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# Academia and document supply: unsustainable contradictions at INIST?

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of the paper is to describe the current situation at the Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (INIST) the French document supply centre after their difficulties with open access articles during 2013.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A narrative and analytical explanation by the director of INIST.

**Findings** – That INIST will no longer service the commercial sector and will provide documents to researchers in CNRS for free and priced to French higher education establishments. The growth in open access will mean that INIST is ceasing to be an industrial scale operation and will be concerned primarily with “long tail” requests.

**Originality/value** – Certainly, the only account in English of the difficulties that INIST has faced in the past three years and how they have been dealt with.

**Keywords** Interlending, Resource sharing, Document supply

**Paper type** Case study

## 1. Introduction

The Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (INIST) was created in 1988 in Vandoeuvre-les-Nancy to facilitate access to results from all fields of world research, promote scientific production and provide services to people in Higher Education and Research[1][2]. I became director of INIST 18 months ago, but I was previously director of ABES (Bibliographic Agency for Higher Education) for eight years. ABES is responsible, among many other tasks, for Supeb, a computer application that manages the interlibrary loan network of university libraries. This means that I know the problem of document delivery from inside. I was also invited by Pentti Vattulainen to make a presentation in Helsinki in October 2010 at the 9th Nordic inter library loan (ILL) Conference. This presentation was about “Resource sharing in France: Academic libraries now engaged into a modernization scheme”.

After being responsible for the provision of document delivery in French university libraries, at INIST, I am now responsible for RefDoc, the other major document delivery service operated by the CNRS. This means that my vision of RefDoc will be set in a larger context because of my very recent past.

When I was appointed to INIST, my roadmap was to bring INIST and ABES closer in the field of document delivery as it is in other areas. It is indeed a very French characteristic to have a dual organization in many areas of higher education

and research, including scientific and technical information, with on the one hand universities and the other research organizations. Several initiatives have been taken to make universities and research organizations work together more efficiently such as the Scientific Digital Library (BSN). Document delivery is no exception, as there are two systems with radically different designs. It is important to recall the main features of both:

- 1 Supeb
  - is intended for librarians, not end users who cannot make online applications;
  - provides all types of documents: original, reproductions; and
  - indexes journals titles (not articles).
- 2 RefDoc
  - is designed for end users via an “e-commerce” type interface;
  - only supplies reproductions of articles; and
  - indexes articles.

## 2. The revolt of the researchers: the controversy of October 2012

### 2.1 The facts

In October 2012, when the controversy occurred, RefDoc was offering 54 million references to articles for sale. Of these 54 million, a number of articles were freely available in open access (OA), pre-print or post-print versions, submitted by their authors on OA platforms or on their personal websites. But this was not mentioned on RefDoc.

On 1 October 2012, a lecturer in information science, Olivier Ertzscheid, an active member of the OA community, published an open letter[3] in which he protested against the

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available on Emerald Insight at: [www.emeraldinsight.com/0264-1615.htm](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/0264-1615.htm)



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sale by INIST of his articles available for free on other sites. For him, “it’s just morally unbearable, scientifically pathetic, legally revolting”.

Olivier Ertzscheid had already denounced – politely – in 2009, this practice at a seminar organized by INIST where he delivered a lecture on the topic of social networks and the digital identity of researchers. This letter immediately had a huge impact via social networks. It even went beyond the scientific and technical information (STI) community and was taken up by general information sites. The controversy became known as “INIST-Gate”.

On 15th October, a petition was launched by the Collective “Savoirs.com” which promotes the common goods of knowledge: “Inist-Refdoc: Join the group of angry authors #inistgate”[4].

It states that:

Refdoc doesn’t respect the will of the creative community (in this case, scholarly authors) by distributing the authors’ work commercially, without their consent, and without links to free online versions. Refdoc being a service of Inist, a department of the CNRS, this policy is all the more difficult to understand that many documents are freely available in open access (OA) repositories such as HAL, an OA repository managed by the CNRS.

It asked all authors whose work is available in refdoc:

- to require the withdrawal of their documents; and
- to join their group of angry authors.

The petition gathered 600 signatures.

Some OA journals (*Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France* in particular), applied for delisting from RefDoc.

