

Refocusing attention on institutional and collective responsibility for an effective consortia model

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Access to content through consortia approach is becoming prevalent in libraries. This paper discusses the status of consortia in India and portrays the challenges of e-resources access and describes how the changing landscape of libraries, information products offered by publishers and emergence of e-learning environment is influencing consortia. The article concludes that we need to focus on more effective consortia models for just in place delivery of content for greater user convenience. In order to enhance their usage, the consortia resources must be in alignment with institutional thrust areas of work and users' information requirements for work performance.

Keywords: Consortia, e-resources

Introduction

Libraries are always regarded as one of the pillars of information society. Connecting people to knowledge artifacts and channelizing right information to the right person at right time has remained as one of the objectives of library services. Such services are augmented with interactions to find out the information requirements of users and identify the tasks, complexities and time involved to meet the users' information requirements.

Information explosion and overload have created confusion and conundrum of finding quality information which can make a difference in taking decisions, initiating expedient and appropriate actions and generating right insights. An average user does not need millions of downloads but best existing, most appropriate high quality reliable information that can be helpful in work at hand. To facilitate this, libraries and information centres require real time coordination and massive collaborative work and effort. Libraries having common interests can come together to economically develop their resources and offer access to information more than totality of what is normally offered by individual libraries. Technological advances provide adequate networked environment to facilitate this. However, networks are just conduits and to leverage full advantage of them, symbiotic relationships with similar libraries, networking of library professionals and clear policy frameworks are essential to ensure acquisition of right content and resource sharing.

We need to refocus on the existing consortia models to make them more performing in terms of just in time delivery of relevant information to users and accessibility of information conforming to thrust areas of institutions. As mobile computing and social networking is gaining ground, we need to work out integrated models that provide greater user interface and facilitate just in place and just in time delivery of information. The selling cost of content provided by publishers is enormously increasing and hence the content acquired must reach their users. Library software packages are being adapted to integrate libraries with social networking sites. For instance, NewGenLib software provides library links to reach users through twitter. With inflation and budgetary restrictions in libraries, educational and research institutions as a whole, the time has come to explore and adapt new ways of handling library electronic resources and services.

The basic characteristics of a consortium are management planning, pooled resources for development and shared responsibility among its members. At international level large numbers of libraries are getting merged or joining hands to save cost and offer better services to readers. Some of the examples include, London Library Consortium and Libraries West Consortium. Today libraries are actively reshaping themselves to enter digital world by various means and technologies. Threatened with corrosive budgets, increasing costs, and challenged by a fear of obsolescence resulting from the accelerating rate of

technological change; libraries are struggling for survival and there is no place for stand-alone libraries.

Why consortium?

Libraries have developed robust frameworks for resource sharing and cooperative cataloging, leveraged publisher and aggregator platforms to deliver electronic collections, and created vibrant consortia and groups that share services across regions and countries. Significant network advantages have been already exploited and achieved, but the full potential of what library networks can deliver is yet to be realized.

Library managers' common understanding of a consortium is larger group of participants may result in lowering cost per participating library for licensed products and services. For example in an academic library collection, growth is driven by patron demand and will include new resource types. Budget reductions, user preferences for electronic access to materials, limited physical space, and the inability to financially sustain comprehensive collections have led many academic libraries to shift from a "just-in-case" to a "just-in-time" dealing. Through relocation from paper based collection to digital environment, distribution costs virtually disappear and this has the effect of reducing the overall costs of the publishing process. The availability of electronic resources and their comparative affordability to the earlier paper medium in turn stimulated more published research and large growth in the output of published information. Such phenomenon has direct impact on research and development activities. However there is also risk of losing big chunks of our cultural record due to lack of funding for digital collection development and preservation.

For instance when quality information is not immediately available or restrictions in accessing such data due to license or privilege issues, researchers will face problems in completing their research activities. Also problems appear to be fuelled by the complexity of discovery options, with many researchers using external search interfaces that are not well-integrated with library systems. Hence libraries must develop Google like interface for their both traditional and online services to explore consortia based resources.

However, overall consortium concept helped in reducing duplication of work, bridging gap between resource rich and resource poor centres, enabling

shared services such as virtual reference and interlibrary loan; and providing opportunities for professional development, policy and standards development¹.

