

## HOW WE SERVE E-CLIENTS OVER THE SEA

### ABSTRACT

*Distance education delivery to external students is a vital and major role for the University of Southern Queensland which has an Australian and international reputation in the distance education field particularly in relation to flexible delivery modes and the development of the e-University. The Library has a major supporting role to deliver services to all students including the majority who are external. Library services include traditional delivery, but are now increasingly dependent on electronic resources and online practices. Virtua, the new library management system allows direct links to electronic resources for all registered users.*

### BACKGROUND ON THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

This paper does not pretend to give definitive answers or solutions to the tangled web of issues, problems and possibilities of electronic resources being so widely debated in libraries at the present time. Electronic resources, their management, maintenance and cataloguing have been a hot topic of debate at recent conferences including the Kinetica Annual Users Meeting held at the Gold Coast in July 2001. A Kinetica Expert Advisory Group on Access to Electronic Resources (KEAG-ER) has been set up to examine issues such as reporting of holdings to the National Bibliographic Database (NBD), bibliographic record standards, record sharing, the vexed question of single versus multiple records, the most relevant form of General Material Designation (GMD) and other challenges associated with materials available through the web environment and not physically held in a library building. In the Final report of the survey to identify major electronic collections in Australian libraries (2001), the Expert Advisory Group concludes that "Australian libraries are increasingly moving to electronic resources as a source of information to their users. They provide advantages in terms of speed of access, searching, and 24-hour access and availability at the desktop for their clients."

A practical case study of how one tertiary education library is managing electronic resources is presented and hopefully will give food for thought to others treading the same path. It is recognized that decisions are usually based on the needs of users, the capabilities of library management systems and the financial and human resources available and more will be discussed about this topic later. The Library at the University of Southern Queensland has based its decisions on the nature of its clientele and the organizational mission of being a leader in flexible delivery and giving students what they want, where they want it and when they want it.

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) is a regional Australian university based in Toowoomba on the Darling Downs approximately 2 hours drive west of Brisbane. Wide Bay is a smaller branch campus at Hervey Bay and there are a number of study centers scattered around Australia but mainly in Queensland. A European Center Bretten has been set up in Germany to deliver USQ courses in that region. USQ has also established local support or study centers with private partners in a number of countries where it has large numbers of distance education students, mainly in Asia. The University has been recognized by a number of bodies as one of the world leaders in open and distance learning and education and in multicultural education. It was the joint winner (with the University of Wollongong) of the Good universities guides "University of the Year" for 2000-2001 with the theme of "Developing the e-university". The Executive Committee of the International Council for Open and Distance Learning (ICDE), which is based in Oslo Norway, awarded its top two Prizes of Excellence for 1999 to USQ. It received the Institutional Prize of Excellence for a dual mode institution in recognition of its very significant contribution to providing education at a distance to the world and in recognition of its leadership and innovation in the field of distance learning, while at the same time maintaining a thriving traditional on-campus program. The Director of USQ's Distance Education Centre, Professor Jim Taylor was awarded the Individual Prize of Excellence for his active role in ICDE and USQ's distance education program over many years. In 2000, USQ won the Queensland Government Multicultural Service Award in the organizational

category following its successes at the 1999 National Multicultural Marketing Awards where it won Best Exporter and was highly commended in the government category.

Of 20,000 students in 2001, approximately 75% are externals using traditional learning packages or completely web-base learning materials using *USQOnline*. The student body has a high multicultural element with 4,500 students from over 60 different countries. USQ's goal is to give equitable service to all clients whether internal, external, online, within Australia or overseas. *USQConnect* and *USQOnline* use Internet technology to provide a personalized study environment including access to course materials, lecturers, the bookshop, library catalogues and electronic databases, full-text journals and electronic books as well as examination papers and academic results.

## **LIBRARY SERVICES TO EXTERNAL STUDENTS**

The USQ Library fulfills the mission and goals of the University by delivering high quality information services and information literacy support to its clients in a flexible learning environment. The Library has a collection of approximately 287,000 books and several thousand serial titles that are increasingly in electronic format. It acquires and manages print, electronic and audio-visual materials to support university courses and carries out continuous improvement practices in all work areas.

Internal students and external students living nearby have access to traditional physical library collections at Toowoomba and Hervey Bay. An Off-campus section in the Library helps service the needs of the large number of external students. *USQOnline* students and externals overseas don't have a book loan service but can connect to electronic resources via the Internet. Book loans via the post are available to external students within Australia living more than 50 kilometres from Toowoomba. External students receive a photocopy service for print journal articles and chapters of books. From 1998, the decision was made to add Table of Contents data (TOC) and other enhancements to library catalogue records judged by cataloguers as necessary for adding value for users and in order to help external students request photocopies of relevant chapters of books. Subject searches to help with research and assignments can be requested by phone, fax, and e-mail or in writing.

