

Managing Electronic Resources in CAIS: Learning Experience

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Abstract

Rapid development in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has brought about many changes in the library world. The proliferation of information especially in the electronic format has boosted up the development of electronic information resources in quantity, complexity and varieties. Undoubtedly, electronic resources offer various benefits to users, but the shift from print to electronic format has posted challenges to most libraries in managing the resources in the aspect of subscriptions, licensing, cataloguing, payment, maintenance, and provisions of access. This paper describes briefly the journey of the Centre for Academic Information Services (CAIS) for over the past nine years in its commitment to electronic journals, highlighting its experiences in encountering pitfalls, benefits, lessons learned and outcomes from the resources.

Keywords: Electronic resources; ICT; Electronic journal

Introduction

The Centre for Academic Information Services (CAIS) is an important agent in the pursuit of academic excellence to Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). CAIS sets out to play its role in the university system by assembling a wide range of information resources in all formats both printed and non-printed in order to support learning, teaching and research in UNIMAS. The extent, to which UNIMAS is able to carry out its vision and mission, portrays how CAIS has been supportive to it, in the provision of all the essential information resources. At the beginning of its establishment in 1993, CAIS has more than 12,000 volumes of books, 842 titles of serials (journals and magazines) and a computer laboratory. CAIS's collection has grown over the years in terms of quality, quantity and variety and in 2004, CAIS has subscribed approximately to 380 titles of electronic journals (print + online and online only)

Subscription of electronic journals

The rapid growth in popularity and availability of e-journals in the 90's had left many libraries struggling to adapt to the new demands imposed by this new form. CAIS was not left behind and first began a serious association with electronic resources in year 2000, despite the fact that we were not actually ready for that kind of format due to the quality of our ICT infrastructure at that time.

Initially, our subscriptions to the electronic journals started with those that came free with the print subscription and also based upon the requests of the academicians. Selecting and ordering of titles continued to be title per title.

Activation of subscription and access

Activation of subscription and access was not a simple task as it required a more set-up steps. Serials staff would collect data on journals having free online access against print subscriptions. Simultaneously e-mail and contact addresses of the publishers of those journals would be collected and we would request them to activate the online access. The publisher would then instruct us to complete the online user's agreement in order to have the free online access of the journals. Publishers would normally inform CAIS accordingly, once access was activated. Earlier, our local agents were much in the dark on these electronic resources than us because most of the time we would initiate the process of activation of the online access for those journals subscribed through these local agents.

Later in 2001, we came to know that some publishers used intermediaries to deliver faithfully rendered and fully searchable online content to their audience. Such intermediaries would provide these publishers with control over all aspects of the online process. The electronic access to the journals of these publishers via the intermediaries would only be available to subscribers. Subsequently we were introduced to intermediaries such as Catchword and Ingenta. CAIS then was prompted to register UNIMAS to Ingenta because Ingenta was authorized by the publishers to make our subscribed titles available to our users via password. Password verification was a requirement of Ingenta, and we had to decide who should have access to these passwords within UNIMAS.

Cataloguing

Cataloguing of electronic journal was far more complex than that of monograph. On the same note, it was more elaborate even in the print environment. Our cataloguing process was slow at the beginning with the use of much not-so familiar marc tag such as the 538 field (Mode of access), 846 field (Electronic Location and Access) etc. These marc tags actually enabled us to track information about accessible titles and keep this information current.

Bridging Access

The growing collection of electronic journals in CAIS then had forced us to think of ways to house them and bring about access to users. Unlike printed journals, which have only one reader at a time, electronic journals have multiple users from a variety of interfaces. Access levels vary from one user to unlimited simultaneous users and the access mode vary from a single dedicated computer workstation to a campus network. This had become a daunting task for us as our OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue) at that time was not designed for

electronic resources. In 2003, CAIS began to develop its own home grown system in order to deal with this ever increasing collection. Dreamweaver, an open source software was used to bring all the electronic journals to users. This had acted as an inventory list for us and searching aid for our users. We would manually tracked changes in titles and URLs during regular updates. This then had worked out fine and had helped us as much in over a couple of years. However due to the rapid increase in the number of e-journals in CAIS and where licensing and deployment had become more complex, the need to manage the resources in a system and uniform manner, became pressing.

