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Enhancing Access to Information through Document Delivery Systems – INFLIBNET’s Approach

S. M. Salgar

Scientist “G”, Information & Library Network (INFLIBNET) Centre,
University Grants Commission, Gujarat University Campus,
Ahmedabad, India
E-mail: salgar@inflibnet.ac.in

and

T. A. V. Murthy

Director, Information & Library Network (INFLIBNET) Centre,
University Grants Commission, Gujarat University Campus,
Ahmedabad, India
E-mail: tav@inflibnet.ac.in

Abstract:

Due to diminishing library budgets, coupled with information explosion, academic librarians in India are finding it difficult to meet the insatiable demands of their clientele. For a country as vast geographically as India, having many universities located in remote places, this problem is compounded. Efforts were made in the past to provide document delivery services through a few documentations centers, set up by the Government in different disciplines. This paper focuses on the initiatives launched by the University Grants Commission of India in last few years, through INFLIBNET Centre, to provide this service through electronic means by computerizing university libraries, establishing a network and setting up of document delivery centers.

1. Introduction:

Most of libraries in the world are plagued by shortage of funds on one hand and shrinking of library budget on the other. This problem is more pronounced in developing and under-developed countries. Due to ever increasing cost of published material, the library collections are shrinking. There is an information explosion and the user demands are increasing. Librarians are at their wits end to satisfy the needs of their clientele. The only viable solution to meet users demands is to make optimum use of available literature. This is being done through pooling and sharing of resources. Inter-library co-operation is of utmost importance for this to succeed. Duplication in acquisition needs to be avoided to make use of scarce financial resources to acquire more unique collections, not available in sister libraries. Librarians are willing to stop subscribing to those journals which are available elsewhere. But before taking such a step, they need to be assured that photocopies of articles in these journals will easily be available to them, when needed. This requires an efficient Document Delivery System.

2. Document Delivery Service in India : A broad scenario

Realizing the need for of photocopies of research papers from learned journals and conference proceedings from both academia and researchers, concerted efforts were made to provide the document delivery services since 1950s' by several national level organizations. These services were initiated mostly by public funded libraries and information centres and were provided at nominal cost strictly adhering to letter and spirit of copyright laws. An attempt is made in this section of the paper to give a broad view of such efforts by some of the major organizations. The same is broadly grouped into the following:

- Service provided by national documentation centers.
- Service initiated and supported by National Information System for Science and Technology (NISSAT)
- Service supported by University Grants Commission (UGC).

There are three major national level documentation centres set up in different disciplines. These are Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (INSDOC), National Social Science Documentation Centre (NASSDOC) and the Defence Science Information and Documentation Centre (DESIDOC). INSDOC was set up as a national facility to cater to the information needs of scientists working in over 45 research laboratories falling under the purview of Council of Scientific & Industrial Research. 'Document Copy Supply Service' has been one of its basic services of INSDOC, since its inception. This is a widely used service at the national level and is not limited to 45 laboratories only but open to entire academic and research community. To facilitate and promote Document Supply Service, INSDOC compiled a National Union Catalogue of Scientific Serials in India listing over 36,000 unique titles of serials subscribed by more than 800 libraries in India in the area of Physical and Engineering Sciences⁽¹⁾. Similarly, the NASSDOC, an apex documentation centre setup by Indian Council of Social Science Research to serve as a national facility for social scientists working in 27 research organizations has been providing 'Document Delivery and Photocopy Services'. This service has become popular among social scientists. A union catalogue of serials in social science compiled by NASSDOC, covering the titles held by all the major social science libraries including some of the universities has been a handy source in using this service⁽²⁾. In the area of defence science, DESIDOC has been serving as a national centre. This centre was established mainly to cater to the needs of Defence scientists from over 40 laboratories, funded by Defence Research & Development Organization (DRDO). 'Document Supply Service' is one of its widely used popular services within the DRDO funded organizations. The union catalogue of current serials and back volumes serve as tool to locate the journals of interest for initiating the requests for articles under Document Delivery Service⁽³⁾.

