Global resource sharing from a Pacific Northwest perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to describe the international interlibrary loan (ILL) experience of three academic libraries in the Pacific Northwest and analyze factors impacting the success of international ILL. The authors seek to speculate on three possible scenarios going forward and conclude with a call to action.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors apply PEST and SWOT techniques, using their own institutions as case studies.

Findings – Some of the most critical factors affecting international ILL at their home institutions include the terms of electronic license agreements, open access, and physical delivery costs.

Originality/value – The internal and external factors affecting international ILL at these institutions are broadly applicable to all types of libraries throughout the world.

Keywords International interlibrary loan, Academic libraries, United States of America

Paper type Case study

Introduction

International interlibrary loan (ILL) can be defined as the sharing of library materials between countries. These materials may include hard-copy books and audiovisual materials as well as scanned articles and book chapters. With the advent of comprehensive online discovery tools and enhanced sophistication and expectations of our users, the borrowing and lending of materials across borders has recently gained a more prominent place in the field of resource sharing. Librarians around the world are increasingly being asked to provide materials held outside local, regional, and national borders. This emphasis is reflected in many ILL units’ workload as well as in a recent stream of publications and surveys on the topic (Atkins, 2010; Hanington and Reid, 2010; Yoo, 2010).

Once a seldom-used process, international resource sharing may now be a significant portion of many ILL units’ daily processes. Despite the recent growth in this ILL activity, however, processes are still complicated and costly. Further, even as discovery of resources has improved dramatically in the past five years, libraries still need help gaining access to and requesting from other library collections. As a library community, we are acutely aware that we are in the midst of a global information explosion that is driven largely by the convergence and integration of telecommunication and information technologies. At the same time, we also recognize that technology is only part of the story for us. Other concerns, including socioeconomic and political factors, along with cultural traditions, have played and continue to play a role in both international and local institutional contexts. The current landscape for global resource sharing is, to say the least, simultaneously invigorating and daunting.

In this paper, we examine the topic of international ILL through the lenses of our home institutions: the University of Oregon (UO), the University of Washington (UW), and Washington State University Vancouver (WSU). We first describe the overall picture of international ILL in our region – the Pacific Northwest of the USA. We then narrow our focus and present an overview of past and current international ILL activity at our own institutions. Next, using the twin business analysis techniques of politics, economics, social, and technology (PEST) and strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT), we use our institutions as case studies to outline which external and internal factors have the greatest influence on our own international ILL activities. We conclude by providing three scenarios for the near future of this important library service and a call to action. Our aim is to provide an insight into...
the process of global resource sharing by studying a few of the needs that gave rise to it and reviewing some of the forms that have emerged in the recent past. It is hoped that such an overview will suggest possible courses of future developments.

International ILL in the Pacific Northwest

In early 2010, the authors decided to investigate the current state of international ILL in our region and where it might be headed in the future. In doing so, we wanted to consider the more immediate past along with some broader and narrower ramifications of a cooperative international interlending service and system.

To put global resource sharing activity into a regional context, we looked at recent international borrowing and lending activity among all academic libraries in the states of Washington and Oregon. Figure 1 provides an overview of transactions for both returnables and non-returnables shared across national borders. The fluctuating statistics, although showing an incremental overall growth, give further credence to anecdotal evidence that international ILL activity is increasing at some institutions while decreasing at others.

In addition, many academic libraries in the Pacific Northwest, including our three institutions, are members of the Orbis Cascade Alliance. The Alliance is a consortium of 36 public and private academic libraries in Oregon and Washington who work together to share information, resources, and expertise. To this end, the Alliance considers combined collections that total more than 9.2 million titles and represent 28.7 million items of member institutions as one collection. More than 280,000 books, CDs, DVDs and other materials are borrowed and loaned within the consortium every year. The Alliance represents an increasingly automated network for resource sharing based on a single centralized catalog with an accompanying requesting and delivery system that might serve as a model for future international ILL systems and practices.

