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Developing responsive Resource Sharing services at an Australian regional university: University of Wollongong Library

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to provide an update of Resource Sharing services at the University of Wollongong (UOW) Library two years after a complete review was undertaken to provide a financially viable service relevant to the research support needs of University clients. This paper provides an update of the service two years on.

Design/methodology/approach – The UOW Library has been attentive to global changes in the resource sharing industry and document supply services. Unmediated resource sharing options are growing and assuming an increasing portion of requests received from clients. UOW's involvement in new services has focused attention on the value of its collection, particularly the last national copy of a publication. By ensuring these unique titles remain in the collection indefinitely, they can be shared with other libraries through resource sharing arrangements. Ensuring staff workplace health and safety during the ongoing transformation in the delivery of services is an important element in the continued viability of resource sharing at UOW.

Findings – The 2011-2013 review of UOW Library Resource Sharing services has resulted in a viable and relevant service that is adaptable to the changing needs of UOW clients and institutional directions into the near future. Unmediated requesting continues to assume a greater share of the requesting workload, though staff expertise is equally important in supporting this service. A future challenge for the UOW Library is the rising cost of postage for the sharing of loans across institutions.

Originality/value – This case study demonstrates how an academic library can transform its resource sharing service for ongoing relevance and cost-effectiveness. Taking a holistic view of the service, in terms of people, costs and services, is important to ensure the overall viability of the service.

Keywords Academic libraries, Document delivery, Electronic document delivery, Document supply, Consortia, Interlibrary lending

Paper type Case study

Introduction

In 2011, the University of Wollongong (UOW) Library began a two-year project to transform its Resource Sharing services. The results of this transformation were published in 2014. This current paper provides an analysis of the service two years on and notes broader changes within the resource sharing community that have further reshaped the services at the UOW Library.

A number of drivers propelled the original transformation project. The Library had been heavily reliant on outsourcing document delivery to Infotrieve Australia and the British Library, which offered commercial document delivery services. At the time, these organisations initiated changes in the delivery of their services that impacted on the UOW Library's ability to continue sourcing from them. The UOW Library's reliance on such vendors meant it was placed in a precarious and risky position which required the search for alternative suppliers. It became clear that UOW would need to future-proof its document delivery services to remain relevant, viable and effective.

The outcomes of the service transformation were: the creation of a new team, the adoption of a new system, new services and a new set of subscriptions and consortia involvements (Daly *et al.*, 2014). The Resource Sharing team was formed in early 2012 and delivered all resource sharing and document delivery services, as well as ereserves services. The Relais system[1] was implemented to replace the Innovative Interfaces Inc Millennium ILL module, and Ariel file transfer software, both of which had proven inadequate for the delivery of this service.

The UOW Library's contribution to national and international resource sharing activities was essential to enable broad access to content not held at UOW. This model of access reflected the increased focus that UOW and other Australian universities were placing on research activity and competitiveness. By 2011, new scholarly publishing models were emerging with inbuilt commercial gateways – such as pay-per-view and outright purchase – that were often the only means of accessing a particular article.

It became increasingly clear that in assessing the resource sharing tools and consortia that are available to libraries and after

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determining the types and formats of content that UOW needs to source, a number of tools were needed to ensure that client requests could be satisfied. As a result, new services and resource sharing arrangements were established that focused principally on unmediated requesting of books and copies (i.e. electronic copies of articles and chapters) via membership in consortia such as ArticleReach and BONUS+, which are described below. Involvement in the RapidILL[2] consortia was being trialled at the time the earlier article was published in 2014. Mediated services such as OCLC WorldCat Resource Sharing, Libraries Australia Document Delivery (LADD)[3] and Subito[4] were also subscribed to due to their strengths in international content, Australian content and conference materials, respectively. The transformation of UOW's Resource Sharing services encapsulated a transition from a pay-per-item model to one requiring an annual membership fee. This transition has enabled the demand for UOW client requests to be satisfied without a commensurate growth in service fees.

