Rethinking library resource sharing: new models for collaboration

Brenda Bailey-Hainer
American Theological Library Association, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Anne Beaubien
MLibrary Document Delivery, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

Beth Posner
Mina Rees Library, The CUNY Graduate Center, New York City, New York, USA, and

Evan Simpson
Tisch Library, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to highlight significant changes in the information discovery landscape; discuss evolution in discovery systems and their connection to resource sharing; discuss the use of best practices by resource sharing practitioners; and describe new collaborations among libraries that change the definition of resource sharing.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors observed the library landscape with a focus on discovery systems, interlending systems, and collaborative resource sharing models and reviewed literature related to these areas to structure discussion and draw conclusions about the changing role and definition of resource sharing.

Findings – Innovations in discovery have significant impact on library resource sharing. Resource sharing practitioners are using best practices to improve services and develop new roles. New models for collaboration are changing the definition of library resource sharing.

Originality/value – This paper positions resource sharing as a dynamic, highly strategic area of service with growing importance to twenty-first century libraries and challenges readers to consider what new partnerships and collaborative models will benefit both libraries and their communities.

Keywords Best practices, Delivery, Interlibrary loan, Partnerships, Interlending, Discovery

Introduction

Libraries and librarians enjoy an established role in society – to connect people with information. Despite any and all other changes in the information world, or the world at large, that purpose remains a vital and consequential one. However, the challenges in meeting it are now taking on new dimensions. Enormous technological advances are pushing the boundaries of the information landscape and providing researchers with new ways to find and access resources. In addition, economic limitations are challenging librarians to meet the demand for quick access to global and digital information as efficiently and cost effectively as possible, while maintaining access to print material.

Where libraries have traditionally developed services to address a scarcity of information, libraries and library services today are shaped by the deluge of information available to information seekers. In the non-networked, analog world of print resources, libraries served as gatekeepers to information. They built and housed print collections, invested in workflows to manage them, and developed services to provide access and assist users who had few alternatives for discovering or accessing information elsewhere. In a highly networked, digital world where information seekers have the ability to discover more than ever before, librarians have become guides. Libraries now serve as critical nodes and points of intersection between the consumer-driven discovery landscape of unsubscribed resources and the landscape of structured, subscribed information that fuels research. Libraries now develop and provide spaces/services that help drive networked cycles of discovery, evaluation, synthesis, and documentation of information no matter where it has been found by users. They help users sort through the information deluge and choose appropriate tools along the way.

A fundamental shift is underway in the role libraries play. Within this new landscape, libraries’ collection development strategies have shifted from “just in case” to “just in time”, making users’ access to resources held outside of their home library even more critical (Shorley, 2008). In this era, resource...
sharing has become a dynamic and increasingly strategic area of service that reflects a constantly changing information landscape and the commitment libraries are making to empower their communities to discover and access information efficiently and effectively.

The rise of resource sharing

Resource sharing services such as interlibrary loan (lending/borrowing materials between libraries) or document delivery (delivering locally held materials physically or electronically, and/or utilizing commercial document suppliers to fill borrowing requests) have long provided access to information resources beyond what is available to a local community. What is different today is that in our rapidly changing landscape, resource sharing has evolved from a service to request to one that delivers a variety of resources in multiple formats with workflows connected to acquisitions, collection development, reference, and other library services. The challenge of filling requests for hard-to-find resources has led to closer ties between resource sharing and reference services where, in some models, subject specialists are integrated into standard interlibrary loan workflows to assist in filling requests from faculty members (Bean and Rigby, 2011).

Integration of resource sharing workflows with other library services/units is seen particularly in the area of acquisitions/collection development. The Getting-It System Toolkit (GIST) developed by IDS Project libraries represents a technology developed in response to the increasingly close ties among these units as libraries pursue new approaches to procuring resources (Pitcher et al., 2010).