## 2.2 Legal vs Ethical

Legally, INIST was within its rights defined by a contract with the French Copyright Centre (CFC) authorizing the sale of journal articles for a fee. It turned out later, when The Cour de Cassation, which is the highest court in France, ruled in the final appeal in favour of the claim filed by a researcher[5], that CFC, used exclusion lists (while the express agreement of authors was required – “opt in” instead of “opt out”), and was therefore not copyright compliant. That judgement led to the suspension of RefDoc on 13th December 2013, but is not to be confused with the accusations by researchers, which legally, were not likely to cause the suspension of RefDoc.

One can legitimately consider that RefDoc provided a value-added service by supplying texts which were freely available on the web but not easily identifiable, thus enabling customers to save time in their research.

However, it is worth noting the difference between the legal and the ethical: how to justify that on the one hand the CNRS officially promotes OA to its researchers, and on the other hand that one of its departments sells items available in OA. Some of these items were also available (in pre or post-print version) on the open archive operated by the CNRS: HAL (Hyper Articles en Ligne[6]). Such a huge contradiction was not acceptable.

INIST had been making a rod for its own back by selling articles from journals available free online. The *Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France* was a particularly controversial example because it is the leading journal of French librarians, many of whom contribute articles.

Accusations of making profits on the backs of researchers added to the tension. It may have been true in the golden age

of the late 1990s when INIST provided 700,000 documents annually, but this is no longer the case with a continuous decrease to 130,000 documents in 2013. The charge concerned the whole of INIST whose policy was then perceived as driven by the search for revenue rather than the needs of researchers. Document delivery, with 81 per cent of revenue generated in 2012 by the private sector, was seen as emblematic of this policy and, therefore, the target for many attacks. A private subsidiary had even been created to promote the dissemination of products: INIST Diffusion. Dissolved in late 2011, it has amplified accusations of commercialism because of its private status.

## 2.3 How to cope?

The solution was obviously to stop selling what is free. I do not know whether other document delivery operators – public or private – continue to do so, but as a unit of the CNRS, INIST just could not possibly continue this practice.

Since November 2013, Refdoc has incorporated articles from four OA archives– HAL[6], Persée[7], Revues.org[8] and Orbi[9] – and are now marked by a pictogram. Other databases will be added gradually – for example, Pubmed Central – but to date, records from these four databases represent only 100,000 references out of 53 million currently present in RefDoc. It was therefore evident that RefDoc continues to offer for sale articles freely available on other platforms.

It is clear that this emergency action was necessary to symbolically mark the shift of RefDoc, but it was not likely to permanently defuse accusations. More substantive action was needed.

## 3. Is there still a future for document supply?

This was the question to be asked before any decision was made (Figure 1).

Document delivery has continuously declined over the past 15 years:

- *RefDoc*: 82 per cent drop in the number of documents supplied between 1997 and 2013; and
- *Supeb*: similar decline.

Any manager, given these numbers, would consider that this business is doomed.

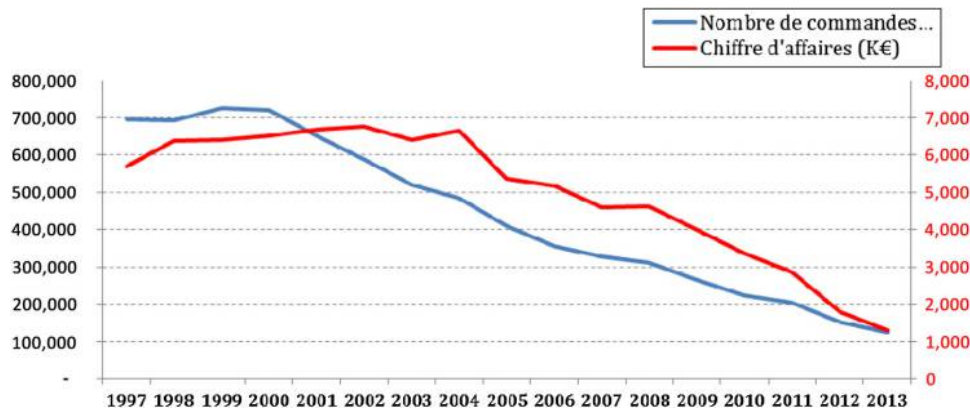
I will now quote the position of a colleague, Guy Cobolet, Director of the Health Library (Paris), one of the largest suppliers of ILL France, in an article: “ILL is dead, long live ILL!” (Cobolet, 2012). He notes the evolution of current publications in the, scientific, technical and medical field (STM): “In 10 years, there will no longer be a single journal printed in the STM sector”. He goes on to say that doctoral dissertations will also switch to digital; humanities and social sciences will gradually follow.

