International borrowing: roads less traveled

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Abstract
Purpose – This paper aims to highlight the characteristics of the bibliographic discovery and delivery processes that can either facilitate or impede attempts to borrow materials from overseas libraries. The experiences described represent the perspective of a typical Interlibrary Loan (ILL) practitioner in the USA.

Design/methodology/approach – The author draws on his own personal experience with interlibrary borrowing at a major private university research library in the USA.

Findings – From a US perspective, the ideal means of obtaining materials from overseas libraries is to locate a potential supplier in Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) WorldCat and use the same system to manage the entire ILL request process. Large union catalogs such as the Karlsruhe Virtual Catalogue are suitable alternatives, as are services specializing in publications from certain countries or regions such as the East Asian Gateway Service or the Global ILL Framework (GIF). The least desirable option is to search and request materials directly through an individual library’s Web site, although the experience can be greatly enhanced through the use of well-designed English language interfaces, easy payment options such as International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) vouchers or credit cards and electronic delivery whenever possible.

Originality/value – This article would be of value for any ILL practitioners in the USA who are involved in borrowing or would like to borrow materials from overseas libraries.

Keywords Document delivery, International ILL, OCLC, Karlsruhe Virtual Catalogue, National libraries, East Asian Gateway Service, Global ILL Framework (GIF)

Paper type Case study

Introduction

“Global resource sharing is an idea whose time has come” (Frederiksen et al., 2012), and a variety of factors have contributed to the trend. A plethora of union catalogs and readily accessible verification tools, the ease of direct Interlibrary Loan (ILL) requesting, system interoperability, electronic delivery of journal articles and, in some cases, ebooks, and convenient payment methods have all played a role in the growth and convenience of international ILL. The most important of these factors, however, is the abundance of excellent discovery tools, which allow the ILL practitioner to search the globe with relative ease for the book or article a patron needs.

WorldCat, which enjoys an almost universal market share among US libraries, provides access to the holdings of thousands of libraries worldwide, facilitates electronic requesting and document delivery between member libraries and simplifies payment for services using its electronic ILL Fee Management (IFM) service. It’s no wonder, therefore, that US libraries consider Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) to be their system of choice for both domestic and international ILL requesting. The Karlsruhe Virtual Catalogue (KVK) provides similar services on a smaller scale. There is considerable overlap between WorldCat and the KVK; however, the latter is particularly helpful with regard to European libraries, who do not list their holdings in WorldCat and do not use OCLC for interlibrary loan. The KVK also allows the requester to include in the search such book dealers as Amazon.de and Abebooks.de. In addition to the mega-catalogs, Web sites like ShareILL or search engines like Google contribute toward allowing the patron or librarian to zero in on, for example, the online catalog of the Jagiellonian library in Cracow, Poland.

For the ILL practitioner, it is a godsend to be able to determine what library or libraries hold that obscure Japanese serial or that elusive Russian treatise that a patron needs. On the other hand, that is only half the battle: “ease of discovery belies the difficulty of delivery” (Atkins, 2010). From the point of view of many librarians, certainly from that of a librarian in the USA, the optimal situation is to find the desired bibliographic record on WorldCat with library holders who supply via OCLC. This scenario insures that the “ease of discovery” is linked to a simple way to initiate ILL requests and to pay any charges that are involved.

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International ILL through WorldCat

The poster child for OCLC libraries that make international ILL easy for the practitioner is the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, or Bavarian State Library. The Bayerische Staatsbibliothek is an outstanding library of nearly 10 million volumes, and the decision was made to play a more active role in international sharing. In 2007, it added approximately seven million records to WorldCat, and in March 2009, it became an OCLC supplier using the symbol GEBAY. Between March and December 2009, 16,000 international requests were received from 25 different countries (OCLC, 2010). I can personally attest to the importance of the Bavarian State Library to the University of Notre Dame. Since it became a supplier on OCLC, we have borrowed more from them than from any other library abroad – more even than from the British Library with whom we have a longstanding account. Of course, how much one borrows and from whom is relative; however, the fact that over the past few years, we have borrowed nearly 400 times from the Bavarian State Library speaks volumes (no pun intended).