A Virtual reference desk exists via "Ask a librarian" on the Library web home page. RightNow software is used to record and track queries from users for both the Ask a librarian and Off-Campus Library Services. Students are being encouraged to help themselves more in the research process by having access to the Library home page which has a number of services and resources including subject guides, referencing help, Internet search engines, USQ and other library catalogues, an interactive online Internet training course (eGO) and e-books, databases and electronic journals many with full-text articles.

The University Librarian Madeleine McPherson has questioned the role of the Library for online students who only know USQ as a web site and may never visit the physical campus. She states (2001): "as universities move more of their programs into the online environment, the number of their students and our clients who will expect remote access will grow, as will the demand for more and better supporting services including libraries".

## **MANAGING ELECTRONIC RESOURCES**

At present the USQ Library is a typical hybrid library with a mix of print, audio-visual and electronic resources. Because USQ started life as a regional College of Advanced Education, the print and serial collection was relatively poor by university standards and there has been a major emphasis in building up electronic resources and in particular full-text electronic journals. At the end of August 2001, the USQ Library had 801 electronic monographs (growing quickly because of netLibrary purchases and free items), 2,038 print serial titles (decreasing with cancellations of titles also held in electronic format), 8,625 full-text electronic journal titles (increasing), 52 databases and 13 electronic publications purchased by serial subscription (e.g. Grove dictionary of art). Regular serial usage surveys are held in the main library to identify little used print serial titles and these are the ones considered for cancellation. Electronic titles show high usage figures, are available to all types of students including external and calculations show the approximate cost of these journals per use was about 10 % of the hard copy journals during 2000 (see Table 1). Print serial cancellations save money

on subscriptions, shelf space, re-shelving and binding. USQ electronic journals are a mixture of free and purchased items from aggregator databases (e.g. EBSCOhost and InfoTrac) and individually selected e-journals (e.g. SwetsNet and EBSCO online).

Complexities in the management of electronic resources include the selection process, to catalogue or not (web pages and/or OPAC), use of single or multiple records, standards to use in cataloguing, negotiation of licence agreements, allowing access for all users (EZProxy) and maintenance of URL's, changes of titles, dropping and adding titles and changes in dates of holdings. AusStats, the online web service from the Australian Bureau of Statistics is an example of a database now available for USQConnect and USQOnline off-campus students in Australia and throughout the world. Since its launch in early 2000, it wasn't possible to access away from the University's campus network because authentication was possible only by IP address. The Library purchased the software product EZProxy that gets around this problem, for AusStats and some other databases and electronic resources, which have similar restrictions. It enables access without requiring the student to change any software settings on their own computers as EZProxy operates as an intermediary server between users and the Library's licenced databases. A new integrated library system Virtua ILS was launched in 2000 and is a Windows-based, client-server application with web-based linking. Direct URL linking to individual titles and multiple MARC records for ease of changes and deletions were management decisions based on vendor services (e.g. ability to supply direct title URL's and notification of changes) and the features and capabilities of the Virtua library system.

The Library has had a small collection of electronic books (about 100 titles) mainly free materials suggested by Liaison Librarians and government titles. NetLibrary is based in the USA and is one of the main aggregators and providers of e-books. A contract was signed with Blackwell's who arranged the licence to give access to offshore students as well as Australian students. Approximately 500 titles were ordered in the first batch after being selected by Liaison Librarians in consultation with faculty members. Selection is intended to be ongoing with a proportion of the acquisition budget to be set-aside for this purpose. Student textbooks and recommended readings are being searched in netLibrary and purchased where available. Of the 500 titles in the first order batch, about 60% were held by the Library in hard copy. All electronic books will be fully catalogued, as they are then searchable and accessible via their URL's and the Z39.50 functionality of the Virtua system. E-books from netLibrary are full-text searchable (including a dictionary) and available for use on personal computers in online and offline formats. All USQ students and staff members can register as borrowers and use them. The real restriction of netLibrary is that only one person can "borrow" and use the title at one time. Browsing of each title is allowed for 15 minutes and one registered user can borrow up to two books for 24 hours. The Library can monitor the usage of each title carefully, and change the loan period accordingly. NetLibrary also offers free electronic books with no access fees to its customers. These titles are from Project Gutenberg and they are out of copyright. The Library will catalogue titles from the following collections: Drama (including Shakespeare), Fiction, Poetry, Religion and Philosophy (including classics).

How do cost increases affect the USQ Library acquisitions? The USQ Library has been monitoring the cost of books and hardcopy journals for a number of years, and electronic resources in recent years. The average cost of books purchased by USQ has risen by 26% from A\$77 in 1998 to A\$97 in 2000 (see Table 2). An extra A\$200,000 would have been required to purchase the same volume of books as was purchased in 1998. For paper journal subscriptions, the cost increases have been much more drastic from an average of A\$334 in 1999 to A\$474 in 2001 which represents an average increase of 42% over two years (see Table 3). An extra A\$294 000 would have been required in 2001 to maintain journal subscription costs for 2,100 titles. The Library subscribes to a number of databases that provide the full text of journal articles. At July 2001, the Library's subscription costs for the databases was A\$217,000. This amount buys access to over 8,000 titles of full text journals. An average cost of these online journal titles is approximately A\$27 each in 2001. As the Library resources budget is not able to keep up with inflated costs, cancellations of paper journals have had to be made while with books we stay within budget simply by buying fewer volumes.