For retrospective conversion, he believes that:

[...] the printed stock is being scanned, globally, massively, by Google Books, Internet Archive, Gallica, Medical Heritage Library and through programs operated by other niche players more modest but active, which also scan at the request of the public.

He also describes publishers’ service offerings including pay-per-view, renting by the day, etc.

Figure 1 Revenue and number of supplied documents by INIST, 1999-2013



3.1 What may well be the future of ILL in this context? Guy Cobolet believes that:

ILL will not cover the current literature, which will be available online, and will probably only concern a residual nucleus (which will vary in volume depending on the speciality) of documents relevant to the history of Science and retrospective research, which have not yet been digitized, but which it will be possible to obtain as a scan on demand from libraries.

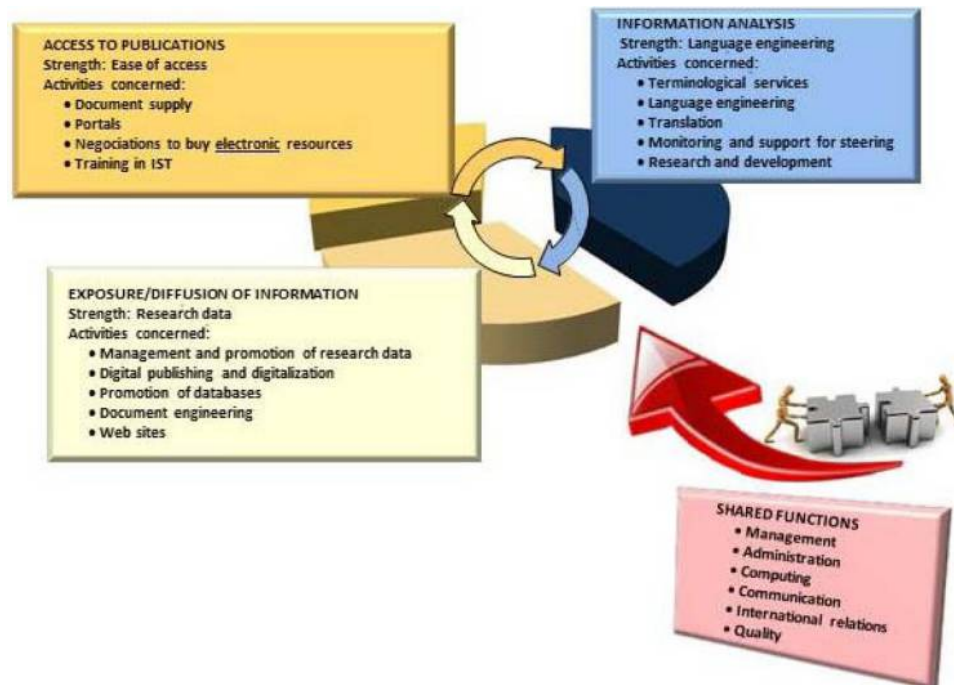
He also criticizes attempts to reconcile RefDoc and Supeb – which are based on two entirely different logics – and poses the question:

Should we apply to ILL a heavy therapy, with a complex dosing, an uncertain prognosis, in a more or less user friendly new environment and unknown economy or support the terminally ill patient in some palliative care units, well equipped with a secure platform, listening to the patient?

4. The role of RefDoc in the new INIST project

See Figure 2 for a schematic of the system.

Figure 2 The new project at INIST



RefDoc is not the only service that will undergo major changes. There is a challenge to major parts of INIST’s current activity inherent to the new INIST project: “Knowledge engineering”, approved by the CNRS in June 2014.

This project involves a new strategic positioning of INIST which:

[. . .] is now established as a unit of the CNRS at the service of public research. It’s a pretty radical change. In other words, we move from a logic of industrial production – which involved selling information products: the Francis and Pascal databases, RefDoc – to a service logic that assumes the needs of the CNRS and more broadly, of higher education and research in the field of STI. In other words, our policy will no longer be guided by the desire to achieve revenue[10].

