IMARK

Module
Investing in Information for Development

Information Access

Lesson 5: Reducing Costs

Learner Notes

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This lesson is part of the IMARK Module on "Investing in Information for Development". The Module contains six units. The unit on "Information Access" comprises five lessons:

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Lesson 5. Reducing Costs

This course is available in self-paced e-learning format on CD-ROM and the Internet (www.imarkgroup.org).

Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- identify some possibilities for acquiring free or low-cost information;
- recognize management challenges involved in trying to minimize the costs of information access; and
- describe the main features of library consortia.

Introduction

If an organization has few or no financial resources, its information specialists may have problems acquiring the external resources required by technical staff.

There are two main reasons for this:

- Peer-reviewed scientific journals and reference publications have become so expensive that many organizations can no longer afford them; and

- Access to the Internet is required for an increasing proportion of the world's literature, and considerable ongoing investments are required in terms of infrastructure and connectivity.

The scientific and educational communities have developed several initiatives to overcome these problems.

High subscription costs: which solutions?

What can organizations do about the high costs of literature? Here are two possibilities:

1. **low-cost access to scientific literature**; and
2. **library consortia**.

The approach to the first option will vary, according to the quality and speed of the Internet connection available. The approach to the second option is not directly affected by the quality of the Internet connection available.

Low-cost access to scientific literature

One option to reduce the costs of information acquisition is through forms of "**Document Delivery"**, which is a generic type of service which normally allows users to order copies of materials, such as journal articles or chapters of books, from a library.

However, if your own organization does not have the document you require, then you might have two other options: to obtain it from another organization either through an **Interlibrary Loan** or in exchange for copies of your own organization's publications (**Document Exchange**).

In all cases, the mode of delivery (mail, fax, or email) can be selected according to local conditions/preferences.

Where Internet access is poor, there are information services that offer free and open access to scientific literature, such as the "e-Journals Delivery Service" (eJDS) (http://www.ejds.org). This is a programme designed to facilitate no-cost access to current scientific literature. eJDS distributes single scientific articles to scientists via e-mail. Recipient scientists must respect copyright "fair-use" restrictions when they make and/or distribute copies. So, if you know what journal you want, but your bad Internet service doesn't allow you to easily view it or print it, you can order it through eJDS.

Where the Internet connection is good, there are several initiatives that offer free and open access to scientific literature. The goal of the three outlined below is to make high quality, peer-reviewed journals available for free, or at very low cost, to scientific and educational users in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

1. **AGORA** (Agricultural Sciences) http://www.aginternetwork.org/en/index.php
2. **HINARI** (Health) http://www.healthinternetwork.org/
3. **INASP-PERI** (General sciences) http://www.inasp.info/peri/index.shtml

Please note that some initiatives of this type are restricted to users in certain countries. You will have to check to see if your country qualifies.

	LOW Ability to pay	**HIGH** Ability to pay
HIGH QUALITY Internet Connection	Free and low-cost products and services on the Internet or via email	Commercial products and services on the Internet or via email
LOW QUALITY Internet Connection	Free/low-cost products and services in printed format or on CD-ROM	Commercial products and services in printed format or on CD-Rom.

This matrix illustrates the access options for scientific literature based on exist for different combinations of:

- ability to pay; and
- quality of Internet access.

An organization can make its choice(s) based on these two parameters, once the nature of the information needs is known.

Low-cost access to scientific literature: a scenario

Let us suppose that your organization has decided to participate in one of these initiatives. What management issues might you face? Here's an example...

The setting is an agricultural university in Africa. Most faculty and students are located on the main campus, just outside the national capital. The library on the main campus subscribes to most national journals and newsletters, but very few international ones. It has some standard reference books, though they are mostly old and the entire collection is a bit haphazard.
The most-used information resources in the library are printed abstract journals (e.g. CAB Abstracts). Faculty and students do not usually have access to original articles, so they use these abstracts instead for their project proposals and theses.

A recent World Bank project has made it possible for the university to invest in improved IT facilities. The university has bought new computers, upgraded its old Local Area Network (LAN), and – most important – committed itself to fast, broadband access to the Internet.

A representative of an international organization visits the university to present **AGORA**. Everybody is excited and a committee is formed, under the leadership of the Dean himself.