In late 2005, we began our subscription to Serials Solutions, which was a better and more up-to-date e-journal management tool that creates and integrates multiple lists of journal titles, regardless of format, into a single list. It had somehow brought waves of reliefs to us (librarian and staff) in Serials Unit, as we no longer need to manually update most of the changes.

Eventually in 2006, the employment of a new library system called Millennium has brought about a number of changes to CAIS. With its unique serials, cataloguing and acquisition modules, journals management has become a much easier task.

Tracking Content

In the print environment, our attentions were more focused on issues of receipt and claims rather than the content of the journal. However in the electronic environment, contents had become our major concerned as we were responsible and answerable to the quality of what could be accessed by our users. Checking whether the issues were available online had become a routine especially since those issues were often available before the corresponding issues appeared in the print format (for a dual print/electronic title). Dealing with embargoed or disappearing titles from our subscription was a nightmare. These routine were time-consuming.

Later with Serials Solutions, we were able to see exactly the number of titles that we have in our subscribed resources, learned about issues on embargos and became aware of disappearing titles from our subscriptions. We were able to analyze duplicate titles in our collection and these have helped so much in the renewals and cancellations of our subscriptions at the end of the year.

Usage

Usage information is difficult to ascertain in the print environment. In the past, CAIS's decision to renew a print subscription mainly relied on shelving studies and feedbacks from the requestors and users. On the other hand, the electronic environment had enabled us to collect usage statistics and presented us an opportunity to have a supposedly better and justifiable ways in making decision on the renewals of our journal subscriptions. Our usage statistics were either gathered by tracking the Web-based access or by collecting vendor-provided

usage data gathered from different publishers and delivered to us via emails. Of the dozens of vendors that delivered usage statistics via the Web, each would have different URLs with different usernames and passwords, all of which must be managed by us. Each site must be accessed separately every time statistics were desired, and the information architecture and design of each site was different, which required time and mental effort for re-orientation to each vendor's system.

Referring to all those above, the process for assessing the usage of electronic journals was actually complicated, time-consuming, and unsatisfactory and on top of that, these statistics were not always helpful because they were presented in many different formats and lacking in standardization. Those librarians who manually tracked usage statistics would understand this whole situation.

Later, the situation was much improved with the establishment of Project Counter, (Counting Online Usage of Networked Electronic Resources), launched in 2002 in the UK and was widely supported by library organizations such as ARL (Association of Research Libraries), NISO (National Information Standards Organization) and publishers.

Lesson learned and outcomes

For the past eight years of our involvement in electronic resources, we have widened our scope of knowledge and sharpened our skills to face the rapid technological advancement. Threats and opportunities in equal measure presented to us by this format have given us opportunities to cultivate new skills such as marketing and promotion, negotiation, and greater technical knowledge. Along the way, with the aid of ICT such as the application of Ezproxy on our network to address the issues of access, subscription to Serials Solutions- 360 Counter to track our usage statistics, our association with Worldcat on the cataloguing aspects and our knowledge on archiving strategy for the electronic resources etc, we have shifted away from traditional library practices. Currently, we have more than 35,000 titles of electronic journals (individual titles and those in the online databases) We are also in the process of converting most of our subscribed print plus online titles to online only titles.

Conclusion

Having described all those challenging experiences in managing electronic resources in CAIS, in general, it can be concluded that the transformation from the world of paper to the world of electronics has not only created more opportunities for our users but has also challenged us (librarians and staff) to be more competitive in the library profession in this information age of the twenty-first century. Keeping pace with the changing technology has become a matter of necessity rather than choice.

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