Figure 1 International ILL among academic libraries in Oregon and Washington, 2006-2009

International ILL at UO, UW, and WSU Vancouver

Our three ILL units employ many of the same automated technologies to process requests and deliver articles, including ILLiad, Odyssey, Ariel, RapidILL, Docline, and e-mail transmission. We differ, however, in the size of our user populations, library size, and volume of ILL activity. Below are descriptions of each university and its ILL activity as well as a brief history of that unit’s ILL activity.

UO

Founded in 1876, the UO, located in Eugene, Oregon, has a population of approximately 26,000 staff, faculty, and students. The UO Libraries contain over 3 million print volumes, a growing collection of e-books, and 74,487 journal subscriptions including free electronic titles. For a summary of UO ILL transactions, which includes both returnables (loans) and non-returnables (copies), see Table I.

UW

As the largest public academic library in the region, the UW is one of the oldest state-supported institutions of higher education on the western coast of the USA. Founded in 1861 and located in Seattle, Washington, the UW has a population of 47,000 students and 4,100 full-time faculty members spread across three urban campuses. The UW Libraries own 7.14 million volumes, with more than 61,000 serial subscriptions. For a summary of UW ILL transactions, which includes both returnables (loans) and non-returnables (copies), see Table II.

Table I ILL and consortial borrowing and lending at the University of Washington Libraries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>Within consortium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Borrowed</td>
<td>29,245</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>35,058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lent</td>
<td>37,376</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>29,567</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WSU Vancouver

WSU is the State of Washington’s land-grant institution. The main campus, located in Pullman, Washington, opened its doors in 1892 as the Washington Agricultural College and School of Science. It is now a nationally recognized research university with more than 25,000 students enrolled in more than 200 fields of study worldwide. The WSU Libraries hold more than 2,159,693 book volumes and 30,000 periodical subscriptions.

WSU Vancouver is a regional non-residential branch campus established in 1989, near Portland, Oregon, with a student population of slightly more than 3000. The WSU Vancouver Library contains more than 30,000 monographic volumes and more than 20,000 electronic journal titles. In proportion to its size, annual (2009-2010) ILL and document delivery transactions total (see Table III).

PEST and SWOT analysis

Considering the future as uncertain and multidirectional in its potential allows us to look with fresh eyes at how the choices we make now may play out under various conditions (Staley and Malenfant, 2010, p. 59).

To gain a better understanding of the current status of international ILL at a local and regional level and how this area of activity may play out under various conditions, we employed the strategic planning and forecasting tool known as PEST/SWOT analysis. PEST and SWOT analyses are organizational management tools useful for focusing discussions while providing a framework for looking at current positions and future directions. PEST (political, economic, social, and technological) factors refer to external, macro-level influences over which we generally have little control but which may have major impacts on our services. Whereas a PEST analysis paints a picture of how external forces affect a company or industry, a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis refers to internal factors and illustrates on a more granular level the factors influencing the success of a product or service.

Using the PEST/SWOT analytical tools allows us to consider the uncertain future of international ILL, in the words of Staley and Malenfant (2010, p. 59), “with fresh eyes at how the choices we make now may play out under various conditions”. Table IV shows some of the PEST and SWOT factors currently at play in international ILL.

Table III ILL and consortial borrowing and lending at the Washington State University Vancouver Library

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>Within consortium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Borrowed</td>
<td>2,503</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>3,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lent</td>
<td>4,395</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>642</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PEST

A variety of external factors impact international ILL, including: open access, changing financial models for higher education, increased collaboration and consortial arrangements, potential changes in copyright law both domestic and international, increased tension and new models of resolution between collection-building and request fulfillment as cheapest cost. Recently, a statement by the International Association of Scientific, Technical and Medical Publishers brought to the forefront issues surrounding e-content licenses, DRM, and international ILL (Kelley, 2011).

For our PEST analysis we have chosen to explore the effects of one external factor as it relates to each of our institutions. The issues covered here are: E-licensing, Open Access, and Physical Delivery.