The integration of resource sharing workflows with other library units is driven by larger shifts in how libraries approach collection development. Where resource sharing was once an ancillary or supplementary service, it has transformed to become a strategic force both supporting and shaping what resources libraries offer and how they are offered. The options a library has for accessing resources through partnerships with other libraries features prominently in decision-making around collection development; indication of this fundamental shift in the strategic positioning of resource sharing dates back many years to the development of systems/partnerships like Borrow Direct (Collins, 2012) and has continued in the era of e-books and patron driven acquisitions (Nabe and Fowler, 2012). Its definition has been widened and its goals enhanced, while its mission to connect people and information and its values of reciprocity, responsibility, and sharing remain.

The evolution of resource sharing is evident when considering strategy and initiatives in three areas: deployment of dynamic new discovery-to-delivery systems, evolution and development of best practices and new roles for resource sharing practitioners, and new innovative models for collaboration. While this is not meant to be a comprehensive survey of examples, it does represent a glimpse of just what is possible today.

Work in each of these areas illuminates how libraries are delivering resources and services in bold new ways to meet changing user needs. How libraries offer their communities the ability to discover information, how resource sharing practitioners develop their roles, and how libraries work together to evolve services reveals a transformation in what resource sharing means and what it does in practice.

Discovery = resource sharing

Driven by changing user preferences and information seeking behavior in the age of Google, libraries today seek to provide rich and comprehensive search experiences. Major libraries and multi-type library consortia are deploying shared discovery and delivery platforms that bring together catalogs from partner institutions under one search. In Australia and New Zealand, for instance, libraries have worked together for a decade to ensure ISO-ILL interoperable systems, and today the Trans-Tasman Interlending program enables efficient resource sharing across national borders (Jilovsky and Howells, 2012) while within Australia, Libraries Australia Document Delivery (LADD)[1] provides users nationwide with over 700 library collections to search and request from (Hanington, 2010).

On the other side of the world, the Boston Library Consortium in the Northeastern US and the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, representing public and private academic libraries in the Midwestern US, are both forging ahead in providing their communities with shared catalogs to expand discovery and facilitate requesting and delivery[2]. The Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) has created UBorrow, a shared interface to search the holdings of loanable items across all the CIC libraries and their range of ILS platforms. CIC helped combine elements of the Relais D2D and ILLiad resource sharing systems into a new, more efficient consortrial borrowing system[3]. Others are deploying web-scale discovery portals built on massive central indexes. The Orbis Cascade Alliance, a consortium of 37 private and public academic libraries in the Pacific Northwest region of the US, has already implemented WorldCat Local and is developing an additional discovery layer built on Ex Libris’ Primo that will provide users with a search experience built on a central index of metadata representing millions of articles, books, and other information resources that extend well beyond the print and electronic holdings of member libraries (Breeding, 2013a).

As the result of these innovations, information seekers in institution-specific (e.g. academic or public libraries), state, region, and nation-wide communities are empowered to search across what had been silos of information, whether full text article/newspaper databases and online indexes, and/or individual catalogs from various libraries and library types. For many communities, more bibliographic information is available via one search than ever before.

Evidence suggests that as information seekers are empowered to discover more information the volume of both lending and borrowing requests has the potential to increase. As early as 1986, patron initiated interlibrary loan requesting was automated, resulting in interlibrary borrowing increases up to 3 to 8 percent of total circulation in some Illinois academic libraries (Potter, 1986). Results of the University of Washington’s implementation of WorldCat Local in 2007 was further indication of the impact of expanded discovery on interlibrary loan volume: due to a search experience that included local holdings, collections in partner libraries, and beyond, borrowing requests increased by 93 percent in 2007-2008 (Deardorff and Nance, 2009). The University of Delaware also experienced growth in interlibrary loan volume after implementing WorldCat Local
with significant increases in borrowing and lending requests between 2007 and 2010 (Gaffney, 2012).

