

ICCC/IFIP Conference: Electronic Publishing '97 New Models and Opportunities

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Conference Paper Abstract

Roles in the new information age: the evolution of the super-agent and the library partnership

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Most of us have relied on familiar ways of handling the acquisition process. The process has included using a third party, or subscription agent, to act as the clearing house, or consolidator, for journals, books, and a variety of other materials. Agents have also handled electronic publication formats, such as microfiche and CD-ROMs. With the advent of electronic publishing and the shift from purchase to lease, the familiar models that we have relied upon no longer work as effectively as they once did. Libraries often turn to their subscription agents in the acquisition process for scholarly journals, CD-ROM titles, or newsletters. For libraries the acquisition of electronic journals should be no different.

This interactive 30-minute presentation will address the concept of a Super-Agent. The presenters will discuss how the library and agent can work collaboratively to move through the myriad of questions in the administrative and access maze of electronic publications. New roles that maximize the partnership between the subscription agent and the library in this electronic age will be illustrated using real-life examples.

Although some academic and research libraries have begun to incorporate the world of electronic publications into their collections, many public and college libraries have not yet begun to approach the challenge. As a result, the role of the subscription vendor has evolved to include all of the administrative details of the electronic journal - from access to licensing issues. Many vendors have provided comprehensive service offerings in the past, but the complexities of the electronic journal will behave all subscription agents to become super-agents. The goal is a virtual one-stop shop for all research materials, from the traditional journal, books, microfiche, CD-ROM, indexes, and myriad other services, including tables-of-contents, document delivery and electronic journals projects complete with a web interface and search engine.

Administrative Support

In order to meet the administrative challenges, many agents are establishing in-house teams to set up the necessary infrastructure to administer and implement orders for electronic titles. These expanded consultative services can be thought of as "outsourcing" for the library which lacks the personnel in-house to interpret access data or negotiate a license.

Much of this process follows the models established for the normal printed journal. However since Internet journals are accessed - not owned - a host of licensing and access issues must be answered.

The super-agent and library will work collaboratively to determine campus-wide requirements based on the available technology and access points within the institution. The agent can provide guidelines for access, which can be used to assemble a profile including IP addresses, types of hardware accessing data, method of transmission (URL, direct to individual Internet address, special browser, CD-ROM, ftp for mounting on campus-wide network, etc.).

By serving as the intermediary for the library, the super-agent will save most institutions countless hours per publisher and thousands of hours per year. The agent will also be instrumental in educating publishers about the technological needs of libraries.

Direct Access

In addition to answering the technology questions related to access, many agents are also providing access or a web-interface to a collection of electronic journals often from many publishers. The super-agent may also be a reseller for popular systems devoted to journals within a discipline or from dedicated publishers. The agent will provide access to an array of services, from bibliographic databases, to full-text and document delivery. These interfaces will also support search platforms suited for both the first-time searcher as well as sophisticated researcher using keyword, Boolean, and other relevancy strategies.

Value-Added Data

The super-agent will also provide valuable collection development data. By capturing use statistics on the electronic journals, the super agent will provide the data to streamline the collection development process. They can answer questions such as where the electronic journal was indexed or abstracted? Is the journal peer-reviewed? These data may be provided by the agent electronically via an online ordering system, or in management reports that can be transmitted electronically, or peruse at your desk.

Upmarket Information Services

With advanced technology and sophisticated ordering techniques, the super-agent will spend more time and energy developing innovative new forms of information delivery that add value to the library. Such services can be outsourced to the vendor. The agency fee will encompass in-house library services that would be eliminated in a cost-cutting mode.

For instance, an in-house document delivery can provide "on-demand" binding services for articles ordered for a bibliography or large-scale research project. Table-of-contents services, subject profiles, or other frequently ordered materials, can also so be bound in a customized fashion to produce a comprehensive information service that the library or information specialist can re-sell to the end-user.

Pricing Options

Most libraries are faced with providing more services with fewer resources. As the in-house resources diminish, a preferred option is to select a vendor who can incorporate the most creative package of services, to replace the task-oriented functions of your staff with decision making responsibilities. As a result, vendors are packaging attractive options that incorporated more consultative services based on the type of interaction between the library and the agent. Where the library takes responsibility for data input, as with most acquisition systems, the agent is freer to offer more interactive services of an advanced level.

Assisting the library with access issues and negotiation takes the agent-library relationship one step closer to the new millennium. The changes in scholarly communication and electronic publishing

afford this partnership the opportunity to look less like a courtship and more like a marriage.