E-Licensing at the UO

 Licensing is a critical factor to take into consideration before lending e-materials to international borrowers. This is true for both e-journals and e-books. At the UO an electronic rights management (ERM) program by Innovative Interfaces (III) contains information regarding whether or not a particular publisher will allow their e-journal articles to be provided via ILL. The ERM is linked to the UO online catalog. As ILL staff process incoming lending requests for e-materials, they first search the online catalog by ISSN or title to bring up the record for the requested item. The journal publisher name is included in the link to the journal. At this point staff members have two choices. They can either consult a list of publishers known to prohibit ILL lending or click on the “About Resource” tab located next to the title. Licensing information for ILL is detailed in “Terms of Use (Staff).” A sample entry may read “Open access titles. No restrictions for ILL, reserves, or course packs” or “ILL not permitted.” If ILL is not permitted, the request is cancelled. Over the past fifteen years e-journal publishers have grown more willing to allow ILL for their e-journal publications. This is a very welcome development.

For international lending, ILL is not permitted in the licenses for six of our e-journal publishers. ILL staff consult a list of these publishers before filling a request for an e-journal article for an international borrower.

E-book lending at the UO, as at many institutions, is still in its infancy. Three of our e-book publishers currently allow ILL in their licenses at this time and we have created a workflow for lending e-books. We look forward to a time when more e-book publishers allow ILL in their licensing.

Open access at the UW

The UW is fortunate that discussions of Open Access journals and their use are also occurring within the UW Libraries and the UW campus in general. The UW Libraries Open Access FAQ page states:

The University has taken no formal position on open access, but in April 2009 the UW Faculty Senate approved a resolution encouraging faculty to publish in moderately priced journals, in journals published by professional societies and associations, or in peer-reviewed ‘open access’ journals, and to archive their work in open access repositories.

The UW’s Office of Research also issued a statement of the UW position in 2007 encouraging voluntary open access. The UW Libraries operates Research Works, which provides faculty, researchers, and students with tools to archive and/or
Publish the products of research including data sets, monographs, images, journal articles, and technical reports. In fact the commercial journals are on average less cited than the non-profits and the average cost per citation of commercial journals ranges from five to 15 times as high as that of their non-profit counterparts.

**Physical delivery at WSU Vancouver**

The success of the global resource sharing model hinges on each library’s ability to deliver critical resources. ‘Hydrophobia,’ or what has been called the fear of damage and loss when shipping valuable library materials overseas (Massie, 2000), has long been the greatest barriers to cooperative sharing. Physical delivery of library materials has also been further threatened by other PEST factors, such as budgetary limitations, excessive increases in the cost of shipment, declining acquisitions and serial deselection efforts, and even postal strikes (Austen, 2011). Recent pricing decisions by Netflix discourage DVD shipment in favor of streaming content and detail the high costs of shipment (Gutter, 2011).

At WSU Vancouver, regional and national delivery of library materials is greatly enhanced by cooperative agreements with consortial partners. Expedited access to materials, rather than method of payment or fear of loss, is one of determining criteria used when choosing an ILL lender. WSU Vancouver currently has no special shipping arrangements with libraries outside our borders, other than those negotiated with individual requests. Given the expense and other concerns surrounding international delivery and return, we greatly prefer both sending and receiving digital copies over print materials. Digital libraries, digitization-on-demand programs, and even streaming media, along with improvements in broadband transmission and software, have been of great benefit to us in speed, efficiency, and cost savings. An unexpected consequence of e-delivery is “greening,” that is, a reduction in the energy consumption and carbon footprint of libraries that ship physical items from place to place. For example, researchers at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst report that streaming uses 78 percent less energy than physical shipment (Seetharam et al., 2010).

**SWOT**

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to our three ILL units have many things in common. Our greatest strength is our dedication to getting what our patrons need as well as a willingness to borrow and lend materials overseas. Another commonality, which can be considered both a strength and a threat, is our libraries’ access to WorldCat Local and WCL’s main search bar featured prominently on our libraries’ home pages. As a result of the implementation of WorldCat Local, our libraries have seen a significant increase in the number requests for materials from international libraries. We see the increase in borrowing requests as an opportunity to provide a richer store of materials to our patrons. Further, it has given us the impetus to codify and standardize our international borrowing processes.