The second major initiative came from National Information System for Science & Technology (NISSAT). NISSAT is a national level coordinating & funding agency for creating information infrastructure in the area of Science & Technology. This agency is setup and supported by Department of Scientific & Industrial Research, Government of India. NISSAT, so far, has created and supported over 13 sectoral information centers, in specific subjects, such as leather, drugs, machine tools, food etc., six NASID centers (National Access Centres to International Data services) and over a half dozen city library networks. All these centers and networks offer the document delivery service in their respective subjects to meet the needs of specific constituencies⁽⁴⁾. Much needed boost came to this service when, NISSAT took major step, by working out an arrangement with National Library of Australia for supply of articles at subsidized cost under NLA-ASTINFO (National Library of Australia – Regional Network for the Exchange of Information and Experience in Science & Technology) projects. This involved 13 institutions, from different parts of the country to work as nodal agencies and it was one of the successful projects of NISSAT that created interest among user community, though it was for a limited period⁽⁵⁾.

Since the above-mentioned efforts mainly focused towards catering the needs of researchers from scientific organizations, a need was felt to strengthen the services in the academic sector as well. The University Grants Commission (UGC) [<http://www.ugc.ac.in>] being the apex body to monitor and fund the higher education in the country, established following three information centers covering different disciplines to fill this void.

- National Centre for Science Information (NCSI)⁽⁶⁾ at Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore.
- National Information Centre (NIC)⁽⁷⁾ at SNDT Women's University, Mumbai.
- National Social Science Information Centre (NASSIC)⁽⁸⁾ at M.S. University, Baroda.

All these three centers had the mandate to provide the Document Delivery Service, specifically to the academia. Accordingly, the necessary infrastructure was created to extend this service, using the serials collection held by the universities where they were attached. Of the three centers, NCSI took active interest and worked out the arrangements with other external Document Delivery Service agencies like BLDSC (British Library Document Supply Centre), CISTI (Canadian Institute for Scientific and Technical Information), NLA (National Library of Australia) and others and extended the service.

Besides these major efforts in this area, the National MEDLARS Centres, established at National Information Centre (Government of India) has been providing the Document supply service to the medical practitioners as an extended activity of National Medical Library, USA using the rich collection of serials in the area of Medicine⁽⁹⁾. There are a quite few large and resourceful academic institutions, like Indian Institute of Technology (six), Indian Institute of Management (six) libraries, offering Document Delivery Services using their collation of serials

3. Document Delivery Service through INFLIBNET supported Centres

India has over 260 universities and 14,000 colleges⁽¹⁰⁾. Most of the universities are either funded by Central or by State Governments and majority of the colleges also receive funding from the Government. To facilitate the modernization and to promote resource sharing among the libraries and information centers attached to these academic institutions, the University Grants Commission (Government of India) established Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET) during 1991. One of the major objectives of this network is “ to provide a document delivery service by establishing resource centers around librarians, having a rich collection of documents”⁽¹¹⁾.

Having concentrated its full resources and efforts in computerization of 142 university libraries (as shown in enclosed map) and training more than 600 librarians in the country during its first decades of its establishment, INFLIBNET turned its attention and initiated a proposal to set up document delivery

centers during 2000. This was done with a view to give much needed impetus to document delivery service in the academic sector as a supplementary to the existing services provided by other agencies. This proposal was discussed and debated in detail in the meetings of INFLIBNET's Governing Body and Council and got the final approval from UGC with a commitment to support with fundings. The Document Delivery Service is a three-year pilot project supported and coordinated by INFLIBNET and was launched in the beginning of 2001. Under this service, following six resourceful universities were identified to serve as Document Delivery Centres.

1. Banaras Hindu University [<http://www.bhu.ac.in>]
(Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh)
2. University of Hyderabad [<http://www.uohyd.ernet.in>]
(Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal)
3. Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore [<http://www.iisc.ernet.in>]
(Karnataka, Kerala, Lakshadweep, Pondicherry, Tamilnadu)
4. Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi [<http://www.jnu.ac.in>]
(Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan)
5. Panjab University [<http://www.puchd.ac.in>]
(Chandigarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab)
6. Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai [<http://www.tiss.edu>]
(Diu and Daman, Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra)

These universities represent different geographical areas (state names are mentioned) and cover almost all major disciplines. All the six universities have signed Memorandum of Understanding with INFLIBNET showing the commitment to share their resources.