Specifically Pascal and Francis ceased production at the end of 2014. RefDoc will not close but we are reducing its scope.



#### 4.1 To do what instead?

The INIST project focuses on the development of 14 value-added activities. They are grouped in three areas: information analysis; access to publications; dissemination of information. We will ensure the development of services and expertise that already exist at INIST but remained virtually in the shadow, such as training, translation, digital publishing, bibliometric studies, terminology, and document engineering services. We'll also further commit to the management of research data, (Figure 2).

### 5. What is the new scenario for RefDoc in the context of the CNRS?

We considered a number of factors:

- that INIST is now established as a unit serving public research, while the emblematic RefDoc service mainly served the private sector;
- that we want to no longer be accused of commercialism;
- that the request of the CNRS that we should consolidate our total costs (including human resources) and charge these to the private sector would lead to soaring costs and also increase the cost of licensing STM journals; and
- that the President of the CNRS was annoyed with RefDoc following the “InistGate” controversy which had been the cause of very bad publicity for the CNRS.

And it was decided that RefDoc:

- would cease to serve the private sector;
- would only serve higher education and research in France and other countries (out of its own stock and with back up libraries); and
- would supply CNRS laboratories for free (at least for paper reprography as a first step).

Thus, once the legal conformity was finalized with CFC, RefDoc was able to re-open on 12th November 2014 with no charge for print copies to CNRS (INIST taking care of the 1.99€ copyright fee) and a priced service for higher education and research users (4.4€ plus Tax + 4.97€ copyright fee as required by French copyright law). No decision has yet been made on electronic document delivery. For 2015, a new contract has also been re-negotiated with CFC in the context of a call to tender for the collective management of the rights of authors.

The expansion to French and foreign public institutions, as well as to students, is in the process of being finalized and should be effective by May or June 2015.

Furthermore, the development of OA in RefDoc is proceeding with the integration of PubmedCentral (more than two million references), which is also planned for May-June 2015.

When I presented the project to the president of the CNRS, the RefDoc issue was discussed at length. The president was particularly impressed by the quality of the service provided by the experienced RefDoc teams in finding documents difficult to identify and locate the “long tail”. This perception corresponds to the position of Guy Cobolet who saw the future of ILL in a “residual nucleus of documents relevant to the history of science and retrospective research”.

This decision has important implications for INIST and the RefDoc teams:

- The end of service to the private sector will result in a significant decrease of about 70 per cent in the number of requests. The workforce will be halved.

- Revenue will decline but the decline will be more than offset by the cessation of paper subscriptions. These subscriptions supplied INIST's own library but were initially bought for the indexers of the Francis and Pascal data bases. Stopping these databases means stopping subscriptions. From January 2015, the INIST library became a closed collection.

Stopping service to the private sector raises a major question: Who will now cater for these business requests?

- the network of University Libraries despite the rather shaky legal framework;
- our partners such as the British Library and Subito; and
- commercial suppliers.

An argument in favour of keeping the private sector was that INIST was ensuring confidentiality on requested documents, which opponents to the decision said might not be necessarily guaranteed by a private supplier. However, this was not felt to be of sufficient importance to alter the basic decision to withdraw from supplying the commercial sector.

### 6. The impact on relations with the network of university libraries

RefDoc was convicted by the courts for the illegal sale of copyright material, but I believe that the situation of academic libraries is just as illegal as INIST's used to be. Indeed, contracts between CFC and universities do not seem to allow them to practice document supply on a commercial basis.

Why did then they escape any questioning? It is probably because they are much less visible than RefDoc, a one-stop shop, while more than 150 university libraries participate in Supeb, which is only a back office tool.

INIST's prime concern now is to operate in perfect compliance with the law and, therefore, we cannot afford to continue to work with French university libraries as back up libraries (for referral activities). We would indeed be exposed to the risk of providing illegally reproduced documents. As long as French university libraries do not guarantee that they work in perfect legality, INIST will apply to foreign libraries as we know that they are in compliance with regulations on copyright. This is an absurd situation but it is imposed on us.

