

Providing access to journals—just in time or just in case?

By Elizabeth A. Fuseler

Establishing and delivering current-awareness services

For the past two years, as a response to declining budgets, the Colorado State University (CSU) Libraries Science and Technology Department has been providing document delivery from a selected list of journals via a commercial vendor. This service exemplifies the manufacturing concept of “just in time” rather than the traditional library concept of “just in case.” The program is described here, including planning, implementation, and evolution.

Declining library budgets and ever-increasing subscription costs are demanding that libraries look for creative solutions to meeting their researchers’ needs to identify and obtain journal articles. Traditionally, libraries have been storehouses of information, adding to their collections to support the current and future needs of their organizations. They collected things just in case they would be needed. However, as budgets have decreased and book and periodical prices increased, libraries are not able to purchase books and journals to meet even their basic needs. The manufacturing industry reached a similar crisis and found that it was not cost-effective or efficient to stockpile parts. They realized that large storehouses of parts weren’t necessary, and were expensive to maintain, and the just-in-time concept came into being. Just in time means that parts are produced only at the exact time of need.

Libraries, taking a cue from manufacturing, are now investigating ways to give their patrons quick access to information when they need it. While the information must exist some-

where, as opposed to manufacturing where a part is produced on demand, it is not necessary for all libraries to own everything in their areas. The access versus ownership issue is currently a widely discussed concept in collection development circles.

The problem

Two years ago we reached a crisis stage when the amount we had to spend on new periodical subscriptions could not purchase all of the journals requested. However, since service is our primary mission, we wanted to find a way to fill the requests if at all possible.

As we examined the problem, it became clear there were three issues: providing current awareness for specific journals, providing document delivery, and the reluctance of our faculty to use “new technologies.”

Our solution

We decided that if we could provide access to the tables of contents of the journals that had been requested, and document delivery within a reasonable period of time (quicker than the usual interlibrary loan delivery time), we might meet most of the needs of our researchers.

We selected as our supplier the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) since it provided both the table of contents service for the complete list of our titles and document delivery at a competitive cost. We also liked that ISI provided the actual article through tearsheets whenever possible; this was important since many scientific articles include photographs and other illustrative materials which traditionally have not reproduced well. We selected an original list of 40 titles to try our experiment. We have since increased the list to 48. We receive

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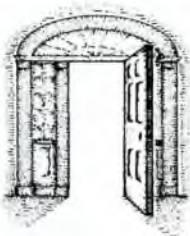
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the tables of contents through ISI's Research Alert, and provide the articles through ISI's document-delivery service, the Genuine Article.

If this was to be accepted by faculty and researchers we decided that we would need: 1) to make the mechanism invisible to users, so they did not see how it was ordered, and 2) to publicize it so users understood what was being provided and how it differed from interlibrary loan.

We realized we might not always use the same vendor, so we developed an identity for our new service: SABR (Selected Articles by Request). We sent letters to the faculty, included the new service in our library newsletter, and talked to every department we could about the service and how it would work. We added the titles to our periodical list and our online catalog with a note saying "Selected Articles by Request. Table of Contents only available. See Science Reference Desk."

The tables of contents are displayed in three-ring binders shelved in with current periodical issues. Order forms and instructions are included in each binder. The form is turned in at the science reference desk.

Requests are sent by fax to ISI. This cuts down by 3-7 days the time it takes for them to receive our request and the difference in cost is insignificant. ISI's turn-around time is a maximum of 48 hours and often only 24 hours. Our only complaint has been the length of time it takes for the U.S. Postal Service to get the items to us—7 to 10 days from when we fax in our order. While ISI offers a fax-delivery service, we could not justify the additional cost.

Evaluation

From September 1990 through March 1992 we had 263 requests for articles. The average number of articles per journal title was 5.5, the median was 2. We had eight titles which received no requests.

Use of the service was spread almost equally among our primary clientele: students, faculty, and staff. The service was used by undergraduate students (27.76% of the requests), graduate students (26.24%), faculty (32.32%), staff (11.41%), and interlibrary loan (2.28%).

Of the 24 departments and eight affiliate laboratories using SABR, the most frequent users were one department with 24.7% of the requests and one laboratory (17.9%). Departmental usage then dropped off abruptly to 9.1%.

For the two-year period, it cost us approximately \$8,700 (including tables of contents, document delivery, photocopying, staff, and telephone charges) to provide access to approximately \$62,800 worth of journal subscriptions. For less than 15% of the total cost we've provided ready access to these journal titles.

After evaluating the use of the service, we decided that it would be cost-effective for us to subscribe to five of the 48 titles. Because we are still receiving requests for 1991 and 1992 for one title, we purchased a two-year backfile.

