

NEW ACQUISITION WITH NEW PARTNERS: ARE WE READY YET ?

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Abstract:

The quantity of information purchased by libraries has been declining in recent years due to the price escalation of scholarly publications. Libraries are exploring new ways to provide more information with less budget. In the field of Astronomy and Astrophysics, many of the journals have made a significant departure from the traditional publishing model. The availability of electronic format of these journals has facilitated the librarians to adapt to the new technology driven-media. While trying to accommodate the changed information format they have encountered the necessity for additional funds and the required infrastructure to access the information. Libraries in India are no exception to experience this metamorphosis of information. Librarians have the additional responsibility to take care of the economics part of the expensive information they buy for their users. FORSA (Forum for Resource Sharing in Astronomy) is an informal group consisting of 8 astronomy libraries in India. It has the potential to become a “ Consortium”, by sharing the access to a few electronic journals.

Publishers and Vendors have been cooperative, by offering alternative business models suitable to libraries. They encourage the libraries to form “Consortium” to bargain with them for a better deal in pricing. It is a convenient situation for the publishers also to communicate to a group collectively rather than transacting with individual libraries. Can FORSA consortium model be a forerunner for other groups of libraries, which are in the preliminary stages towards getting converted as formal Consortium?

In this paper we have tried to identify the various offers made by different publishers for getting access to electronic journals. We have also attempted to analyze the suitability of these offers for developing future consortia keeping in view the requirements and use of the digital information in India. Some of the challenges could be sorted out with the help of governments' participation in bridging the Digital Divide within the country.

Introduction

Special libraries have always grappled with the problem of maintaining a good service in the face of escalating cost of journals and shrinking budgets. Though several remedial measures such as resource sharing, cutting subscriptions etc., have been mooted, the problem still persists. It has become more acute now, due to the introduction of electronic journals, which carry the extra price tag. With more and more library users turning to their desktop computers for information, the libraries are also redefining their role by adapting to the state-of-the-art technology. The need for electronic journals has created the necessity for the librarians to change their role of keeper of the library documents to a navigator of information. According to an editorial in Science, (17th April, 1998) “ Digital publishing has much to recommend it over print publishing for practical if not for aesthetic reasons. Uncomfortable tradeoffs are involved, to be sure, but the gains include ease of access, rapid delivery over great distances, and hypertext links from indexing services and bibliographic citations to the full text of cited documents “. The transformed electronic information

loaded with numerous advantages has to be taken more seriously in the government level to overcome the technology barriers and facilitate the access with ease. It is a debatable issue in a developing country like India, whether electronic journals are a necessity or luxury? Even if they are considered to be a necessity the few academic research libraries in India who have managed to access electronic journals, find it difficult to sustain them, due to its exorbitant cost and the fluctuating license models offered by different publishers. It is necessary to standardize procedures and establish policies to govern the e-information in the national level. 'Consortia Licensing' could be considered as a solution to these problems.

Establishing consortia will provide the leverage for libraries dealing with the publishers and suppliers of documents. They will establish a higher level of cooperation and help libraries accomplish more by working together than if they were to do as a single institution independently. Unlike consortia existing in the USA, where they are all well established, the ones in India are still in their infancy and there is a need to study these models and establish guidelines and methodologies. The levels of academic and research organizations in India are quite different from the ones in US and UK in terms of the structure and also the availability of limited funds towards establishing such an organization. It is felt that the concept of 'Consortia' can work well within similar organizations having similar situations such as, sufficient additional funds available for the libraries of the consortia members and above all the committed mindset of the library administrators. However, in reality the idea of consortia is still far fetched as many university libraries which are yet to experience the power of information technology applications. In India it is the right time to develop models for consortia, so that when the information technology applications are introduced in university libraries, they can be prepared for participating in consortia which are already in practice in other libraries. The few case studies where some special libraries have made attempts to establish consortia among themselves in India, are typical examples, which demonstrate the merits and demerits of consortia licensing and serve as guidelines.

