



Interlending & Document Supply

A farewell from the editor to Interlending and Document Supply
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A farewell from the editor to *Interlending and Document Supply*

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to reflect on developments in document supply and scholarly communications and to look into the future of the service.

Design/methodology/approach – This study provides an informal overview.

Findings – The results of this study indicate that *Interlending and Document Supply (ILDS)* as a service has a long future ahead of it albeit at a lower level than in the recent past.

Originality/value – As a farewell to *ILDS*, it is inevitably original; its value will be judged by the reader.

Keywords Academic libraries, Document delivery, Interlibrary loan, Open access, Journal publishing, Scholarly communications

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

I have edited *Interlending and Document Supply (ILDS)* since 2002 with a short break. From the next issue, it will change its name to *Information Discovery and Delivery*. This name change reflects the need to widen its scope from what used to be a significant part of a library's activities and is now much less so, although ILL remains an essential service to all libraries. After all, one of the enduring myths of this electronic age is that "everything is available immediately on the Web" – and indeed free. I can find no research on the amount of material that has not yet been digitised and hence "not free on the Web", so I did some quick and dirty research myself and came up with the surprising, nay and staggering, result that over 90 per cent of both journals and books have not been digitised! Thus, there is much scope for the ILL of older material as well as less-used material of any age. That is quite apart from the fact that the document supply of born digital articles can be fast and cheap, and the enormously expensive elephant of the Big Deals generates more and more anger within the library community. Suffice it to say in this introduction that I strongly support the change of scope of the *Journal* and send my best wishes to the new, and indeed first, editor of the new journal. At the ripe old age of 75, I will move onto pastures new!

My following thoughts are based on a farewell keynote given in Rome in May 2016 to that splendid Italian organisation NILDE which "is an online service that allows libraries to request and supply documents in a reciprocal manner" (<https://nilde.bo.cnr.it/>).

Past and future

I moved from the British Library in London to its Document Supply Centre at Boston Spa, Yorkshire, in 1976, rather reluctantly, but gradually warmed to the challenges presented and to the wonderful staff. After retirement at the age of 60, I edited *ILDS* from which I retire as the editor with this issue.

First of all, I want to deal, for the last time, (thanks goodness some will say) with the fundamental conflict which shapes the scholarly communication sector. That is between the publishing industry and its customers – libraries and their users.

The fundamental conflict

To understand our world of resource sharing and document supply, we must stand back from the churn of the day-to-day and look at the underlying forces. The key one is global capitalism, specifically the global network of public limited companies. Their goal is to maximise profits. The individual firm achieves this in a number of ways, all of which seek to dominate their particular market. Product innovation, price management and cost reductions are the main instruments. This drive to maximise profit never stops, and new ways are always being sought to achieve this goal. This is very crude, but it is an essential truth which helps us to understand the forces operating in the world of scholarly communications. Elsevier is only concerned with scholarly communications insofar as it furthers their goal.

Today, there is a titanic battle being waged for the control of the world's knowledge output. On the one side publishers – on the other librarians and their various supporters.

Let us go back in time for a moment [. . .].

In the 1950s, Robert Maxwell found a way of generating vast profits from convincing university publishers that their business was best left to the commercial publishers – hence Pergamon Press and the growth of Elsevier, Springer and many others. Today, the market is dominated by five mega

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publishers which accounted for more than 50 per cent of all papers published in 2013. With control of the market came control of prices. The failure of the library profession to confront this threat vigorously led to the so-called “serials crisis”. Publishers can charge prices based on the old print model, which is both anachronistic and absurd but provides them with a high baseline on which to generate increases that are usually multiples of the rate of inflation. The logical conclusion of this model led to the Big Deals which dominate and distort the budgets of academic and research libraries but are very convenient and loved by your users. I was involved in a fairly successful campaign in the UK in 2011 to confront the Big Deals of Elsevier and Wiley, which saved some millions of pounds for the universities. In 2013, I gave a presentation in Padua to Italian librarians on the campaign. It was a memorable event for me because I was saved from choking to death at the seminar dinner when my life was saved by an Italian medical librarian who gave me the Heimlich manoeuvre – a technique which we should all learn!