It is clear that the success of expanded discovery relies on resource sharing to ensure access to items found. The investment libraries make in discovery requires significant investment in resource sharing services, systems, and strategies. Libraries, vendors, and the open source community have invested heavily in tools that facilitate requests for items not available locally in print, online, or in full text that are integrated into search and discovery interfaces. Such tools are embedded in item records, available via openURL gateways, or available using plugins/widgets that connect users from resources discovered on the open web to discovery and resource sharing services at their affiliated library. The LibX toolbar is an example of an open source plugin that supports a direct connection between discovery and immediate delivery by retrieving appropriate accessible copy via a “Magic Button” (Bailey and Back, 2008; Puckett, 2010).

There are new challenges in meeting the demands of increasing volume driven by new discovery platforms. In addition to ensuring adequate staffing levels, equipment, and systems there are challenges in fulfilling requests for new and rare formats. How to share e-books has emerged as a focus for both the resource sharing and collection development communities as publishing models continue to restrict sharing (Breeding, 2013b). Special formats such as media and microforms remain difficult to borrow, and as users discover more items from special collections, libraries are pushed to consider ways to provide access. HaithTrust presents challenges related of intellectual property rights which effects access. However, solutions to these challenges may be as simple as drawing attention to policies which may have unnecessary restrictions on borrowing particular material types. As the result of a study conducted among CIC libraries about the challenges of high volume interlibrary loan, some libraries began lending AV materials or increased the amount of pages they were willing to photocopy to supply loan, some libraries began lending AV materials or increased

Controlling costs associated with the delivery of physical items remains a priority given sustained if not increasing circulation rates and the investment in the discovery systems that bring print collections together via one search. Many library consortia or state library agencies have long managed and/or funded courier delivery services to help reduce the cost of delivery of materials. In Colorado the Colorado Library Consortium (CLiC), which manages the statewide courier, expanded this idea even further. CLiC initiated an agreement that connected the couriers in Colorado, Kansas, and Missouri to form a service called COKAMO which was designed to reduce the cost of out-of-state borrowing. A library participating in the courier in their home state can send and return materials to libraries participating in any of the three state/regional couriers. During the first year of service, COKAMO saved libraries an estimated $215,000 in postage for transporting 57,990 items for out-of-state borrowing. This calculation was based on an average USPS Media Mail cost of $4.00 per piece. A total estimated cost for USPS of $231,960 was contrasted with the COKAMO cost of $16,672. Additional benefits included a generally faster turnaround time and a low percentage of lost or damaged materials (below 1 percent). The significant cost reduction allowed at least one large public library to increase the number of out-of-state loans they were willing to provide, which had previously been severely restricted due to budget constraints (Horton et al., 2010).

Copyright law, intellectual property laws, and license terms can also limit the sharing of information. However, creative solutions can still be developed that are both within the law, and allow libraries to provide excellent and proactive service. For instance, the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries (Alliance) licensed Oxford Scholarship Online content for nine academic libraries and as part of that license was able to negotiate a contract that allows any public library or community college in Colorado or Wyoming to have free access as well (Lamborn and Machovec, 2013). In another example, since the European copyright act does not allow libraries to physically deliver electronic copies to the patron, the Bavarian State Library (OCLC symbol GEBAY) worked with ImageWare to find a creative solution. They developed the MyBib eLL视野 platform for interlibrary loan requests, which requires that documents be saved on the lending library’s server. This enables the borrowing library to print a single copy of a requested document, while at the same time adhering to the European copyright act[4].

Best practices

Traditional interlending – the sharing of loans and copies, of print and now digital information between libraries – remains essential for library patrons who need information that has not been or cannot be digitized (generally because of copyright and other intellectual property laws) and that is not owned by their local library. However, this traditional function is now performed more efficiently and effectively than ever due to new technologies such as electronic transmission and the development and sharing of best practices.