## CATALOGUING DECISIONS

Cataloguing of electronic resources has caused much debate over recent years. Purchased electronic journals and books are probably a manageable part of the untamed World Wide Web. The OPAC or

Library catalogue is seen by many as a powerful tool using recognized cataloguing standards to bring some order to the chaos of the web environment and the explosion of electronic publishing which ranges in authority and accuracy from personal home pages to scholarly papers and peer-reviewed journals. Sarah E. Thomas (2000) has described the library catalogue as a portal to the Web and its goal "must be to increase the ability of a community of users to meet their information needs by doing as much "one-stop shopping" as possible". The USQ Library is attempting to make its catalogue as comprehensive as possible for seamless access to all resources whilst also maintaining a Library web home page as an alternative means of access to services and resources including Internet resources using a structured approach. Because USQ is not sharing catalogue bibliographic records or contributing to the NBD via Kinetica (except for the possibility of adding holdings soon), we are relatively free to tailor catalogue records to meet user needs while still attempting to adhere to MARC21 and AACR standards.

After some debate and trials the following cataloguing decisions have been put into practice at the USQ Library:

- All electronic titles (e-books and full text e-journals but not titles containing only abstracts) to be fully catalogued in the Virtua library catalogue which allows hyperlinks via its Z39.50 protocol.
- Multiple version records with separate records for print and each differently sourced electronic title (e.g. Journal of further and higher education from both EBSCOhost ASP and EBSCOhost PDC) to be created.
- Switched from former practice of single record with various holdings attached because we believed the cluttered records confused users and also for future records management as it is unlikely that all electronic resources will be maintained by the Library permanently.
- Single title but multiple records approach by not using GMD for electronic journals or books (i.e. [computer file] or [electronic resource]). This allows multiple versions of the same title to file together in the catalogue and then allow choice of format and access to users who are first and foremost interested in the title and its information content.

The Library catalogue is used as a valuable one-stop information database with sophisticated searching capabilities such as keywords and contents notes from enhanced records. An alternative search approach for electronic resources is via the database services/electronic resources listings on the Library homepage grouped by vendor and database name rather than by individual title. A recent addition to this listing was "Electronic Books (netLibrary)".

Direct linking via URL to title and contents pages of individual journals rather than database home pages whenever vendors facilitated this was considered very important for catalogue users. EBSCO title URL's lead to a list (often very long) of articles from that particular title. Clients who access electronic resources via the Library home page are often puzzled by the trade names used such as EBSCO, Ingenta or SwetsNet, which give no indication of subject content. Full catalogue records for individual titles certainly give better subject and keyword access for library users.

URL's for paid subscriptions include an EZProxy prefix, which allows remote users to access the USQ campus network without extra IP authentication and also restricts use to USQ staff and students in accordance with licence agreements.

Sources of catalogue records are Kinetica, OCLC and some from suppliers such as netLibrary or EBSCO or by copying and adapting existing print serial records (e.g. by changing call number to ELECTRONIC RESOURCE).

Specific MARC 21 tags used in USQ records are:

- 516 (Text),
- 530 (holdings, database source and embargo periods if any),
- 538 (Mode of access : Internet) and
- 856 (URL for electronic location and access)

The above cataloguing decisions have been put into practice at the USQ Library but are open to fine-tuning and input from library clients. Quality resources organized for effective access by all users regardless of time or location are vital for an organization such as the University of Southern Queensland, which has carved a niche in the distance education market in an increasingly e-world.

Robert C. Bolander (2001, p. 28) described the ongoing importance of the library catalogue in a dot.com world when he said: "Librarians must strive to connect information seekers with the resources they need in a timely and cost-effective manner, and the catalog can help. The library catalog has the advantages of being selective, consistent, predictable, trustworthy, credible and familiar."

At USQ our major concern is how to cope with the sheer volume of e-resources that can suddenly appear even with the purchase of just one extra database. Cataloguers need to balance efficiency with thoroughness, make few changes to records unless mistakes are present, follow set guidelines that have been developed within the USQ Library for cataloguing electronic resources and attempt to achieve outputs and targets as set out in self-performance assessments. Cataloguing must be timely and efficient to lessen the gap between online availability of electronic resources and the time when a full record appears on the catalogue. Perhaps metadata (data about data), which can be in part automatically generated, could be considered as a future possibility for generating acceptable catalogue records with the same or fewer staff?

**Table 1 - USQ cost per serials usage**

Year	Print serials usage Cost per use	Electronic resources usage cost per session
1999	Approx. A\$8.13	Approx. A\$2.01
2000	Approx. A\$12.80	Approx. A\$1.00

**Table 2 - Average cost of books purchased for USQ**

1998	Approx. A\$77
2000	Approx. A\$97

**Table 3 - Average cost of journals purchased for USQ**

1999	Approx. A\$334
2001	Approx. A\$474

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