Large commercial publishers have been incredibly successful in maximising their profits – Elsevier regularly achieves 35 per cent year in year out – that is, 35 euros, pounds or dollars that every 100 libraries spend goes straight to the shareholders. Compare this to a large supermarket with maybe 5 per cent and even banks with between 5 and 10 per cent. Only arms manufacturers and pharmaceuticals do as well. Society publishers should provide competition but do not – they follow the coat tails of the commercials and justify their own high prices by the need to subsidise their professional activities. As one leading university librarian in the UK said to me bitterly “Why should I subsidise from my budget society members at this university to go on trips to their conferences?” This control of pricing is married with a lack of transparency over costs which are, of course, lower than those in the print era, so negotiations have an element of farce about them.

The pricing of Big Deals has ensured that the overall amount charged by any one publisher continues to increase, but there has also been a big increase in articles published and, indeed, in the number of journals. However, the balance between user-satisfaction and the long-term damage done by the Big Deals has tipped into the negative. The relentless pressure for publishers to maintain or increase already high profits conflicts fundamentally with the limited budgets of libraries.

However, an important, and for the publishers, an unintended consequence of their market domination has been the development of the open access (OA) movement, followed by the explosion in peer-to-peer exchanges via ResearchGate and others – this being simply an advanced variant on the old practice of researchers sending their papers to each other by post.

Open access

OA presents both threats and opportunities to document supply librarians, so let us take a closer look. First, just two short definitions:

- 1 Gold OA is immediately and freely available on publication. There is often a fee paid by the author, usually known as an article processing charge (APC).

- 2 Green OA publishes conventionally but archives the agreed version in a repository.

In their arrogance and complacency, the publishers were blinded to the development of OA, alternately belittling it and ignoring it. As it grew, they finally realised the danger to their profits and rapidly snatched victory from the jaws of defeat – most obviously in the UK in 2012 with the publication of the Finch report, which was speedily supported by the government. This allowed both Green and Gold OA publications for publicly funded research but with a preference for Gold. Publishers seized on this and are now promoting Gold OA vigorously – no wonder as they now have another revenue stream from author fees, and as their costs are secret, they can get away with offering only token reductions in subscriptions – a device known as “double dipping”. A report to the UK Government in February 2016 looked at the UK experience so far with OA and recommends actions for the next five years:

By April 2017, almost all journal articles published by UK university academics will be available under open access routes. Of these, approaching 20 per cent will be available on the date of publication and without any further restriction.

But this comes at a heavy price as the report goes on to say – “UK universities currently spend an estimated £33m on open access charges and, without mitigation, this is estimated to rise to between £40m and £83m by 2020”. So high are the costs of Gold OA with commercial publishers that the policy preference for Gold OA has now been diluted in the UK. Nonetheless, in the past 10 years, Gold OA articles have increased from about 3 to 13 per cent of the total published articles each year.

And what happens in the USA is of vital importance, as their researchers produce about 20 per cent of the world’s published research. Here, the US Government has a preference for Green OA, and in response, publishers have set up CHORUS, which will manage the scholarly communication and publication work flow and crucially allow publishers to control the process in such a way as to minimise the damage to their bottom line. Arguably, a similar process is developing in the EU as a result of a closed conference held only last month, where a strategy of flipping works in repositories back into the publisher’s control was discussed. The Netherlands has already reached an agreement with Wiley and Springer to continue with the Big Deals so long as their authors who publish with those firms will be made OA immediately without Gold payments. As Richard Poynder describes it in his excellent blog:

This is surely the long game publishers are playing: appropriate gold OA in a way that preserves their profits, while simultaneously seek to appropriate green OA in order to control it, and then gradually phase it out, thus ensuring a transition to a pay-to-publish environment that best suits their needs, and at a cost based on their asking price (Poynder, 2015).

The STM 2015 report which I reference gives an up-to-date picture of the growth of Gold OA and the more complex Green OA – complex because of the difficulty of estimating the different types of content in repositories – personal, institutional and subject-based. Suffice it to say that all types of OA are growing faster as funder mandates are implemented and deposit becomes easier. I have also referenced Laakso and

Bjork's work which goes into great detail on recent developments.