Weaknesses also include difficulty with languages and costs. Here are some SWOT factors that are unique to each of our institutions. One of the greatest threats to our international borrowing program is the increasingly high cost in borrowing from some overseas libraries. We are monitoring these costs and may need to make adjustments to our borrowing policies to accommodate these expenses.

**UO**

To accommodate the increase in international borrowing requests we have added an international workflow to our borrowing request processing which includes sending ALA requests via ILLiad. A weakness of our system is that it can break down, however, when potential lenders do not respond to requests, leaving these items to languish in our “ALA request sent” queue. We have learned over time that we need to monitor this queue frequently.

The strength of international ILL lending at the UO is that we place no restrictions on materials provided to international borrowers. They may borrow the same materials that we loan domestically. It may be reassuring to libraries who have not yet taken the plunge in lending materials overseas that our non-return rate for these materials is no higher than for materials loaned within the USA and, in fact, may actually be quite lower.

**UW**

Following the UW’s installation of OCLC WorldCat Local as the primary library search interface in May 2007, our international borrowing activity increased threefold. The activity prompted a review of all international borrowing processes and several procedural revisions. The UW Libraries:

1. Created an Access database logging all international libraries not listed in OCLC from whom we have successfully borrowed. Currently we have over 400 libraries listed. This database lists contact information, whether they loan books, articles, or both, their fee structure, their requested ILL procedures and necessary forms, and preferred method of payment.

2. “Tagging” of each international library within our ILLiad system, to speed gathering of the statistics. We can now generate reports showing fill rate, turnaround time, reasons for cancellation, etc., for international-only libraries.

### Table IV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEST/SWOT</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>History of library cooperation</td>
<td>Global, state and, institutional “Hydrophobia”</td>
<td>Increase collaboration</td>
<td>Copyright legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increasing digitized content</td>
<td>E-content licensing and DRM controls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Increasing number of records loaded daily into WorldCat</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

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Revision of our international shipping procedures. After a thorough review of international shipping methods, we selected USPS Shipping Assistant for our international shipping, as it was the most cost-effective method of shipping that included tracking.

We still experience delays in searching international ILL requests due to challenges verifying citations, language translations, and in using the multiple requesting methods and/or discovery tools necessary for processing these requests. E-book purchasing at the UW is also increasing which speeds delivery in the lending of e-items, but also hampers resource sharing where the license forbids international ILL – or any ILL at all.

Following the installation of WorldCat Local in May 2007, the UW found that the costs to borrow internationally were becoming unsustainable high. Rather than stop borrowing internationally altogether, we chose to ask a new question on our request forms: “Would you like us to get this item from an international library if it is not available in the USA?” Ordering from an international library takes more time (six to eight weeks) and costs the UW Libraries more money (about $100) than using US libraries. See FAQ for more details.

Our goal was to have informed patrons, not library staff, making decisions about whether or not we should pursue this item internationally. This has worked very effectively at reducing the amount of international borrowing we are doing and of course in reducing the associated costs. However, we know there are some patrons who are intimidated by this note and do not select ‘international ok’ even when they have a pressing need for an item. And there are other patrons who say ‘international ok’ even when they do not need the item. Managing patron expectations and reactions to cost information remains an ongoing challenge.

WSU Vancouver

The WSU Vancouver Library began participating in resource sharing in the early 1990s. Because of the size and location of our campus, it was necessary from the outset to establish strong cooperative relationships with peer institutions in the state, region, and beyond. For our campus, access has always been the model and we were encouraged to implement the most effective and efficient means of providing our users with information that was fast, good and inexpensive. In doing so, we built on a tradition of resource sharing set up by our parent institution in Pullman as well as at the UO and UW.

We began our operations with ILLiad, Ariel, and Docline and have expanded from there. We are active participants in LVIS, and have expanded from there. We are active participants in Libraries Very Interested in Sharing (LVIS) as well as numerous other formal and informal agreements. Given our entry into the arena of international ILL, we benefited greatly from technological improvements to automated management systems. In the past five years, we have seen a steady increase in international ILL traffic directly related to improvements in vastly increased visibility of library records and discovery systems, such as OCLC’s WorldCat product. In addition, as more libraries are able to borrow and receive PDF attachments to email, we have been able to expand our international lending activities.