Of course, GEBAY and BRI, the Bavarian State Library and the British Library respectively, are hardly the only WorldCat or OCLC libraries that make international ILL easy. There are other such suppliers in Germany and Great Britain. Countries like Denmark have ten such libraries, led by the Royal Library in Copenhagen (Brink and Andersen, 2010). Moreover, as the name WorldCat implies, these libraries are all over the globe, from the University of South Africa to the National Library of Australia and from Waseda University in Tokyo to the National Library of China and Tsinghua University in Beijing. In 2012, there were >200 libraries in 30 countries that have provided International ILL through OCLC and have expedited that service through IFM (information supplied in a personal e-mail from Tony Melvyn, Product Services Consultant, OCLC).

When one cannot make an interlibrary loan request through OCLC, then one must visit the Web site of the library that owns the material. The discovery tools may be the same. For example, one may find the bibliographic record of the needed item in WorldCat; however, the symbol of the holding library is in lowercase. Pretty much the same situation prevails if one finds a good bibliographic record in the KVK – that is, having found a holder, one must go to the Web to find out how to affect a loan or a photocopy.

Library to library

In any case, visiting another library’s Web site to determine how to initiate an interlibrary loan is always an adventure. Web sites vary a great deal; the spectrum runs from interfaces that are reasonably transparent and easy to use to those which are fiendishly difficult. One example of a good library Web site and a good library for international ILL transactions is that of the National Library of Spain, the Biblioteca Nacional de España[1]. The Web page is all very intuitive; converting the Spanish to English is fairly obvious. With a glance over the options, “services” and “interlibrary loan” are easy to find on uncluttered pages. First-time users need to register; once registered, they are provided a username and password. Upon login, there is another simple set of options:

- submit a new request;
- check the progress of your ILL requests; and
- change your password.

If one goes directly to the National Library of Spain’s general catalog and finds the bibliographic record of the needed item, it is only a matter of clicking on “Prestamo Interbibliotecario”, or “Interlibrary Loan” if using the English interface, and after logging in, the ILL form appears with certain key fields (author, title and year of publication) already populated. This slick Web site did not occur by happenstance. “Towards the end of 2007 the ILL Service [at the BNE] began a series of improvements focused on customers” (Albelda and Abella, 2010). The national library’s strategic plan emphasized interlibrary loan, and the ILL unit became “committed to offering a better service both to end users and universities and research centres” (Albelda and Abella, 2010). There is an emphasis on electronic delivery and payment for international borrowers is with International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) vouchers.

Another library Web site an ILL practitioner may have reason to use is that of the National Library of Russia. Like the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, the Web site of the NLR in St. Petersburg is easy to convert to English, and it is equally easy to find one’s way to “services” and to “electronic delivery” and “interlibrary loan”. With regard to scans or photocopies, one must register with electronic delivery and prepay with a credit card or through a bank transfer; IFLA vouchers may be used to pay for a loan. Thus far, the resemblance to the National Library of Spain is fairly close, but the resemblance ends here. The catalog is more difficult to use – there is a general catalog of scanned cards that can be searched only by main entry, author or title and a range of more specific catalogs that can be searched more flexibly through a variety of accession points. The problem is that the average ILL practitioner accustomed to WorldCat or to a simple Google-type search box may throw up his or her hands in despair on pondering such catalogs as:

- publications in Foreign Languages (1994-2004);
- publications in Yiddish;
- publications in Russian (1708-1926, 1976-Present);
- books in Armenian (1623-2006); or
- books in Georgian (1629-2006).