I can give a modest insight into the impact of OA with my own experience in writing a quarterly literature review for *ILDS*. The review is based on checking about 140 journals, reports, websites, etc. for material relevant for those interested in ILL.

Table I shows the number found for each issue – the number that were OA when checked and then the number when checked two years later. You will see a gradual, if erratic, increase in OA articles until 2015, when they are running at over 60 per cent of the total used. Thus, the impact of OA on priced document supply must be significant and growing.

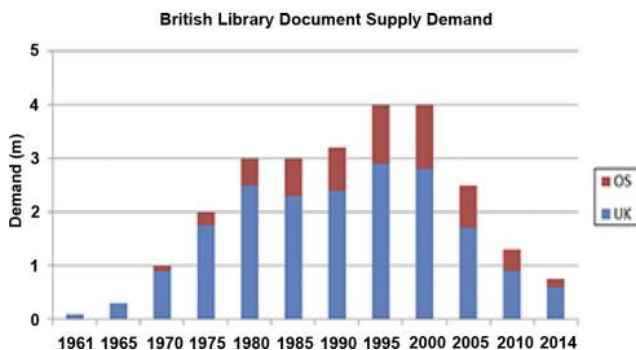
The impact of both the Big Deals and OA on document supply can, perhaps, be best illustrated by looking at the decline at the British Library Document Supply Centre – still the largest in the world (Figure 1).

I was fortunate to retire in 2001, just as the peak passed. One of my last tasks was to work on a review into the future of the Centre. We predicted that demand would drop by about 40 per cent as a result of the Big Deals and OA – clearly an underestimate of the true fall.

Table I Statistics on the number of articles and reports freely available for literature review for *Interlending and Document Supply*

Date	No. of refs	No. of OAs then	(%)	No. of OAs two years later	(%)
2011-39.4	43	12	28	23	53
2012-40.1	31	16	52	19	61
2012-40.2	31	6	13	25	81
2012-40.3	36	14	39	23	59
2012-40.4	23	9	40	11	28
2013-41.1	13	7	54	10	77
2013-41.2	28	14	50	16	60
2013-41.3	33	23	70		
2013-41.4	31	21	68		
2014-42.1	31	19	61		
2014-42.2	29	19	66		
2014-42.3	23	13	57		
2014-42.4	23	13	57		
2015-43.1	29	16	55		
2015-43.2	30	20	67		

Figure 1 The rise and decline of demand at the British library document supply centre



The decline in document supply may or may not continue, and in conclusion, I want to look at its future.

The current situation

On the one hand, there is reduction in ILL staffing – caused by a reduction in demand and also by technical changes to the document supply process, removing the need for much manual intervention; examples of which are the widespread acceptance of copyright signatures, the use of link resolvers to populate request forms, electronic searching including Google and automatic searching of the library's own catalogue for material already held.

On the other hand, there is a demand for skilled searching in an increasingly complex environment. These skills are of course bread and butter for ILL librarians, and I reference how one library in the USA deals with identifying articles that have been requested via ILL (Baich, 2012). It becomes increasingly important to check if requested material is freely and easily available. This saves money and provides a better service to your users. I suggest that this will become an important part of the job of any ILL librarian. Consider the following issues:

Business as usual

One reason why ILL exists is that many articles are rarely read; for example, research by CIBER (2009) demonstrated that over 90 per cent of titles used were derived from 50 per cent of journals at a number of research universities in the UK.

Another reason why ILL will continue to be important is because most published material is not available digitally, let alone freely. This will surprise many students who think that if it is not on the net it does not exist. Librarians know this to be wrong, but even they often overestimate the amount that has been digitised. The only systematic research that I am aware of is for books by Robert Darnton whose work I reference. There are about 150 million books ever published and about two million are published every year. Various bodies including Google are digitising them – in April 2016, in the US Supreme Court, Google won the right to continue digitising books. Google estimates that it has digitised about 25 million already, but only those in the public domain are accessible freely on the Web, which one can infer from Darnton's work in 2008, and account for about 15 per cent or four million – thus only 3 per cent of the total books ever published are now freely available on the Web. Other bodies have digitised, perhaps, as many as two million or 2 per cent more. Thus, about 95 per cent of all books published can only be obtained via purchase or ILL, unless they are held in the reader's library.