Access to E-Journals: Indian Scenario

University libraries:

In the 21st century, access to information & knowledge is a critical determinant of the success and sustainability of a nation. For developing countries, it is a challenge to access the new information and communication technology amidst the lack of basic infrastructure and facilities. According to a survey conducted by the University Grants Commission in India in the year 2001, (INFLIBNET, 2001) 64% of the university libraries in India are equipped with computers. But many of these libraries are yet to be provided with Internet access. INFLIBNET, an information library network, which is a nodal point for the university libraries in India, connects the information centers through a nation-wide high-speed data network for the optimum utilization of information. So far 142 university libraries are equipped with computers and Internet facilities and they are interlinked within the INFLIBNET. But the libraries, which have Internet access, all of them do not necessarily subscribe to electronic journals primarily due to the enormous fee for access. The allocated yearly budget is utilized mainly to subscribe to the print journals which they have been always focusing and also to sustain this subscription without cutting down their essential journals. Due to this reason, many university libraries feel, that the transformed electronic format is a burden for them and even if considered to be a necessity, not a need they can satisfy. Probably, a Consortium Model, which facilitates the sharing of resources without having to spend

additional fee to access the electronic journals, will be an ideal solution. But is such a solution feasible? Will the publishers encourage such a 'library friendly budget' idea?

Special Libraries:

Experience has shown that the concept of consortia works well between organizations which are similar in size, funding and those which are headed by enlightened library administrators. Research libraries are in a better situation with reference to the facilities and funds available. Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in India has 40 scientific laboratories involved in basic and applied research in various disciplines. Many of the laboratories have well equipped libraries, and some of them act as the nodal information centers in different subjects, functioning as consultant libraries in the national level. Access to electronic journals using the state-of-the-art technology is possible in many of these libraries belonging to these laboratories. There is already a move to establish a Consortium among the 40 laboratories and a few Consortia Licensing models have been worked out between some of the members and a few major publishers.

The best academic science library in India, the Indian Institute of Science (IISC) at Bangalore receives less than 2000 serials. Out of these, 1382 are accessed electronically. Though this is a mere 32 % in the total percentage of journals produced electronically (ARL Directory, 2001), it still competes as equal partners in the worldwide research by accessing and disseminating information. The fact that 66% of the journals accessed electronically within the IISC library is an indication that the electronic access to many journals are certainly a necessity for the faculty and the students.

Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) Library caters to astronomers and astrophysicists exclusively. It subscribes to 210 journals in the field of Astronomy, Physics and Computer science. Out of these, 104 journals are accessed electronically. While the usage statistics for many of the journals accessed electronically are available in the publisher's site now, the in-house statistics collected over the past few years, for the usage of print journals have proved to be useful in taking a decision to go in for the electronic access to many journals in IIA library (Jismi et al.2001). The economics of subscription to these electronic journals is an important aspect, which is vigorously worked out in the last one year in these research libraries. The libraries have now dual responsibilities apparently contradictory of not only trying to satisfy the changing requirements often more expensive of the users in the digital age but also to represent the interests of the institution in the judicious management of a limited budget.

.Working Together:

In any business endeavor, identifying the partners is an important task and staying together needs Herculean efforts. In the circumstances where there are plenty of disparities among the members of a group it is difficult to work out a balanced model for an optimum result. Establishing a Consortium between homogenous groups of members is slightly easier than bringing the heterogeneous group of members together. The Indian Astrophysics Consortium is a typical example of homogenous group of members joined together to negotiate consortium licensing for astronomy and astrophysics journals. This consortium is an upshot of an informal network of 8 astronomy libraries called FORSA (Forum for Resource Sharing in Astronomy) in India (Vagiswari & Christina, 1999) . The homogeneity is in the subject area of specialization.