In 1991-92, because of continued rising journal costs and an essentially static budget, we canceled 224 journal titles in an effort to balance the budget. Because our evaluation of SABR has shown that we have a cost-effective way of providing access to journals without owning them, departments are now willing to substitute the SABR service for the 22 cancelled titles.

Evolution

For the first year, requests for SABR articles were handled by the Sciences and Technology staff using an outside vendor. In an effort to control costs, Interlibrary Loan (ILL) handled the requests during the second year through its normal channels (no outside vendor) with a rush status. We continued to display the ISI tables of contents and to use special forms for requesting articles. The process for obtaining articles was still invisible to the patrons and demand for articles stayed about the same.

Due to a problem with the computer-statistics-gathering program we did not get any statistics for March through November 1992. For December 1992 through June 1993 we had a total of 112 requests for articles. The average number of articles per journal title dropped to two and the median was three. The statistics show that requests received continued to be spread among our primary clientele: undergraduate students (25% of the requests), graduate students (23.1%), faculty (29.8%), and staff (22.1%). Sixteen departments and three affiliate laboratories requested articles. The department that previously was the most frequent user continued to be with 21.4% of the requests. The laboratory that had been the second most frequent user dropped to fifth. The average turn-around time for receipt of articles was five days, with delivery varying from one to 21 days.

Estimated costs for the one-year period (table of contents service, staff hours, and ILL

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is not fundamentally different from the teaching faculty. There are many modes and versions of teaching, and they are not necessarily defined by the 40-minute classroom lecture. Librarians do teach in the traditional sense. They also inspire, guide, and support students and peers offering an in-depth knowledge of librarianship and other subject areas as well. Shapiro contends that "the research requirements for [teaching] faculty are significant to the fields in which they teach," and she further derides the quality of research in librarianship.

One may question the significance of research in any field. There is no data to support the claim that research in library science is any less or any more significant than in other fields. Nor can the quality of research in librarianship be dismissed for being too empirical. There are a limited number of great minds that have, as a result of their research, changed our lives. But that should not deter others from adding to the canons in their respective fields.

Answer to #2: The protection of faculty status is important for academic librarians. Many library faculty believe that faculty status provides them with more credibility and respect on campus. It affords them entrée into the educational process on an equal footing and not

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costs) are \$4,585. Our estimated cost for processing an interlibrary loan request is \$12. We were thereby able to reduce our costs for the total service from \$26.06 to \$23.88 per article.

Future

Expanded access to our online catalog and various databases allows our patrons access to tables of contents online. Uncover2 is available to most of our users from their offices or computer labs. Despite the ease of scanning tables of contents online, currently only a few of our patrons use UnCover2 for current awareness. We hope to institute some educational programs which will increase our patrons' use of this service.

Currently we have a pilot project which allows patrons to place requests directly on UnCover2 at no or low cost. If the patron does not have access to a place for fax delivery of the article, a copy is delivered to a vendor within the library for a \$2.00 charge.

We are certain that as modes of delivery and the number of document-delivery vendors increase, we will continually evaluate and refine this service to our patrons. ■

as an invited or occasional guest. It provides a link for working cooperatively together and for improved communication to promote the educational process.

Answer to #3: Faculty status benefits the academy, not just librarians. First, let us clarify that faculty status is more than earning tenure. It is an orderly procedure by which faculty are evaluated using guidelines and criteria established and accepted by the institution and the faculty. As such, it strives to be a fair and impartial mechanism which is as much a benefit to the academy as it is to the faculty. Is tenure a panacea for academic freedom? The author points out that "junior faculty members and others without tenure enjoy markedly less academic freedom than tenured people, and a determined vicious chairman can still abuse a tenured faculty member." Think where we would be if tenure vanished.

Answer to #4: Faculty status provides a position of influence for the profession. I agree wholeheartedly that our influence on campus must be earned. It is crucial that we become active participants not only in the governance system, but also on committees which afford an opportunity to communicate the role of the library on campus. Collection building and the deselection of materials are enhanced by a thorough understanding of the library's constituents and their special needs. Librarians are often at the forefront in teaching faculty and students how to access information via new telecommunications links and computerized databases. In no way does faculty status for librarians detract from or debase our position on campus. On the contrary, many have firmly held opinions that faculty status is a kind of pedigree that counts in the academic climate.

Answer to #5: Faculty status has proven to be a benefit to academic librarians: The author points out that faculty status is not a guarantee of pay equity with teaching faculty in the same institution. However, it is a model that has worked, and worked well, in some instances. It seems to me that the standards promulgated by our national and regional library organizations have had little effect on our professional salaries. In the real, messy world of economic expediency, those who have no or little political clout in the academy are usually the first to be victimized by both the loss of jobs or salary inequities. Faculty status provides that clout, at least in some instances and to some extent.—

Carol Schroeder ■