will find them. News flash is very popular, cost-effective and does not violate copyright laws [5]. Many resource guides have been designed and developed around the electronic resources available over Internet in several subject fields to help Net surfers to locate relevant information [2,3].

(F) COPYRIGHT RELATED ISSUES

Over the past decade, there has been a steady growth in the e-publications. This led to gradual increase in the electronic/digital information component in the libraries all over the world. There is a growing dependency on electronic resources in the libraries. More and more institutions are turning to e-technology replacing some of the conventional publications and entering into license agreements which were not necessary till now. The proliferation of personal computers and the decreasing costs of primary

and secondary mass storage media all made it possible to download, store, display and print electronic information. Further, the downloaded documents can be forwarded to others without the knowledge of its rightful owner. Also, the digital information systems are easy targets for tampering, and incorporating or uploading unwanted, unauthorized and objectionable information. The rights issues of digital information include copyright, ownership, pricing and rules and regulations governing multiple usages.

(G) COPYRIGHT REGULATIONS AND LEGISLATIONS

Copyright is generally understood as a right or license to free copying. However, in reality it is a legal right to prevent others from illegal copying. Copyright is an economic system for ensuring the creation of new knowledge by rewarding their creators and their agents; (it provides) an assurance that the creator can determine, if, how, where, when and in what form his or her creation can be used. Many countries are reviewing the current copyright laws to protect the digital media from infringements. Many developed countries such as the USA, Japan, European Commission, Canada, Australia, etc have already enacted tough regulations to overcome the challenges posed by the digital technologies. The e-Lib program of UK envisages spending of 46 million pounds over 3 years on a series of projects concerning copyright and rights management, usage of electronic resources and multimedia electronic journals.

5.0 SECURITY OF ELECTRONIC INFORMATION

It is easy to create digital or digitized copies of the text, photographs, music and video and this results in revenue losses to the copyright owners. Further, digital information is highly vulnerable to manipulations like additions, deletions, etc. resulting in plagiarism, authorship conflicts and impersonation. Unlike the case of printed journals, close monitoring and restriction of usage of digital documents is difficult. Denning[1] reported a few cases of plagiarism of already published electronic material. Lynch [4] suggested solutions like dedicated server, document digest algorithms, and cryptographic signatures to overcome some of these problems. Although efforts such as Stanford Copy Analysis Mechanism (SCAM) have been made to prevent fraudulent acts from digital libraries, such incidents are becoming common due to difficulties in their detection. The most popular way to protect rights and provide secure access to electronic journals over networks such as Internet is through the usage of passwords. Many electronic journal publishers and vendors use this time-tested (by database vendors) mechanism. The Security and Rights Management System of ISI Electronic Library Project (Anderson and Lotspiech, 1995) employs password for providing secure viewing at the client level. Blackwell offers Electronic Journal Navigator service and allows subscribers/end-users log on and browse journals regardless of the storage format or location. The access is through user name and password. Elsevier Science introduced Science Direct service, a full text electronic information resource service of nearly 1000 journals, which also is operated through user name and password.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The latest additions to the field of libraries are Internet and intranets. Millions of people are connected through these networks and many more millions are expected to join. Plans are to introduce a wide variety of commercial and other information services over these networks. Already users of electronic information experienced some disputes relating to intellectual property rights (IPRs) and as the computer networks expand, such problems would increase further. Content liability is another related issue. Who is to be held responsible for the access of the pornographic, seditious, and violent material accessed by users? The impact of e-media on the research users is such that they expect access to information from wherever they are, free of any charges and wish to get not merely bibliographic information, but full original text. Users perceive the Internet as an information goldmine and the answer to all their information problems. However, when they attempt to use electronic resources, they sometimes change their perspective. Quite often they realize that to exploit these resources effectively they need training. The users do not really get the benefits from the technology unless they are trained to have a right perspective and understanding of the electronic resources. Because of these and various associated factors, many experts have advised caution. Once e-journals are recognized and accepted by academics and tenure committees for appointments, promotions, etc, the reluctance of authors to submit their research contributions will disappear. These in turn may result in possible reduction in cost for (academic) libraries; speed in submission of contributions, avoiding waiting for issues (particularly quarterly issues) as submissions can be 'published' any time; and should academic and research institutions as well as authors become involved in publishing, then copyright by originators may no longer be an issue.

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