Existing Consortia Models in India:

a) Model 1: Homogeneity of subject

Indian Astrophysics Consortium grew out of the efforts of handful of librarians from institutions specializing in Astronomy & Astrophysics in India. This consortium also known as FORSA consisting of 5 members (from the initial 8 members only 5 joined the consortium for negotiating licensing for astronomy journals) identified a subscription agent as a supplier of journals. Subscriptions for both paper and electronic format are paid through this supplier. The agreement is meant for only astronomy journals published by a particular publisher. The whole negotiation is based on the number of the print journals and hence the sales volume will dictate the price paid for the titles. The more the number of titles, the price paid decreases by a few percentage points. This supplier has agreed to be a negotiator between the members and the publisher to provide access to the licensed materials. The concept of establishing a consortium of this kind was born out of the necessity to access the most expensive titles in astronomy published by the particular publisher. It is a win-win situation for both the members and the publisher in terms of the decreased cost for electronic access to members and the increased volume of sales for the publisher. At the time of negotiation there were pre-determined conditions, which were relaxed later to work out a simple working model to enable all the members to be partners in this consortium. The following table displays the cost factor while negotiating the consortium licensing for FORSA consortium.

No .of members	No .of titles	Volume of sales In Euro Dollar	Savings on online access In Euro Dollar
Indian Institute of Astrophysics	8	11680.00	934.40
Inter-university Center for Astronomy & Astrophysics	7	9969.00	797.52
Raman Research Institute	5	7970.00	637.6
Uttar Pradesh State Observatory	2	5333.00	426.64
Harish Chandra Research Institute, Allahabad	11	11692.00	935.36

From the above table, we can estimate an average of 12.5 % of savings for each institute by way of participating in the consortium negotiation.

The Salient features of FORSA Consortium:

- Members of the consortium belong to institutes specializing in Astronomy & Astrophysics

- The journal titles for which the consortium license is negotiated are subject focused.
- Since the number of members constituting this consortium is small, there is an added advantage for a better communication and understanding between the members and between the agent/publisher.
- The publishers find it convenient to negotiate with the members through the agent since the individual invoicing is raised by the agent to the individual members.
- The model is worked out for cross - e-access to the print journals subscribed by the members of the consortium and hence equal access for all the members.
- No additional requirement of budget for the members in terms of subscription to new print journals since the already subscribed titles to be maintained (subject to the normal increase in subscription)
- Savings on the additional fee for electronic access, which is more for those who do not belong to the consortium.
- The most important feature is that the members are not burdened with peripheral and less important journals to their list of access, which is a standard offer of 'bundling-together' from publishers.

Problems:

FORSA consortium is not devoid of problems, now that, it is in operation. Since the consortium concept is still new in India, there are neither defined guidelines nor established models to help the librarians to establish a formal consortium where the members are legally bound and also protected for their decisions. At the time of formation of FORSA consortium, it was an informal commitment from the librarians to appoint the agent to negotiate the consortia licensing with the publisher. Though the agent is expected to act on behalf of the libraries, there is always a possibility that the agent may favor the publisher, because of the commission paid to the agent by the publisher. He may gradually move from being the libraries negotiator to become the representative of the publisher. In this consortium deal, the agent has included a member at a later stage, to increase the volume of the sales by introducing additional titles which are outside the purview of this 'subject - focused consortium', thus diluting the initial objective of the consortium formation. Now the members are loaded with mathematics journals in addition to astronomy journals as part of the consortium deal. If the members had proper guidance about the consortium formation, and had a formal committee to decide the membership to the consortium, this action of inducting new members by the agent could have been avoided. Secondly, the combined subscription to the print and electronic format through the same agent has created some confusion among the members since at least one member was subscribing to the print through another agent. This member could not join the consortium in time to process the combined payment through the agent who is the negotiator. Even among a fairly homogenous consortium, there are differences that stem from the institution size, funding, location in the same city, and differences in institutional culture and approach in management. At this juncture, it has become very essential for the FORSA members to formalize the formation and functioning of the consortium before future consortia negotiations with other publishers are concluded.