Best practices can take different forms in name and function. Benchmarks, guidelines, standards, and checklists are all used to describe the practice of agreeing to common values and protocols for sharing. All forms of best practices can help both new and seasoned staff to evaluate their own units and offer the most relevant and useful services to meet their users’ needs. Since interlending is not a prominent subject in the curricula of library education programs and many people do not enjoy the benefit of learning from predecessors, new ILL staff can use these tools to learn just what their library can and should be doing and more seasoned professionals can stay current with the latest trends in sharing and the protocols that help guide sharing among partner libraries. Such guidelines are generally not radical or controversial, but since not all patron communities have the same needs, some may not be equally applicable to all libraries. They should, nonetheless, challenge all libraries to offer the highest quality of services.

For instance, interlending specialists today recognize that not all information is available from other library partners. In order to access requested information they may have to purchase it directly from publishers or booksellers, make direct requests to authors, or search for Open Access material online. Best practices also include the responsibility that a borrowing library has to the lending library for print material from the time it leaves the lender to the time it returns[5]. Libraries that want to borrow information should also be willing to lend at the lowest cost and with the quickest turnaround time as well as be willing to make their policies as open as possible to facilitate lending to libraries outside of their normal environment.
Libraries should use technology whenever possible and be willing to go beyond their local, regional, and even national partners when necessary (Posner, 2013).

The resource sharing community continues to be actively engaged in developing best practices. Sources of best practices include the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) “Guidelines for best practice in interlibrary loan and document delivery”[6], the UK Forum for Interlending and Information Delivery “Best practices guidelines”[7], the American Library Association’s “Interlibrary loan code for the US”[8] as well as their RUSA STARS online ILL course[9], and the IDS Project Workbook[10].

Another source of best practices is the Rethinking Resource Sharing STAR Checklist which focuses on the Rethinking Resource Sharing Manifesto for making interlending easier and more efficient for library users and partners[11]. In addition to providing a selection of policies/practices for libraries to strive for, data from libraries which have used the checklist reflect interesting trends in how the roles of resource sharing practitioners are changing and adapting to new challenges in the current landscape. For instance, data show that it is common to find resource sharing practitioners with knowledge of the sharing permissions for locally held electronic resources (88 percent indicated knowledge) and involvement with license negotiations for new resources (63 percent indicated having input) (Simpson, 2012). Nearly half of respondents work at libraries that provide and actively promote tools to connect users from the open web to library services, namely discovery options and interlibrary loan. These data reflect the interconnectivity of discovery via library services and the open web as well as the importance of, and increase in, resource sharing services. They point to the challenges posed by license restrictions and emerging formats and the role resource sharing and resource sharing practitioners play in addressing them. Overall it is clear that the roles of resource sharing practitioners have broadened as resource sharing increasingly integrates with other library units and workflows.

Collaborative models

Interlending and resource sharing are by their nature collaborative enterprises. The closer that libraries and librarians work together, the more they can accomplish on behalf of their communities. There are many examples of collaborative models that improve interlending and many that expand the concept of resource sharing around the globe.

In Scandinavian libraries, for example, there is no charge for the sharing of returnable material. Scandinavian libraries have also connected their library courier systems for more efficient physical delivery. This means that a Danish library can send a book to any library in Norway or Sweden for less than one dollar US (which is the same price as within Denmark) even though the distance between a library in southern Denmark and a library in northern Norway is more than 1,200 miles (Erlandsen, 2012).

As mentioned previously, the Committee on Institutional Cooperation and the Center for Research Libraries, with combined holdings of over 100 million books, have reached new levels of collaboration around services, workflows, and technology with the UBorrow system and additional initiatives. Via UBorrow, items are delivered with speed due to the significant commitments made by each institution to provide comprehensive and timely service, including expedited delivery service. In addition, CIC has created a task force of CIC ILL librarians, collection development officers, and an electronic resources officer in order to identify a publisher willing to work with the CIC to develop a new model for ILL for e-books that will be beneficial to both libraries and publishers[12].