UOW and the broader picture in 2015

The UOW is a medium-sized university situated 80 km south of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. UOW has nine campuses in New South Wales, two international campuses in Dubai and Hong Kong and a presence in Malaysia and Singapore. The UOW Library, located at the main campus in Wollongong, serves a community of just over 1,000 academic and professional staff (FTE) and over 31,000 students globally. The Library's Resource Sharing services are delivered centrally from Wollongong.

Two years on from the 2011 review at UOW, the changing national and international resource sharing environment has influenced adjustments to UOW's Resource Sharing services, as it should do for any library that wishes to remain relevant and responsive. It is a common understanding that service restructure and transformation is an ongoing necessity for libraries, particularly with: the rapid pace of technological development, the changing nature of scholarly publishing, growing client groups and diversity, uncertainty in library budgets and the inability of many libraries to maintain an expanding physical collection (O'Connor and Jilovsky, 2009, p. 121).

Within this environment, the resource sharing landscape presents an ambiguous picture. The Libraries Australia Annual Report (2013-2014) illustrated a drop in total document delivery requests through their national subscription service, LADD, of 16,885 (6.7 per cent) during this period. The number of libraries subscribing to Libraries Australia during the same period dropped by 23 (1.7 per cent), which included 30 new subscriptions and 48 cancellations (National Library of Australia, 2014). The National Library of Australia (NLA) has recognised a declining trend in document delivery internationally, which they have attributed to the widespread availability of free resources via the Internet as well as electronic content otherwise available to users (National Library of Australia, 2012). Regardless of the growth in student and academic numbers, there is a corresponding drop in loans generally within academic libraries (Anderson, 2013, p. 90).

Supporting broad and relevant access to resources for diverse research specialties in growing postgraduate cohorts and research areas is a general trend as universities seek to

build their research impact profile (Werner, 2015, p. 98). The UOW Library's Resource Sharing services support appropriate borrowing or access to individual items for these specialty research activities. In addition, undergraduate access to resource sharing services was introduced via membership in ArticleReach (copies) and BONUS+ (loans), inspired by the fact that these services could be provided without significant financial impact on the Library. Regardless of the general trend towards decreased usage in loans and resource sharing, UOW resource sharing activity remains healthy.

Last national copy

At the time of the initial review in 2011, UOW needed an urgent solution to sourcing copies. Difficulties in sourcing some international book titles – particularly older publications – and conference material occasionally meant that UOW client queries could not be filled. Once sourcing arrangements were in place that responded to these issues, UOW could focus on strengthening its supply-side services to other organisations within consortia.

Like other university libraries, UOW's collections are closely aligned to the curricula delivered at UOW. However, it has also built collections related to the Wollongong region and surrounding districts, and content published in Australia or multidisciplinary content with an Australian context. A commitment to steady-state collections that ensure the quality and ongoing relevance of content provided is a trend in many academic libraries (O'Connor and Jilovsky, 2009, p. 122). Nevertheless, it is clear to UOW that maintaining a commitment to the provision of its collections, particularly its unique content, through national and international consortia arrangements was important, as it ensures equitable contribution to the resource sharing community.

The UOW Library's "last national copy" project further addressed this aim. Australian libraries recognise their responsibility for preserving Australia's scholarly monograph heritage, but they are also now recognising that their responsibility extends to ensuring unique material is accessible to others (O'Connor and Jilovsky, 2009, p. 123). The UOW Library approached Innovative Interfaces, the proprietor of the INN-Reach system used to host BONUS+, to determine if its holdings could be notated with "Last national copy" and, therefore, not be removed from this system. This could not be done, so UOW annotated these records within its own Library Management system, providing a safeguard against the removal of flagged titles from the collection at any point in the future without an awareness of their status as "last national copies", and also ensuring these copies are included within the BONUS+ catalogue.

Suppliers

BONUS+[5] and LADD[3]

UOW has continued its membership within the BONUS+ consortia and the LADD service. BONUS+ is a highly used, unmediated book-requesting consortium of 13 libraries across Australia and New Zealand. The service is open to all UOW clients, including undergraduates. There is no membership cost involved in joining BONUS+, although the INN-Reach product must be used to facilitate the service. BONUS+ has

made a valuable contribution to UOW’s portfolio of resource sharing services. It continues to be well used by UOW clients, and healthy supply numbers show the value of the UOW collection to the broader consortium (Table I).