And this is just the beginning; we have not yet considered serials, newspapers, music, maps, etc. More often than not, one must key in search terms in Cyrillic, and sometimes the interface provides a virtual keyboard, sometimes not. Similarly, on drilling down into the Web site, at times the option of an English interface is available, and at other times it is not. Turnaround time could be better; for example, an article request goes through several stages: research, cost estimate, awaiting client acknowledgement, awaiting prepayment and, finally, delivery. On occasion, payment can be challenging; one may need to set up an account with assist.ru, a kind of Russian PayPal, to use a credit card. Delivery varies – on occasion scanned articles must be retrieved from a server; at other times, they are received as an e-mail attachment. In short, needed materials are often available, but there are challenges that require sufficient time and patience to get over the hurdles and work around the obstacles.
Another library Web site to consider is that of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF). I have been fortunate over the years to have received a great deal of help from the BnF in Paris. I have received reproductions of 18th century novels, difficult-to-find musical scores, Vietnamese documents and many more items; however, I must also say that I struggle mightily when I go to the library’s Web site. An English interface is available, but this English interface is only helpful for introducing the library and its services. Of course, one can use Web translation tools, but at the sacrifice of expert and fluid translation for a clumsy, word-for-word rendition. When visiting the “catalogue général”, the ideal situation is to have the help of a French-speaking colleague to assist with phrases like “recherché” for “search” and “acheter une reproduction” for “buy a reproduction”.

“Acheter une reproduction” is a new addition to the catalogue. In the past, one would e-mail reproduction@bnf.fr with an explanation of what was needed. Now, when searching the catalog général, one can click on “buy a reproduction” to initiate a request. However, clicking on “acheter une reproduction” and proceeding from “panier” (basket) to “livraison” (delivery) to “récapitulatif” (summary) to “règlement” (payment) has been a considerable challenge for me. Recently, while purchasing reproductions of several 18th century music scores, when I clicked on “continue” to go from Step 1 to 2, from “panier” to “livraison”, I received an error message because I did not check the box indicating that I accepted the BnF’s terms and conditions, and when I tried to go back to the previous screen to correct my omission, the computer would not allow me to do so. I had to close out my order and go back to the catalog général and begin the whole process again. It seems this situation can occur for various reasons; for example, there is a box to indicate the pages to be copied or scanned. Because in the case described above, I was ordering very short musical scores (4 pages, 12 pages) that were out of copyright, I wanted to indicate “all”, but the rather unforgiving form would not accept “all”, and I received an error message. Again, I could not retrace my steps, but rather had to close out and go back to the catalog and begin again. Finally, after working through the steps and having my credit card information accepted, I was surprised the next day to receive an e-mail from the Bibliothèque Nationale with an attached form. The form was for the credit card information which I had already submitted! Despite all of my grappling with the online form, I had to fax my credit card information.

In short, it is a difficult Web site to navigate. Of course, I readily admit that my language skills and computer expertise are not the greatest; nevertheless, considering my three examples of the Web sites of the national libraries of Spain, Russia and France, I would have to say that of the BnF is the most challenging.

Bear in mind that everything is relative. Visiting a Web site once every few months, one never develops a good feel for where all the important links are located and how to find what one needs. Moreover, Web sites are always changing. How often do you go to your own library’s Web page and wonder where the Web designers have buried that list of subject specialists which you used to find so easily? Language skills vary; even if one can convert some pages to English, chances are there are other places which must be dealt with in the original language. Even the browser one uses will have an effect on one’s experience when exploring another library’s Web interface.

**Gateways and consortia**

Depending on the nature of the request, when there is no OCLC supplier, it is sometimes possible to avoid the problems occasionally encountered when going directly to another library’s Web page. For example, an ILL practitioner with a request for an article in Chinese which cannot be found through any WorldCat or OCLC supplier could go to the East Asian Gateway Service, run by the University of Pittsburgh[2]. The service was established by a grant from the US Federal Institute of Museum and Library Services and now is supported by the University of Pittsburgh Library System. The gateway has a partnership with 16 academic and research libraries in the People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. The request form is simple and easy to use. If a serial cannot be found in a North American library, submit the form to the East Asian Gateway Service and staff there will search the holdings of such libraries as Beijing Daxue, Fudan Daxue, Shanghai Jiaotong Daxue, Sichuan Daxue and others. One of the added bonuses of this service is that it is free for individual researchers and for non-profit organizations. Articles are delivered electronically, and the turnaround time is relatively good, approximately a week.