The Center for Research Libraries, with southern Denmark and a library in northern Norway is more can send a book to any library in Norway or Sweden for less for the sharing of returnable material. Scandinavian libraries expand the concept of resource sharing around the globe. collaborative models that improve interlending and many that behalf of their communities. There are many examples of librarians work together, the more they can accomplish on

Common to find resource sharing practitioners with knowledge of the sharing permissions for locally held electronic resources (88 percent indicated knowledge) and involvement with license negotiations for new resources (63 percent indicated having input) (Simpson, 2012). Nearly half of respondents work at libraries that provide and actively promote tools to connect users from the open web to library services, namely discovery options and interlibrary loan. These data reflect the interconnectivity of discovery via library services and the open web as well as the importance of, and increase in, resource sharing services. They point to the challenges posed by license restrictions and emerging formats and the role resource sharing and resource sharing practitioners play in addressing them. Overall it is clear that the roles of resource sharing practitioners have broadened as resource sharing increasingly integrates with other library units and workflows.

Collaborative models

Interlending and resource sharing are by their nature collaborative enterprises. The closer that libraries and librarians work together, the more they can accomplish on behalf of their communities. There are many examples of collaborative models that improve interlending and many that expand the concept of resource sharing around the globe.

In Scandinavian libraries, for example, there is no charge for the sharing of returnable material. Scandinavian libraries have also connected their library courier systems for more efficient physical delivery. This means that a Danish library can send a book to any library in Norway or Sweden for less than one dollar US (which is the same price as within Denmark) even though the distance between a library in southern Denmark and a library in northern Norway is more than 1,200 miles (Erlandsen, 2012).

As mentioned previously, the Committee on Institutional Cooperation and the Center for Research Libraries, with combined holdings of over 100 million books, have reached new levels of collaboration around services, workflows, and technology with the UBorrow system and additional initiatives. Via UBorrow, items are delivered with speed due to the significant commitments made by each institution to provide comprehensive and timely service, including expedited delivery service. In addition, CIC has created a task force of CIC ILL librarians, collection development officers, and an electronic resources officer in order to identify a publisher willing to work with the CIC to develop a new model for ILL for e-books that will be beneficial to both libraries and publishers[12].

The Center for Research Libraries, with southern Denmark and a library in northern Norway is more can send a book to any library in Norway or Sweden for less for the sharing of returnable material. Scandinavian libraries expand the concept of resource sharing around the globe. collaborative models that improve interlending and many that behalf of their communities. There are many examples of librarians work together, the more they can accomplish on

2CUL is a collaboration between two large US academic libraries, Columbia University and Cornell University. They are creating a partnership that aims to broadly integrate resources, collections, services, and expertise between the two organizations. This model goes beyond traditional sharing of expertise and materials. It aspires to merge operations of two distinct institutions to reduce costs significantly so that resources can be redirected to meet emerging needs. James Neal, Vice President for Information Services and University Librarian at Columbia University, has referred to ambitious projects like these as “radical collaboration”[17]. Successful collaborations have developed that involve not just libraries, but also nonprofit organizations and commercial entities. Ingram has developed partnerships with organizations like OCLC and CISTI to re-envision what “interlibrary loan” means in an e-book environment. A selection of e-books offered through their MyiLibrary
platform has been made available for short-term e-book loan access through OCLC, a variation on a project they undertook earlier with CISTI (Levine-Clark, 2011; Woods and Ireland, 2008).

Early shared print repositories focused on reducing the space demanded by rapidly growing print journal collections, particularly as those same publications became available in electronic form. The trend has shifted to examining true needs for printed monographs. Library consortia use data harvested from circulation and holdings records to determine overlap in collections and usage patterns and estimate the true number of copies needed to support library users across the organizations. One such project, the Maine Shared Collection Strategy, has been undertaken by eight of Maine’s largest public and academic libraries; it features shared management and archiving of print collections. This collaboration ensures that users have access to materials via resource sharing, but at the same time insures that libraries’ financial and physical plant resources are used wisely (Kelley, 2013).