Model 2: Common title subscription

The same FORSA consortium has approached another publisher for a consortium deal for a single important journal. In this case, the members have the freedom to choose the partners since

the journal in question for which the consortia licensing is negotiated, is subscribed by most of the science libraries. The boundaries of the FORSA group has been opened up to include few other libraries with mutual interest, and at the same time, not to increase the size of the consortium beyond certain numbers. At present there are six members who have formally committed to share the license fee to access this particular journal electronically. A few interesting observations about this negotiations are;

- There is no predetermined condition of the print subscription by the members.
- Independent invoicing to the members of the consortium directly from the publisher, though there is a condition for one of the consortium members to sign the license agreement on behalf of all the members.
- The consortium negotiation is based on the total number of users.
- The calculation of the base price for the electronic access and the per site access fee is a standard offer made by the publisher worldwide to all the consortia negotiations
- The more the number of members in the consortium deal, the lesser the amount paid by individual members towards the electronic access.

Problems:

As mentioned earlier, since there is no formal understanding among the members of the consortium, it is a difficult situation now for one of the members to take the responsibility of signing the license agreement on behalf of all the members. Since the publisher expects the members to join at the same time, it is essential for all the members to start their subscription at the same time. The members are not free to join at any time of the year to access the e-journal, even if they have already an active subscription to the same journal in print. Though the practice of getting the invoice directly from the publisher has no doubt facilitates the administrative procures, it has to be watched for obvious benefits like a direct and transparent negotiation in terms of money and also avoiding the middle men who act as the negotiators on behalf of the publishers most of the time. When libraries commit institutional funds to participate in a consortium they not only expect their consortium to make wise use of their funds, but also have flexible options to make use of the consortium negotiations.

c) Model 3: Same funding Agency

The Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) consisting of 40 laboratories in India has been negotiating with some major publishers for consortium licensing of their entire database. It is premature to discuss their consortium model since the models offered by various publishers are quite different from each other, depending on the parameters chosen for the negotiation. The following list includes the parameters for pricing.

1. Number of subscriptions
2. Number of Titles
3. Number of subscribing labs
4. Number of non-subscribing labs
5. Print base price 2002
6. Average subscription cost / journal
7. Additional charge for E-access
8. Cross – e-access for all subscribing labs
9. Access fee per non-subscribing labs

10. Additional fee for entire collection per subscribing lab
11. Additional fee for entire collection for ALL subscribing lab
12. Access fee all non-subscribing labs
13. Access fee for rest of the journals that are not subscribed by any lab
14. Total additional payment by consortium for E-access & sharing
15. Total additional payment as a % of print base

It will be a difficult task to design a model to include all these parameters, since the number of members who are partners in this consortium are many and also their focus of specialization of subjects belong to a wide spectrum. The consensus to be arrived at by the members in any smooth functioning of a consortium is difficult for the following reasons.

- The members of this consortium are spread out across the country, location-wise
- The size of the libraries vary in terms of collection and users
- Absence of infrastructure to access the electronic journals in some of the member libraries
- The varied specialization of subjects has made it difficult for the publishers to offer a concise and tailor made proposal in terms of choice of the journals to the members
- The access fee for the entire database works out to be very high compared to the selective choice of journals offered.

In spite of all these hurdles, the parent body of the CSIR, is making attempts to bring together their laboratories to participate in the consortium, by making payment from one resource for access to e-journals on behalf of all the CSIR laboratories.

d) Model 4: Payment by a central agency

Tata Institute of Fundamental Research is a premier scientific research organization, which has five branches in the country. An ideal situation to work out a simple consortium model among the branches as members. They have negotiated with one of the major publisher for licensing of the part of the serial collections. The main library of TIFR at Mumbai has acted as the parent organization for making the payment on behalf of their branches. Initially, the negotiation agreement was signed for one year and later it was extended to the second year also since the functioning of the consortium is smooth. The members as well as the users are satisfied with the arrangement of accessing the essential set of e-journals among themselves. Since the negotiation was not based on the print subscription by the members, one of the branch libraries has the benefit of accessing the entire offer of journals, in spite of not subscribing to a single print journal in the collection (Christina et al., 2001). This is a multiple-site client model different from the earlier CSIR model, since the administrative procedures to handle the e-journals is also managed by the parent organization here, in addition to the central funding.

Learning from experiences:

As more and more models evolve, it will be a challenging situation for the group of libraries to choose the model suitable for their environment. Publishers come out with different offers beneficial to both libraries and themselves often. In the absence of set of thumb rules, every single offer has to be evaluated by group of responsible and committed individuals who will be part of the committees making policy decisions in the country.

