The Contemporary Academic Library Resource Sharing Mission: Fragmentation or Evolution?

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The Message

As with all other aspects of academic library management, the resource sharing mission is undergoing substantive change. Changes in scholarly communication practice, the publishing world, and library collection development patterns are confronting academic interlibrary loan practitioners with requests for information that cannot be met using our traditional suite of skills and tools.
The Message, cont’d

The sum of these changes can be characterized as either the fragmentation of the resource sharing mission or its evolution into a new form of service that will routinely make use of new skills and diverse sources of disseminated information outside the scope of past practices.
Traditional Interlibrary Loan Service
Up to circa 1995

- Print-Based
- “Managable” pace of editing and publication process
- “Managable” number of bibliographic resources
- Relatively slow turnaround times
The Fragmentation of Traditional Interlibrary Loan Service
Developments (mix of causes and effects)

• Conceptual broadening of ILL into resource sharing
• Serials Crisis
• Changes in pace of scholarly communication
• legacy tools for communicating local shelf status and journal holdings (prime example: WorldCat)
• Changes in collection development practices (acquisition of fewer print books)
• New forms of scholarship (video articles; see Journal of Visualized Experiments)
Developments, cont’d

• Difficulties in discovery of and access to electronic resources (limitations of ERM and link resolvers, off-site access issues, etc)
• Impediments to sharing of e-books
• Difficulty of communicating demand for supplementary material like data sets
• Growing pains of open access publishing (fees, predatory journals; resistance from traditional publishers)
• Resource sharing needs have outgrown copyright guidelines dating from the 1970s
• Decline in demand (see chart)
Total Number of DOCLINE Requests

NLM DOCLINE REQUESTS

Source: Maria Collins, 2014 MLA DOCLINE User Group Meeting
The Fragments
Fragments

- Local print collections
- pre-peer review repositories (archivx, bioarchivx, Socarivx)
- curated repositories of open access literature (green; Europe PMC, PMC, SCOAP3)
- OA journals (gold)
- digital libraries containing or pointing to scanned public domain literature (Internet Archive, HathiTrust Digital Library, Digital Public Library of America)
- institutional repositories
- commercial document fulfillment companies (mediated and non-mediated)
- social media article-sharing networking sites (ResearchGate, Academia.edu)
- Informal, pirate, and peer-to-peer sharing sites (Lib Gen, Reddit Scholar, Sci-Hub)
Remedies to Fragmentation

The evolution of a conceptually new service
Some potential remedies

• Openness to changes in service
• Increase staff searching skills
• Improve staff and library user knowledge about the fragmented information ecology
• Larger scale solutions, not entirely in our hands: centralization of open access discovery; relaxation of copyright laws and guidelines, improvement of discovery tools
Discussion
Suggested questions

• Is decline in demand your experience? (see: Opening Interlibrary loan to open access Baich, T 2012 Interlending and document supply 40 (1): 55-60 for a different view)

• How do we inform our users about these new barriers (and improvements) to resource sharing?

• Do you have suggestions for integration of open access discovery into the resource sharing user experience?

• How can resource sharing practitioners contribute to large-scale remedies?

• Does academic resource sharing service need to evolve or merely reform?