Impact of inflation

The severe economic crisis that we had witnessed in the last three years may have originated from the USA but it has since gone global. The Euro crisis and the near economic collapse of many countries have resulted and will continue to result in dramatic cuts in public funding including research spending. Also commercialization of scholarly publishing is at the centre of the economic problems faced by libraries. In difficult economic times, every dollar spent by a library may need to be justified to its administration; however compromising research in the name of budget crunch cannot be justifiable.

As libraries move to become centers of digital collections, maintaining information on the usage of these collections is ever more critical. It's also essential to maintain common measures across heterogeneous collections to be able to effectively analyze how the library's collection budget is being spent. Consortia themselves are changing very rapidly as technology and economic conditions demand new models.

Select examples from India

In India we have different types consortia approaches like, Open Consortia, Closed Group Consortia, Centralized Consortia; Publisher based Commercial Consortia, Budget Shared Consortia and National Consortia.

Below are some of the consortia examples, operating in India;

- NKRC (CSIR–DST) [Closed group Consortium]
- UGC-INFONET Digital Library Consortium [National & Centrally Funded Consortium]
- N–LIST (National Library and Information Services Infrastructure for Scholarly Contents) [Centrally Funded Consortium]
- UGC-DAE Consortium for Scientific Research [Centrally Funded Consortium]
- CeRA (Consortium for e-Resources in Agriculture) [Closed group Consortium]
- DRDO E-Journals Consortium (DESIDOC) [Closed group Consortium]
- DeLCON (DBT Electronic Library Consortium) [Closed group Consortium]

- Electronic Resources in Medicine (ERMED) [Budget Shared Consortium]
- Health Science Library and Information Network (HELINET) [Budget Shared Consortium]
- Forum for Resource Sharing in Astronomy (FORSA) [Budget Shared Consortium]
- J-Gate custom Content for Consortia [Commercial Consortium]

Consortia	Established	Operation	Funding	Subject	No. of Institutions	Annual spending in Rs. million (approx.)	Users (approx.)
NKRC	2002	NISCAIR, New Delhi	CSIR & DST, GoI	Science, Technology and Management	65	600	10,000
INDEST	2003	IIT, Delhi	MHRD, GoI	Science, Technology and Management	1397	600	100,000
INFONET	2003	INFLIBNET, Ahmedabad	UGC	S&T, Humanities, Social Sciences	161	1200	600,000
N-LIST	2012	INFLIBNET, Ahmedabad	MHRD, GoI	All subjects	6000	-	-
DRDO	2007	DESIDOC, New Delhi	DRDO, MOD, GoI	S&T and others	50	200	7,000
CeRA	2007	IARI, New Delhi	ICAR, GoI	Agriculture	126	100	10,000
DeLCON	2009	NBRC, Gurgaon	DBT, GoI	Biomedical Sciences	33	80	2,000

Source: Prakash Chand²

How changing information environment influence consortia?

The changing landscape of information not only influenced library services but also has changed the way information products are offered by publishers. According to Green³ “at its heart, the nature of the library will never really change, but the services that we provide and the role that we play in a student’s or researcher’s life will constantly shift”. While libraries are finding ways for cost effective acquisition of content, upgrading their facilities and networking, the content publishers are interfacing in areas of common interests, bigger publishers are on acquisition spree for more enhanced business. The following noticeable changes are being seen in libraries and publishing world:

- Libraries/institutions seem to continue consortia in more matured way;
- Spirit of cooperation, collaboration, and coordination as was viewed in the beginning is still strong and need to be stronger
- Psychology of owning is on the decline with
- Fairness and transparency are in demand
- Monopoly of big players has gone up
- Pricing structure is shifting to value of information gauged by usage

- Avenues to publish more in foreign journals by Indian authors
- Acquisition of Indian journals by international commercial publishers
- Major international players are opening their offices in India
- Large scale marketing/publicity events are being organized

Steven⁴ thinks new learning initiatives like MITx and Udacity’s massive open online courses are opportunities for academic libraries to serve non-traditional, potentially unaffiliated students, who he refers to as higher education’s new majority learners. Consortia must have a clear target on products and services they provide, and agreed service levels. Solid leadership, management and team work should be there to drive consortia efforts. Consortia efforts must be regularly monitored through performance management system. Sharing best practices among consortium will largely help in avoiding duplication of work. Bargaining and negotiation are other skills library managers need to inculcate.