From the few models discussed above, it is seen that there are some uncertainties at different levels:

Situation of uncertainty at the library professional level:

1. Absence of consensus among members of the consortium :

There will be individual negotiations with the publishers if the members do not arrive at consensus due to the location and time of subscription.

2. Absence of awareness about the legal points relating to the access, ownership, and preservation of digital works :

Since we will be dealing with virtual products, it requires in-depth discussion about the access and ownership rights over the electronic information in addition to the archival rights.

3. Absence of professional librarians to govern the administrative procedure in libraries :

In many libraries the level of supervisory authorities in-charge, are not qualified librarians and the administrative procedure to participate in library related activities including consortium, takes a back seat due to the lack of professional librarians.

4. Absence of professional training for the library staff to handle cooperative activity :

The professional training at various levels has to be implemented both formally and informally by means of participation by the library professionals in discussion groups, national and international meetings. The national level cooperative activity among the libraries has to be encouraged.

Situation of uncertainty at the government level:

1. Many of the developing countries are unable to provide the necessary infrastructure to access the electronic media in academic and university systems.
2. Non-cooperative policy between the governments of different countries has adverse effect while working out cooperative models between the members and the publishers.
3. Absence of well defined national laws which dictates the access and archival procedure of electronic information within the country.

Situation of uncertainty at the publisher/vendor level:

1. Most of the publishers are uncertain about the structure of the educational organizations including big universities. It is quite different from universities in US and other developed countries. In India the university departments and the colleges affiliated to the universities are located at different places due to space constraint, and the funds allocated to these units are not uniform. Publishers will have to work out entirely a different set of consortia models to cater to these universities since the number of campuses under a single university is spread out.
2. The merging and splitting of publishers often has resulted in the postponement of implementing the negotiated agreements between the consortium members and the original publishers' offer
3. The base price quoted many times for calculation of the consortium deal is worked out for developed countries and publishers should exercise more concern not to quote the same price structure for developing countries.
4. Publishers should communicate more effectively with the library administrators about the various suitable models. They can organize seminars and meetings in developing countries to facilitate the awareness among the librarians.

5. The absence of the representatives of many of the publishers within the country has serious implications while negotiating any consortia deal.

Towards solution:

The concept of National Site License (NSL) started in UK (Turner 1999) can be worked out in India. It is a single license, which is operative across the content of many publishers, negotiated on behalf of many institutes and academic organizations. It is a cost-effective mechanism, if worked out at the government level. Most of the scientific and research organizations in India are funded by the government. It will be a worthwhile attempt for the government to work out a single license for all the scientific and research organizations and make one payment and make adjustments while allocating their individual budget.

Government should also make attempts to provide the necessary infrastructure like high-speed links and a stable network to access the e-journals Policymakers, both at the national and international levels, together with service providers and other entities operating the Internet have a shared obligation to seek ways to achieve the wide spread use of the Internet in developing countries. Access to Internet has been dependent on telephone service. This is a major problem in a country like India, where majority of the population do not have access to telephones, though ironically it is quiet strong in IT sector (Rao et al 1999). Recently, there is a move to privatize the telecom sector in India. The cost of the international dial-up connections is worked out by the private people to offer a competitive rate. This will facilitate the Internet users. To some extent, this will reduce the cost factor while accessing and downloading the e-journals since the cost of data transfer is directly dependent on the dial-up cost in addition to the access fee for the e-journals.

There is a need for professional training for the librarians in the country. Government should make arrangements to conduct some workshops to include these upcoming topics as part of the workshop training. They should start a forum to bring the librarians and the publishers/vendors together for better communication and interaction.

It is clear that the technology of the web, the increasing importance of electronic resources and advances in resource-sharing systems have created new opportunities for consortia. Beyond these technological and economic motivations, the instinct of the librarians to work together at the time of uncertainties is to be nurtured at all levels. Combined with this attempt and the support from the government will certainly enhance the chances of forming more consortia models.

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