INFLIBNET, through UGC has provided financial support to all the six DDCs during the project duration. This amount is provided as initial and recurring grants. Using the financial support, all the Document Delivery Centres have got the following infrastructure to deliver the articles either as photocopy or electronically using Internet.

- Dedicated computer system with Internet connectivity
- Flat bed scanner to scan and deliver A4 papers
- Colour laser printer
- Photocopying machine
- Ariel software (version 3.1)

These DDCs will provide the service using their existing collection of journals and conference proceedings, and will ensure that there is no copyright violation. Service is mainly open to all academic and research institutions with a priority to INFLIBNET member libraries. It is provided through libraries of respective institutions at nominal cost.

A union catalogue of serials is compiled by INFLIBNET listing all the titles subscribed by six DDCs. This is made available to most of the academic and research organizations in print form. The same is accessible in electronic form through INFLIBNET's website at <http://www.inflibnet.ac.in>. Union catalogue lists over 3800 unique current serial titles, and is updated on a continuous basis. Of these, more than 861 titles are of Indian origin. Conference titles and annuals are not covered in this catalogue. Libraries are finding this as useful tool in locating the titles of their interest before requesting for articles.

Due publicity has been given by both INFLIBNET and each DDCs about this service in most of the professional publications and newspapers. Libraries and individual users are encouraged to send their

requests for copies of papers by email. Separate email accounts have been opened in the name of DDCs and contact persons are identified at each DDC. Service is gaining momentum among the librarians & users and is yet to reach the expected level of usage. Some more steps are being initiated to make this service efficient and useful.

Presently the service is a little hampered for want of a dedicated captive network linking all the universities. Majority of the university libraries have only dial-up connectivity to Internet obtained from local Internet Service Providers (ISPs). Since most of the ISPs provide the Internet connectivity using normal PSTN lines, the data speeds are slow and down loading of articles is time consuming. In the month of April, 2002, UGC has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with ERNET India Ltd. [<http://www.ernet.in>], a body under the Ministry of Information Technology, Government of India to establish and operate UGC Network, a wide area network linking more than 170 universities across India. UGC Network will also have connectivity to Internet. This network will be a mix of satellite and terrestrial network technologies. Once operational, it will provide good data speeds to universities and the use and demand for Document Delivery Service is expected to mushroom.

With launching of this service, INFLIBNET hopes to bridge the gap between resourceful universities and those who lack the resources, thereby optimizing the use of existing collection of journals.

4. International Collaborations : Exploratory Efforts

INFLIBNET does not want to limit its Document Deliver Service to literature available only in India. It understands the importance and need to provide access to information resources to Indian academic and research community available at international level and also allow sharing of Indian resources by others. Some exploratory efforts are already being initiated in this direction. University of Pittsburgh has initiated a Global Resource Sharing project in 1998 with six Chinese universities. Under this project, delivery of research papers has been taking place using Ariel software on the Internet. A trial project could be started between University of Pittsburgh and six Indian university libraries which are currently serving as Document Delivery Centres under INFLIBNET Programme. Similar tie ups may be explored with Centre for Research Libraries, Chicago, Carnegie Mellon University and others.

5. Conclusion

INFLIBNET Centre was established by the University Grants Commission in India to mitigate the hardships faced by the academic and research community in having access to desired information. As a first step in this direction, computerization of libraries was carried out successfully. A wide area network is being established linking all the universities and other important information centers. Efforts are under way to devise means for optimum utilization of available resources through sharing and pooling. Establishment of an efficient Document Delivery System in the country is a step in that direction.

6. Acknowledgements

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7. References

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INFLIBNET IDENTIFIED UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES FOR AUTOMATION