The principal challenge faced by membership to BONUS+ is the cost of postage, which for the UOW Library is estimated at over AU\$80,000 per year, a significant annual outlay to support one service. UOW is not alone; postage remains a big issue for libraries distributing material nationally and internationally. Interestingly, there is very little discussion of this topic in the literature. The UOW Library has commenced trialling various delivery methods and models to determine the most cost-effective response to this issue.

Since the review in 2011, mediated resource sharing methods have assumed a decreasing portion of requests received from UOW clients. The UOW Library has been a member of LADD for many years. LADD is a service administered by the NLA that supports document delivery, including interlibrary lending throughout all Australian libraries with a current subscription to the Libraries Australia service (National Library of Australia, 2012). LADD was the principal avenue for sourcing books and copies for UOW clients up until recently. Table II shows that UOW requests to the LADD system almost halved between 2011 and 2014. From the UOW Library’s perspective, this decrease may be attributed to the effectiveness of unmediated requesting via services such as BONUS+ and increased awareness of this product by UOW clients. Supply of content to other member libraries has also decreased, but at a lesser rate (33 per cent). There are more copy requests supplied via LADD than book requests. It is difficult to determine why the decrease in book-requesting activity in LADD may be occurring, though it could be as result of other libraries also implementing a range of other service options (including unmediated solutions), or a reduction in book requesting by library clients generally.

Subito[4]

Since the review, some changes have been made to supplier arrangements used by UOW. During the review, UOW determined that continued use of the Subito service was the most cost-effective and useful means of sourcing conference material for UOW clients. UOW now uses the GetInfo service for this purpose. GetInfo is a document supply service jointly delivered by TIB Hannover, the German National Library of Science and

Table I UOW activity in the BONUS+ consortium, 2013-2015

BONUS+	2013	2014	2015 Jan-June
Requested	5,206	5,556	2,147
Supplied	6,328	6,275	3,025

Table II UOW requests through the Libraries Australia Document Delivery (LADD) services, 2011-2014

Year	Libraries Australia Document Request	Delivery Supply
2011	2,210	1,979
2012	1,643	1,568
2013	1,345	1,486
2014	1,123	1,319

Technology, FIZ Karlsruhe, FIZ Technik and FIZ Chemie (TIB Hannover, 2015). GetInfo is used by the UOW Library for both conference and journal requesting, though due to UOW payment preferences, it is a last resort option. It is particularly useful for conferences that have been published via CD-ROM.

Subito continues to be used for some journal article requesting. Subito is a document delivery service collaboratively supplied by research libraries from three countries: Germany, Switzerland and Austria, although it is also available for use by other international clients. In 2013, the Library re-assessed the Subito pricing model, and decided that only as a last resort would it purchase Subito content that included license fees from publishers. Non-licensed content via Subito is purchased at the rate of €6 per copy.

When ordering from TIB Hannover, the UOW Library may on occasion receive a non-supply notice for copyright reasons; or an extra fee may apply due to publisher licenses. At this point a decision is made whether to order the item based on cost parameters set in the team for these instances. Similarly, Subito advises when there are extra fees associated with purchasing from Australia, and the same approach is followed.

It became clear that the majority of content UOW purchased through Subito was licensed. This is demonstrated in Table III, which shows a 74.5 per cent decrease in UOW requests filled by Subito from 2012-2014. By reducing the purchase of licensed content from Subito, cost savings were achieved.

The commencement of RapidILL membership in 2013 may also be a contributing factor to the declining use of Subito. Regardless, Subito is considered a valuable source of content by UOW Library staff. It is the first mediated option that Library staff access after exhausting the unmediated options and it is very useful for sourcing foreign language content.