What are the present challenges in e-resources consortia?

Library culture has direct impact on the demand of library services by users. With the emergence of

Google as the quickest and convenient facility to find information, less demand for resource sharing or less usage of library services may be seen. In such a competitive situation, what kind of consortia models should be developed to deliver worthwhile information to the users?

Some publishers sell their content as a package asking libraries to acquire even that in their package which is not required by them. We require to workout consortia models for acquisition of content where libraries receive content in alignment with their exact requirements. In case the content acquired is not need based, it remains unused. Content acquisition therefore must be negotiated after due assessment, analysis and consolidation of requirements. Libraries are affected by middle men as far as collection development is considered! Why do we need a middle man when high end technologies are in place for open publishing; only a true culture and proactive thinking is enough to change the game plan of libraries? Hence library partnerships are essential for success of consortia. Nonetheless publishers too have formed consortia to increase their business impact.

Limited access to consortia creates new digital divides between libraries. Additionally, some libraries have greater access to content than others. The digital divide is a central issue and one that consortia can help bridge, especially for smaller holding libraries. For instance recently, OCLC announced “a new beta cloud-based service, Website for Small Libraries (WSSL), with which libraries with fewer than 20,000 items in their collections may construct a low-cost, simple but dynamic website. Features include basic patron and inventory management, including checkouts, returns, holds, and renewals, among other functions”⁵. This is an initiative for capacity building in small libraries and to participate in consortia activities.

Emerging technologies like Clouds and Big data may immensely help in forming effective consortia services over the network. Cloud computing helps libraries shift away from owning and operating local servers to Web-based services. For example Google’s suite of apps, Amazon’s S3 and EC2 services can be used for library portals and DuraCloud to host an online library media collection.

Big Deal model

The three elements; “proliferation of consortia world-wide, shift to electronic publishing and vastly increased published research have had the combined effect of setting the scene for the creation and growth

of the purchasing model known as the Big Deal. It is emerging because this involves procurement of large vendor specific collections of electronic resources”⁶. Big Deal provides an effective model that allows larger publishers to sell their content to more libraries by offering ‘volume discounts’. Publishers and vendors tend to view the library as the ultimate buyer of content. Nonetheless from a library perspective; it is their end-user who decides usage and importance of documents.

Patron driven acquisition model

For smaller libraries patron driven selection of resources is a viable option. For that they should have clear cut requirement and short range planning for acquisition of resources based on RFP – courses taught in each semester, research projects, number of scholars and their areas of specialization– it could be an annual exercise. Such a model allows for a flexible sale where little chunks of content (books or journals, and even individual chapters or articles) can be sold and delivered as and when the users request. California State University is successfully piloting a scheme called “Get it Now”, a patron-driven document delivery scheme which claims to deliver articles nearly instantaneously to the patrons⁷. This will facilitate libraries to purchase only those documents that are in high demand and absolute necessity.

Consolidating consortia efforts

Instead of establishing separate library consortia by different educational and research institutions, it is better to have single consortia for all educational and research institutions with countrywide access to all online journals and databases. Hence emerging, nation-wide consortia will not only help in resource sharing but also it may act as clearinghouse for a particular nation. In the countries like the US and the UK, public libraries are forming massive consortium to cope up with information needs and arrive at economies of scale. Scaling up and fully networked national public library system will help such institutions in having better consortia.

Conclusion

Libraries must work on new mechanisms for evaluating new scholarly forms of authoring, publishing, and researching. As we are moving from static access of information to mobile access, mobile devices are changing the way information is delivered and accessed. Libraries must tailor their products and

services to pass information to its clients on mobile platform and devices. Many leading publishers and aggregators are already extending their services through mobile interface –such as iPhone, iPod touch and Android. Even network giant like OCLC has mobile access to its World Cat. To transform teaching and learning librarians' should create digital libraries of instructional resources to keep library relation alive with scholarly activities.

With the widespread access to the Internet and fine-tuned search engines, users have little or no problem finding information. Since libraries are now competing for user attention, the current challenge is to provide immediate, seamless access to sources of helpful and useful information in order to remain in the game.

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