Of the many examples of collaborations that exist, those that can be replicated and expanded offer the most possibility. However, any group of libraries and any library of any size can benefit from joining consortia and connecting with other library resource sharing specialists. As seen in Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia, and the US, cooperation on a massive scale to expand discovery and facilitate interlending is opening new library collections to users. Leveraging collective knowledge is critical for various library consortia to continue serving their communities, and the IDS Project and 2CUL represent a significant new direction for what resource sharing can be. Collaborative development projects around key systems and technologies are helping practitioners in IDS Project libraries gain efficiencies and improve the user experience. Shared strategies, expertise, and staff in collection building, metadata creation, and other services allow 2CUL libraries to innovate in organizational design, discover efficiencies, and find new opportunities to serve their research communities.

Conclusion

Discovery systems, best practices, and new collaborative partnerships are all logical ways to improve services, but they are not inevitable. Indeed, they require concerted time, budgetary support, and effort to build and maintain.

It is true that ever easier online discovery and free open access publishing should make the sharing of information increasingly seamless in the near future. However, interlibrary loan services will be necessary for the delivery of print items still under copyright protection and that have not yet been or cannot yet be digitized. More libraries, meanwhile, may decrease their local print holdings and instead join regional print depositories, where more material can be efficiently managed, stored, preserved, jointly collected, and shared.

With the existence of both print and digital information, librarians must advocate for liberal guidelines and non-restrictive license language so that they can share what they have purchased. Particularly for education and research, this is essential in order to advance the collective good. Librarians also need to plan for preservation of information. New models, such as direct purchasing of individual articles from publisher websites or licensing access to articles does help to facilitate access, but this does not ensure either the preservation of information for future use, or for the sharing of information through interlending.

In conclusion, there is much interesting and important work to do. Librarians must rethink current policies, procedures, and practices, advocate for creative resource sharing through domestic and international library associations, educate themselves as to best practices, and partner with other libraries. Only by doing all of this can librarians advance and preserve information access for current and future generations of students, scholars, world citizens, and lifelong learners.

Notes


2 Information on the Boston Library Consortium’s implementation of WorldCat Local is available on the BLC website: www.blc.org/services/resource-sharing.

3 Information on the joint CIC and CRL reciprocal borrowing project is available on the CIC website: www.cic.net/projects/library/reciprocal-borrowing/uborrow.

4 Detailed instructions for using MyBib eL® are available on the OCLC website: http://oclc.org/content/dam/support/resource-sharing/documentation/docsuppliers/MyBibcL_HowTo.pdf.

5 The ALA RUSA Interlibrary Loan Code for the United States documents these and many other best practices, www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/interlibrary.


9 Interlibrary Loan 101, sponsored by the ALA RUSA STARS section, provides an introduction to best practices and protocols at: www.ala.org/rusa/development/interlibraryloan.


11 The Rethinking Resource Sharing Initiative is an ad hoc group that advocates for a complete rethink of the way libraries conduct resource sharing in the context of the global internet revolution and all of the developments that have arisen from that. Several documents are available on their website, including the STAR Checklist http://rethinkingresourcesharing.org/?page_id=23 and their Manifesto http://rethinkingresourcesharing.org/?page_id=27.

11
12 Information on the joint CIC and CRL reciprocal borrowing project is available on the CIC website: www.cic.net/projects/library/reciprocal-borrowing/uborrow.

13 GWLA’s website can be found at: www.gwla.org.

14 Details about Maryland’s Marina system can be found at the Sailor website: www.sailor.lib.md.us/services/marina/default.aspx?id = 56300.

15 The Occam’s Reader website can be found at: http://occamsreader.org/.

16 Information on each IDS Project initiative is available on its website: http://idsproject.org/.

17 Information on the 2CUL project is available on its website: http://2cul.org/.

References


Corresponding author

Evan Simpson can be contacted at: evan.simpson@tufts.edu