Like the UO and UW, one of the strengths of international ILL activity at WSU Vancouver is our institutional and regional tradition of sharing. When our ILL service was in its infancy, we developed policies and procedures that encouraged the broadest levels of cooperation. We place no additional costs or fees on any of our international ILL transactions. Although we do not handle the same volume of requests as our colleagues, we have technologies and a workflow that provide a fast turnaround time. Our size, however, can also be a weakness. We do not have a designated budget for non-consortial delivery and may have to cancel a request for international material if the cost to ship is excessive. We see great opportunity in the expansion of e-delivery as well as the threat that restrictive licensing may place on library materials that are born-digital.

Scenarios

In this section we take what we learned from the PEST and SWOT analyses above and use them to guide us in our thinking about what international ILL might look like in the near future. We have painted three possible future scenarios.

Scenario 1: my credit card is my library card

In this scenario information is increasingly available on a pay-per-view basis, with support for institutional repositories and open access hindered. ILL-restrictive license terms and DRM further inhibit resource sharing and the costs for ILL are shifted onto the patrons with a fee-based service. In this scenario, the academic/research library looks more and more like a business or document provider.

Scenario 2: the golden age of the global library

Each nation has indexed all of the library materials and made them discoverable in a unified interface. Open access becomes the standard publishing platform with intellectual property fully protected, copyright royalties affordable, and payments are made with due diligence on a global scale. Further, libraries increasingly collaborate through consortia or groups to achieve cost- and effort-efficiencies. E-content is available in a standard platform with ILL-friendly licenses and DRM that allow publishers to profit without impeding resource sharing. Libraries are financially supported by a strong government or external agency.

Scenario 3: a patchwork quilt

In this scenario library materials will increasingly be available on a pay-per-view basis; reciprocal agreements will increase and may be fee-based. ISO standards are widely adopted. National libraries, union catalogs, digital libraries, and indexes thrive but unevenly. There will be increased digital transmission of loans and copies and decreased physical delivery, with continuity of existing systems in question.

Conclusion

Which one of the proposed scenarios will become our new reality? In the face of some of the trends and issues identified here and the free sharing of information, it is easy to become discouraged. It is even easier to sit back and wait while the current, mainstream providers of information settle issues such as those of open access vs. traditional publishing, big deals vs. crafted collection purchases, and e-book borrowing vs leasing to name a few.

Librarians take a passive approach at their own peril. Without our involvement – and librarians have a long history of involvement in issues related to information sharing –
the trends will almost certainly fall toward profit at the expense of researchers. We encourage you to remain informed and involved through actions such as:

- Read! Daily! Blogs, publications, twitter feeds, press releases, marketing materials to stay informed of information-related trends and events.
- Discuss! Whether via phone, social media, conference discussions, meetings, email. Communicate with others your patrons’ needs and desires. Let your voice be heard.
- Contribute to the discussion by writing letters to the editor, publishing in academic arenas, holding open access discussion forums, or volunteering at your library.
- Make your own purchases carefully or influence those who are responsible for purchasing at your institution. Research the impact on resource sharing when voting with your dollars. Purchase e-readers that allow for the download and sharing of books. Purchase e-packages which are DRM-free. Negotiate licenses that do not limit international or domestic resource sharing.

Where we have been and where we are now determines where we will be in the future – either by our silence or by our involvement. Which will it be?

Our future is neither predetermined nor predictable: it is, rather, something that lies within our hands, to be shaped and molded by the choices we make in the present time (Margaret Mead).

References


Further reading


Appendix. Why does Interlibrary Loan ask me if I want them to request from an international library if it is not available in the USA?

If your requested item is not available from any US Libraries, ILL will try to borrow it internationally.

- Photocopies from international libraries can take up to four to six weeks to arrive and cost the UW Libraries approximately $80 to borrow.
- Loans from international libraries can take up to six to eight weeks to arrive and cost the UW Libraries approximately $100 to borrow.

ILL is able to provide this service for items that are necessary and important to your research, but asks you to confirm this when you place your request due to the time it takes to receive these items and the cost to the libraries.

We appreciate your cooperation.

About the authors

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