By the same token, a practitioner with a request for a Japanese book or article which has no OCLC or WorldCat suppliers could take advantage of the GIF program, a service of the North American Coordinating Council on Japanese Library Resources (NCC)[3]. The NCC, which was created in 1991 by funders who recognized the growing need to support Japanese studies, has various components from collection development to instruction. One of the components is access, and to facilitate access the Global ILL Framework was begun in 2002. To use GIF, one needs to register and become a member, but that is a relatively simple procedure and a registration form can be found on the NCC GIF Web site. Registration allows ILL staff to submit requests to Japanese libraries which are normally outside the scope of OCLC WorldCat and, of course, registrants are obliged to supply articles to GIF member libraries in Japan – resource sharing is a matter of cooperation, after all. With regard to books, both North American and Japanese libraries have the option on the registration form to say yes or no to the lending of books. Charging is up to the library partners; they can work out reciprocal agreements or arrange the usual fees for international ILL and, thankfully, charges are done through IFM, so there are no problems with currency conversion or invoices. The mission of GIF is to support access to Japanese materials through ILL and document delivery (Paulus, 2013) and ILL staff at any academic library which supports programs in Japanese language and literature would be wise to register.

For the most part, Japanese libraries use CiNii Books as their union catalog and National Center for Science Information Systems (NACSIS)-ILL as the interface for initiating ILL requests for the records in that catalog. This catalog and interface, created by the National Institute of...
Informatics (NII), is equivalent to WorldCat, the union catalog that most North American libraries use, and to OCLC ILL, the prevailing interface. The Global ILL Framework, or GIFF, facilitates the way these two different systems work together, using the ISO ILL standard. Perhaps the best way to illustrate is to use a concrete example or two. One of our faculty members at Notre Dame needed several articles that appeared in the 1950s in the Japanese serials Kingu and Shukan shincho. A number of North American libraries have runs of these serials; however, none of them had the years I needed. So the next step, to use GIFF, was to go to the Japanese catalog CiNii Books and see who had what I needed. One can find a link to CiNii books on the GIF homepage or simply go directly to the CiNii Books online catalog[4]. Use the “advanced search” to take advantage of plenty of options, such as searching the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) number or, if an ISSN is not available, cut and paste the Japanese title from a WorldCat record after clicking on “Show non-Roman characters” or use a transliteration.

After finding a Japanese bibliographic record with a list of library holders, the default is for “any libraries”; North American requesters will want to go to the drop-down menu and choose “Available via Japan and USA/Canada ILL” – these will be the GIF libraries. In the case of my example of articles from the 1950s from the Japanese serials Kingu and Shukan shincho, Kansai University Library in Osaka appeared to have what I needed. Clicking on Kansai provides such details as fax numbers, charge policy and OCLC symbol. The latter is what I was most interested in; the symbol for Kansai University Library is YH@. This is all the information I really needed; now I could go to my ILL requests, find the OCLC WorldCat records for Kingu and Shukan shincho and, even though Kansai is not listed as a holder, I could put in their YH@ symbol and eventually get the articles through an OCLC ILL request.

If there is no record in OCLC WorldCat, the job is a little more difficult, but it is manageable enough. Upon finding the bibliographic record in CiNii Books, copy and paste the title, author and so forth into a blank OCLC ILL form. It is always wise to copy and paste the link of the record from the CiNii catalog into a borrowing note. At the time of this writing, there were 161 libraries in Japan participating in GIF, and 89 out of the 161 were willing to lend books (Paulus, 2013). To determine who will lend books, look closely at the information provided after clicking on the library holder in the CiNii catalog. In the information under the Japanese library, look for “loan period”, “loan renewal”, “loan charge”, etc.; if there is information provided, such as 28 days under loan period, you have found a lender, while N/A suggests that the library only scans articles. It is not a difficult system to use, although for the first attempt or two, it is great to have an East Asian librarian to help search the CiNii catalog, which initially can be a little intimidating. Ultimately, the “GIF program is an excellent example of interlibrary loan at its finest” (Paulus, 2013). As one satisfied participant in GIF has noted, it is as if the “door to a whole universe of knowledge and scholarship has been thrown wide open” (Jackson, 2003).