However, the head of the extension department is rather negative:
"What is in this for us? The journals available via AGORA are only relevant for research".

The head of the computer department is cooperative, but points out that the existing IT infrastructure in the university might not be good enough to allow widespread use of AGORA:
"If many faculty and students start using AGORA, we will need to buy additional bandwidth from our Internet Service Provider"

The librarian is enthusiastic, but at the same time also worried:
"Will people still come to the library if they can have access to all these resources at their desktops? I have some other investment priorities. We have been talking for some years now, but the library catalogue is not yet fully computerized, let alone available on the campus network".

Problems and solutions

From the remarks of the senior staff people in the previous example, we can already identify several problems:

- How to **integrate existing resources** with new resources (particularly in the library)?

Possible solution:

Begin to build a "virtual library", consisting of elements such as:

- a digital library catalogue containing information on the existing collections of physical documents;
- scanned/digitized versions of at least some of the existing collections of physical documents; and
- a continually updated list of the new and "most popular" web-based resources, which can then be integrated into the library catalogue.

- How to **serve the needs** of those faculty and students who are not primarily researchers?

Possible solution:

Some staff and students may be interested in more informal technical literature not found in AGORA (e.g., extension), and the university library should ensure it also acquires less academic material such as newsletters and bulletins.

- How to **allocate scarce IT resources** when faculty and students have so many demands on existing IT?

Possible solution:

Innovative solutions have to be found to maximize efficiency of information acquisition through AGORA. Some examples are:

- storage of articles dowloaded from AGORA in a database accessible to all users;
- establishment of an organization-wide schedule for Internet access to ensure availability of bandwith for services such as AGORA.

Library consortia

A second option for reducing costs is a **library consortium**, an association of independent libraries formed to share resources and to negotiate with publishers on journal/database subscriptions and book purchases.

The main advantage of a consortium for the member libraries is that they can negotiate with publishers from a position of strength. The advantage for publishers is that they can negotiate with one party (the consortium) rather than with many (the member libraries). [1]

Consortia are often somewhat informal at the beginning. Their initial objective is usually to make deals with publishers, but as they evolve, they develop structures and procedures to perform tasks like:

- negotiating longer-term prices and licenses;
- developing common interfaces to catalogues and databases;
- training.

[1] The International Coalition of Library Consortia is an informal, self-organized group comprising (as of September 2003) nearly 150 library consortia from around the world.

In addition, consortia can improve the performance of other cooperative tasks, such as:

- coordinating inter-library loans of printed and electronic (e.g. CD-ROMs) materials;
- organizing physical and/or electronic access to materials held at all libraries in the consortium;
- coordinating activities for joint preservation and/or archiving print and digital material.

Are all library consortia all similar? No. Some are **public** (created by government), while others are **private**. Some are **commercial**, while others are **non-profit**. Some are **centralized** and tightly structured, while others are **decentralized** and loosely structured.

In addition, different consortia can have:

- different **purposes**;
- different **sizes** (number of member libraries);
- different **types of members** (types of libraries);
- different **scales** (regional, national, international); and
- different **resources**.

Forming consortia is usually not easy. Here are some of the challenges:

- getting funds;
- overcoming political obstacles;
- making compromises between institutions;
- legal and structural issues.

The Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL) exists to help organizations wishing to form consortia. EIFL is an initiative of the Open Society Initiative (OSI). Its main focus is on negotiating affordable subscriptions on a multi-country basis, while also supporting emerging library consortia in member countries (http://www.eifl.net).

Summary

Access to scientific and technical information is a major challenge for organizations. Two of the main issues regarding information acquisition are the high costs of scientific literature and the high cost of a good quality Internet connection.

Options for reducing information acquisition costs are:

- low-cost access to scientific literature; and
- library consortia.

Document delivery is a service which normally allows users to order copies of materials, such as journal articles or chapters of books, from their libraries. Related services are: “inter-library loan” and “document exchange”.

Where Internet access is poor, there are information services that offer free and open access to scientific literature, such as the “e-Journals Delivery Service” (eJDS). Where the Internet connection is good, there are several initiatives that offer free and open access to scientific literature, such as AGORA.

Organizations can opt to join a library consortium, which is an association of independent libraries, formed to share resources and to negotiate with publishers for low-price journal/database subscriptions and book purchases.