To circumvent legal obstacles to a priced service, we proposed in February 2014 reciprocal free reprography to university libraries. This is part of the legal assignment that allows a library to reproduce materials on paper from its own collections and deliver without charging a fee. The proposal, supported by ABES, received little response from academic libraries. In addition, the legal department of the CNRS felt that it posed a legal problem insofar, as it was likely to distort competition with potential private suppliers.

I would add that after my repeated abortive attempts while at ABES to modernize the Supeb network, I very much doubted that all university libraries would move to a common position on free document supply: the organization of French ILL is a contentious topic both between members of the network and within the libraries

themselves, which have divergent interests: between STM and humanities; between small libraries already practicing free document delivery and large ones which derive significant revenues.

## 7. The future

INIST has decided to change unilaterally. Does this mean the end of any collaboration with the French university libraries?

It is certainly not our intention. But the pre-requisite is that university libraries prove that they are now operating within a secure legal framework.

On the substantive issue of reconciliation between RefDoc and Supeb, failed attempts in recent years to mount a unified service show that it was futile to try to marry two systems that are so different. We should be more modest and try the policy of small steps such as working with universities that are prepared to cooperate with the proposed free reciprocal arrangement.

Other projects could boost document supply, such as the "Collections of Excellence" (Collex) project. The project, still being defined, is to serve as a resource infrastructure for research based on rare resources and a specialized network of libraries. They plan a redesigned system of document supply, based on large specialized libraries, able to meet quality criteria such as meeting deadlines for delivery.

## 8. The impact of OA in France on ILL

During the 2012 conflict discussed previously, the 600 signatories of the petition requested the withdrawal of their bibliographic references or the suspension of payment for the delivery of copies of their publications. This represented 2,400 documents (articles or books). INIST had tried to estimate the number of copies sold that issued from these publications. Only 48 copies had been delivered in 2011 and the first semester of 2012 (out of a total of over 280,000 copies during the same period).

This shows clearly that librarians, just like researchers and other users of the web, employ the Internet, especially the free access databases or services such as Google Scholar, to look initially for free documentation. Only in the case of failure do they turn to paying services such as RefDoc as a last resort.

However, a non-negligible percentage of RefDoc users (especially private companies until 2012) continued to prefer a published, paid-for version rather than a free OA version. Certain users did not want a free preprint (even if this was identical to the post-print version).

Since the integration of resource reporting in OA into RefDoc in 2013, it has been difficult to measure the direct impact of this new service on the demand for copies of documents via the INIST platform. For example, in 2014, approximately 1,500 links to OA documents were "activated" by the users, a figure that appears to be very low. But despite the measures of usage carried out, the link created towards the integral text on OA sends the user towards the target site, and we cannot verify whether this is what they required. However, it must be remembered that RefDoc was closed for document requests and was only open for the consultation of references, which led many users to use other platforms to obtain a document. Since the

beginning of 2015, the statistics give even lower figures, principally because of the closure of the service to private companies, which was responsible for 70 per cent of orders. Furthermore, the academic users initially approach platforms such as HAL, revues.org or the DOAJ to carry out their searches and only if these turn out to be unsuccessful do they turn to tools such as RefDoc.

### 8.1 The overall impact on requests

Since the end of the 1990s (i.e. well in advance of the massive provision of open resources), the supply of documents showed a strong and regular decline of 15 per cent per year. No-one envisaged a recovery, or even a more gentle slowing of the level of activity. The development of document acquisitions by national licences such as with Elsevier in 2014 which is available for all higher education institutions and university hospitals, the setting up of archives such as initiative d'excellence en information scientifique et technique (Excellence Initiative of Scientific and Technical Information [ISTEX]), which is vast program (60 Million €) of acquisitions of scientific resources aimed at creating an international-standard digital library which can be accessed by all members of higher education and research institutions and public libraries[11] and the exploitation of social networks allow us to develop a content offering that responds better to the needs of researchers. This will reduce the demand for copies of articles or loans of documents. The growing integration of OA into journals or articles in the publishers' offers, the development of open archives and institutional repositories accentuates this reduction, but it is difficult to estimate the weighting, especially for certain scientific disciplines. For example, Humanities and Social Sciences represents an extremely low part of RefDoc's activity (4 to 5 per cent of the requests for copies) but they were (and still are!) very proactive in the development of open resources with Hal-SHS, Persée and above all Revues.org. As for STM, the development of OA resources is highly variable depending on the discipline and it is not easy to correlate the drop in the supply of copies and the creating of OA material.