RapidILL[2]

On completion of a trial of the RapidILL service in 2013, the UOW Library commenced a request and supply membership arrangement with this large North American-based consortium. RapidILL integrates with the Relais system, which facilitates the unmediated submission of all new UOW article requests through to RapidILL. This arrangement has achieved a current fill rate of 89 per cent, slightly less than the RapidILL service average of 96 per cent. UOW’s rate of supply to other libraries is high: 2,767 items were supplied to other libraries in 2014; 1,949 of UOW’s requests were filled by RapidILL in the same period. Upon joining RapidILL, member libraries submit their print and electronic holdings that they are willing to share. The UOW Library included their electronic holdings for which the publisher license enables sharing via a secure file transfer protocol. As a result of this process, the Library has not experienced copyright restrictions in accessing content in RapidILL.

Table III UOW requests placed and filled with Subito, 2012-2015

Year	Total requests	Total requests filled
2012	1,588	1,371
2013	899	759
2014	444	349
2015 (Jan-Jun)	112	75

RapidILL recently introduced a book chapter request and supply service called RapidR. The UOW Library’s existing resource sharing arrangements are proving effective at filling book chapter requests at this point in time, though RapidR is a possible option for the future.

ArticleReach[6]

ArticleReach is another consortium using the INN-Reach software to enable unmediated requesting. The UOW Library has opened this service to all UOW clients with broad uptake. Table IV shows the number of ArticleReach requests since implementation in 2013; a figure that has decreased slightly each year (15 per cent in the first full year). ArticleReach is a point-of-need service that operates with UOW’s 360 Link resolver product, allowing all UOW clients to request an article not held, though pointed to via the discovery service. As an unmediated service, this has been highly effective.

While ArticleReach can be considered a viable solution for unmediated requesting, it is not without shortcomings. The inability to interoperate with Relais has required manual workarounds. Unfilled requests are pushed through to an email address rather than the Relais system. UOW Library staff manually transfer these unfilled requests into Relais after which they are automatically placed in the RapidILL request queue. An investigation of the recently developed “Pass to ILL” scripting that enables automated direction of non-supplied ArticleReach requests to Relais is pending.

Unmediated versus mediated

In 2010, 100 per cent of UOW client requests were mediated by UOW staff. As a result of the review of resource sharing services at UOW, by 2013, 76 per cent of requests were unmediated (Daly et al., 2014). At the time of writing, 83 per cent of UOW requests are unmediated (Table V). Mediated services, such as OCLC WorldShare (formerly OCLC WorldCat Resource Sharing), still have a place within the service for sourcing long-tail items, though unmediated options fulfil the majority of queries.

Unmediated requesting has proven advantageous for the UOW Library in terms of fill-rate, efficiency, staff time and cost. Searching for content and placing individual requests through document delivery systems had previously expended considerable staff time, and a degree of frustration. Long-tail items would sit in the Library’s ILL system for more than a month as staff awaited confirmation from other libraries that a request could be filled. These requests were often cancelled

Table V Mediated and unmediated requests filled for UOW clients, 2013-2015

Requesting	2013	2014	2015 Jan-June
Total filled via mediated sources	3,581	3,112	988
Total filled by an unmediated service	11,229	11,373	4,778
Total filled	14,810	14,485	5,766
% filled through unmediated sources	76	79	83

due to a lack of response. Budget planning was based on numbers of items sourced, rather than accounting for growth and flexibility for the needs of the University. Adoption of unmediated services has enabled flexibility and growth in UOW’s resource sharing activities, significantly benefiting researchers, scholars and students. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge areas for improvement in unmediated services. For example, RapidILL requires that an item’s ISSN be included in the request. There are instances when UOW Library staff must source and enter this information to ensure it is filled through RapidILL. Occasionally, staff must also amend citations that are entered incorrectly by clients. Although RapidILL is, on the whole, an unmediated option, there are times when staff intervention aids the requesting process. Staff skills continue to play an important role in the delivery of this service. The value of staff expertise in sourcing information to ensure client requests are filled quickly and accurately cannot be underestimated.