Nobody knows how many journals remain undigitised – most are defunct. It is generally acknowledged that there are about 28,000 current English language peer-reviewed journals, most of which exist in digital form – and many back to Vol 1 No 1. However, according to Ulrich, there are over 300,000 journals currently published, and I estimate that based upon the holdings of national libraries, there are about 700,000 journal titles both current and defunct. Even if the core of 28,000 current journals were all digitised back to Vol 1 No 1 – that is still only 4 to 5 per cent of all journals ever published available on the Web and of course most are not free. A digitised back file of Elsevier's journals will cost a research

library over a million pounds. Most journals will never be digitised, as the demand would be insufficient to justify the cost. Most researchers will not have access to more than a small proportion of them and hence will need to obtain them via ILL. And, of course, there is plenty of current material to which libraries do not subscribe and hence must be obtained from elsewhere. We should also note that more older and non-digitised material is being exposed as references in digitised back files. So, the future of ILL is assured albeit at a lower level than in the past.

Hybrid OA journals

These are subscription journals which publish Gold OA articles. It is a growing category, but the article processing charge (APC) currently is about double that of a fully Gold OA journal, and very large sums of money are being devoted to APCs as I noted earlier and these amounts can only grow. Thus, a search should be made to ensure that users are not ordering an ILL when the article may be freely available – a task best carried out by the ILL librarian.

Gold OA journals

Currently, the Directory of Open Access Journals gives access to over 11,000 journals that are fully OA. This resource is certainly a first port of call for ILL librarians. Some journals will have APCs and all will be of varying quality, but the first is irrelevant for your user as they do not pay the APC and the quality is for them to decide.

Green OA journals

Articles are published conventionally – that is to say behind a pay wall, but a version will be deposited in a repository and made freely available after an embargo period which varies depending on publisher policies and funder mandates as well as the policy of the author's institution. If that is not complex enough, the version available varies – often it is the final agreed version before publisher processing; less often it is the version of record. The population of institutional repositories is growing rapidly under the impact of funder mandates. For example, my local consortium of three university libraries is receiving an average of about 1,000 deposits a month, principally of articles but also monographs and conference proceedings, and this amount is increasing rapidly, the total currently stands at 36,000 deposits.

All these forms of OA require someone to have the knowledge and experience to find the appropriate item in the form that is wanted – the library user is unlikely to do more than conduct a Google search – if that ILL staff can use their skills in this more complex environment, thus saving time and money for the library.

And finally, I would also note the emergence of what the USA calls patron-driven acquisition or purchase on demand. This successful service requires the close cooperation of the ILL staff, as noted in many published articles.

So, all is not doom and gloom in the land of ILL!

So what of the future?

Well, predictions are always difficult, especially about the future – a quote I think from that well-known academic – Yogi Berra.

In the short term of 1–5 years, matters will increase in complexity. Publishers see their future in Gold OA, and they are starting to move against institutionally managed green OA. The Max Planck Institute is leading a campaign, which aims to flip all subscription-based journals to OA by 2020, and I reference the paper on which the campaign is based. This goal can only be achieved by adopting Gold OA, leaving control firmly in the hands of existing publishers. So, the current publisher strategy would appear to have some support within our profession.

In the medium term of 5–15 years, it is likely that most STM literature will become OA immediately, and Humanities and Social Science will be a mix – some, perhaps most, will be funded for Gold, some will publish in free Gold journals that are funded in various ways, some will be published conventionally – i.e. behind pay walls and some will become available via peer-to-peer networks.

It is certainly going to be complex!

And in the long term?

And in the long-term of 15–30 years? – well, Henry Mintzberg is one of the most-sensible marketing theorists that I have ever read – he says never plan for longer than a year because the world moves too fast for more. Global warming and resource exhaustion will become paramount in this time period, and so, only a fool would try to predict where libraries will be! But, I would certainly love to be here in 15 years time to see how things have turned out!

Some further reading

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