At the end of 2014, we estimated that half of the documents published between 2008 and 2013 were available in OA and we know that France is placed in the average in Europe[12]. For a year N, it is estimated that 20 per cent of published material is deposited in repositories for the year. Then, the following years, other publications published in year N are deposited (thus, retrospectively because of embargoes, for example), which increases the rate of deposited documents published in N. Then, the cumulative rate could reach 50 per cent in N + 4 or 5 years.

The statistics of RefDoc orders show the spread of requests over time. For a given year n, 18 per cent of the requests are for articles published in that year, 12 per cent are for the year n-1, 6 per cent for n-2, etc. and indeed, 50 per cent of requests concern the most recent 6 years. With the increase in OA and reductions in the delay before deposit in a repository, it is obvious that this will impact directly on document requests and for the Prêts Entre Bibliothèques (PEB).

In the framework of the BSN8 project (document supply)[13], thoughts are focused on the sharing of national

measures to accompany the drop in the copy or loan figures, which risk accelerating (thanks to projects such as ISTEEX). The development of resources in OA, by the deposit of the researcher or the investments of the publishers in dedicated journals, can only accelerate the end that has been announced of the “industrial” supply of article copies, which is tailing off to a means of obtaining a document not available in the online offer. That does not mean the end of ILL or document delivery but a transition from industrial model to a mediation/identification and retrieval service. The opinions of experts in this field are convergent, even though they do not have precise measurements (Schöpfel, 2014).

## 9. Conclusion

This article has presented a frank and honest account of the difficulties facing INIST as part of CNRS and the consequences that have flowed from them. These consequences include our estimation of the future for document supply in the context of the development of OA and the particular context of France where INIST operates under the direction of the CNRS.

## Notes

- 1 This article updates and extends an oral communication presented at the international federation of library associations (IFLA) satellite meeting “Restructuring resource sharing: new organizations, technologies, methods”, Nancy, 13th August 2014.
- 2 [www.inist.fr/?lang=en](http://www.inist.fr/?lang=en)
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**Etienne Fleuret** is currently in charge of products and services evaluation at The Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (INIST-CNRS). Throughout his career at INIST, he was previously head of document delivery and portals department (2012-2014), head of databases and scientific information engineering department (2004-2011 and 1998-2001) and project manager for the CNRS (2001-2004). He has been also project manager for the social sciences and humanities CNRS department (2002-2003) and the CNRS Institute of Communication Science (2007-2010).

**Jacqueline Gillet** has worked in the field of document supply for over 10 years. She was a member of the IFLA Document Delivery and Resource Sharing Standing Committee for 8 years which enabled her to build a dynamic network with the major libraries involved in document supply and develop her expertise in this field. She has a master’s degree in animal physiology and a dual DESS Post-Graduate Diploma in IT from Nancy I University. She began working at the Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (INIST) as a document specialist engineer adding content to the PASCAL database then joined the IT department as a data administrator. She then joined INIST’s library department, firstly in charge of the Interlibrary Loans Section and then the Metadata Negotiation Service. Today, she is the head of the INIST’s Documentation Services Section and coordinates negotiations with scientific publishers for the purchase of digital resources, manages making such resources available via CNRS document portals and steers document supply via the RefDoc platform.

**Jean-Yves Mougel** is a Member of the BSN8 (Digital Science Library) steering committee working on Interlibrary Loans and document supply. He has 15 years of experience working in the field of document supply and took part in planning the reopening of the Refdoc site in the framework of the “Knowledge Engineering” project which saw document supply activities recentred towards the CNRS (National Center For Scientific Research), French Higher Education

and Research and public sector organizations in France and other countries. In 1990, he began his career as a production officer in document supply at the Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (Inist-CNRS) where he acquired his experience of the tools and practices linked to this activity. He then joined the training department as a training officer where he presented all kinds of bibliographic management software

and document tools to the scientific community from Higher Education and Research. In 2008, he was appointed document supply project leader working on the launch of the Refdoc reference platform for orders of scientific articles. He is now head of the Document Delivery Unit in Inist's Documentation Services Section where he coordinates all activities linked to document delivery via Refdoc.



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