Taking care of people

Throughout the transformation journey of Resource Sharing services, consideration for the workplace health and safety (WHS) of the Resource Sharing team (eight people) was a priority. Resource sharing activities can entail a range of ergonomic factors, such as the manual intervention required for both online and physical requests. All packing, unpacking and physical resource processing is conducted in a workspace dedicated to these tasks, with around 650 books processed and circulated through the mail system each week. An efficient, ergonomically sound set-up was required to support fast service turnaround, as most outgoing material is handled within 24 hours of receiving a request. Added to this are the extended periods of sitting required for computer-based work.

The Resource Sharing team introduced a standing agenda item for team meetings to discuss WHS issues, and the following areas were identified for improvement:

Table IV UOW Resource Sharing activity for unmediated versus mediated sources, 2010-2015

Source	2010	2013	2014	2015 (Jan-Jun)
Items received-mediated	10,158	3,581	3,112	988
ArticleReach received-unmediated	–	4,553	3,868	1,704
BONUS+ received-unmediated	–	5,206	5,556	2,147
RapidILL received-unmediated	–	1,470	1,949	927
Subtotals				
Items received via mediated sources	10,158	3,581	3,112	988
Items received via unmediated sources	–	11,229	11,373	4,778
Total items received	–	14,810	14,485	5,766

- The height of benches in the processing area where staff stand to process, pack, unpack and scan large volumes of books. The benches were at a height intended for seated work (based on past practices).
- Very limited opportunity for staff to stand while working. Low bench heights in the processing area encourage staff to sit to process items rather than stand, providing no variety in physical positioning.
- The increased risk of pain caused by bending over a low bench to process items.

Team members agreed the most appropriate method to address these issues was to raise the height of the benches. Through consultation with the Library's Workplace Advisory Committee, UOW Facilities Management was engaged to heighten benches in the processing area and provide support bracing for raised desks and screens. One bench was already at a standing height and, based on feedback from the team, was used as a guide for the height of other benches.

Staff individual workstations are configured for sitting work only. With the new arrangement in place in the processing area, team members are provided with opportunities to stand as a break from their computers, while continuing to work. The transformation of the workspace was so successful that an additional computer and desk used communally by the team for processing books has been implemented, preventing twisting while removing books from trolleys.

In addition to changes in the common physical space, staff have taken the opportunity to have their individual desks assessed for optimal set-up by UOW's WHS Unit. A UOW Library-specific manual handling course was conducted to ensure safe work practices when loading and unloading trolleys and handling books. Through the team's regular discussion of WHS, a well-thought-out solution to a series of issues has resulted in improvements for all team members. These workspace changes were subsequently recognised with a UOW WHS award.

Conclusion

The 2011-2013 review of UOW Library Resource Sharing services has resulted in a viable and relevant service that is adaptable to the changing needs of UOW clients and institutional directions. The UOW Library has been responsive to trends and issues within the library industry, such as recognition of need to preserve access to last national copies, and has been open to assessing and taking advantage of initiatives that offer great benefit to the broader library industry, such as RapidILL (of which the UOW Library became the first Australian member), to which UOW is providing a strong supplier-side contribution. Unmediated requesting at UOW has increased by 4 per cent in the past year. While overall requesting numbers have decreased slightly, the dominance of unmediated services in assuming the bulk of requests has benefited the Library significantly, allowing the Resource Sharing team to commit resources to other tasks and projects. At the same time, unmediated options may not

always be totally effective, and there are times when staff expertise in sourcing accurate and complete metadata is needed to ensure a request is filled. The Library still faces a challenge in the growth of postage costs for loans within consortia such as BONUS+. While several thousand print loans continue to be sent by mail each year, UOW must consider the most cost-effective means of managing this aspect of the service. The UOW Library's attention to the WHS requirements of the Resource Sharing team within the team's processing space demonstrates a holistic commitment to the effectiveness of the service and the well-being of the staff who provide it.

Notes

- 1 www.relais-intl.com/
- 2 <http://rapidill.org/>
- 3 <http://docdel.librariesaustralia.nla.gov.au/>
- 4 www.subito-doc.de/
- 5 https://bonus.newcastle.edu.au/screens/bonus_faq.html
- 6 <https://arlr.iii.com/>

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