More challenging ILL scenarios

The last scenario to touch on is the situation when the library Web site does not readily yield any information on interlibrary loan. For example, I had occasion to need a couple of pages from a treatise published in Caracas, Venezuela. I was unable to find any holders except for the National Library of Venezuela, so I consulted the library’s Web site[5]. This is a Spanish-only Web site; however, after consulting with the Latin American Studies librarian at Notre Dame and after using the Web translation tools, I settled on “Reproducción”, where I found a form and an e-mail address: referencia@bmv.gob.ve. But after filling out the form and sending the e-mail, I received no response. I searched the Web site for another promising e-mail address, sent another e-mail, but once again with no success.

I had a somewhat similar experience when a patron submitted a request for a 17th century treatise entitled Vocabulario de Antonio. The only holder I was able to find was the National Library of Mexico. Of course, I knew that our only hope was a scan of this treatise, so I accordingly went to the library’s Web site[6]. This is also a Spanish-only Web site, but once again it is simple enough to explore the Web page with the help of the Web translation tools or the help of a Spanish-speaking colleague. I found nothing specific on interlibrary loan, but the section entitled “Reprografía”, or reproductions, looked promising. On closer inspection, I was unable to find a way to submit a request. It appeared to me that one had to be physically present to ask for a scan or copy. Finally, I submitted a question by e-mail to “referencia”, and about a week later I received a reply. The reply suggested that my request was feasible; however, the process was an involved one. I needed to write a letter to the Coordinator of the National Library of Mexico, specifying the nature of the research, a full reference to the material requested, the use that would be made of the reprographics and the digital format required, all of which needed to be on official letterhead stationary. I also needed a commitment letter on the part of the department supporting the research as well as a photocopy of official identification of the patron (a passport in the case of foreign researchers), once again on official letterhead stationary. After these letters were submitted, I would get an invoice, as well as the name of the bank and the number of the bank account in which the payment was to be deposited. Finally, when payment was made, I would need to e-mail the administrative department of the national library, attaching a scan of the proof of payment, and only then would digitization begin. I discussed this situation with the graduate student patron and, ultimately, we decided to do without Vocabulario de Antonio.

I have taken an informal poll of my interlibrary loan colleagues, and our Latin American subject specialist at Notre Dame conducted a similar poll of bibliographers around the country, and I have come to the conclusion that my experience is not unique. My conclusions are as follows: it is often difficult to find an interlibrary loan contact on many of these Web pages, and e-mail requests to “referencia” or “reproducción” sometimes go unanswered. It may be better to deal with academic libraries rather than national libraries, and by all means use a trackable and
insured method of shipping when lending or returning a title you were fortunate enough to borrow. Another recommendation is not to forget or discount such helpful Web sites as the Digital Librarian’s guide to Latin American Resources[7], and the union catalog of Latin American digital repositories[8].

Conclusions

In conclusion, international interlibrary loan is improving, but there is still a long way to go before true global resource sharing is realized. Everyone of us can contribute to this improvement. If we are not involved in organized efforts on digitization projects or such problematic issues as copyright, we can at least support as liberal an international ILL policy as possible in our own library. And if we are not in a position to weigh in on the formulation of policy, we can always answer that e-mail from a library abroad as promptly and as generously as possible.

Notes

1 See www.bne.es/ for more information about the Biblioteca Nacional de España/National Library of Spain.
2 Additional information about the University of Pittsburgh East Asian Gateway Service can be found at www.library.pitt.edu/eal-gateway-service#about
3 The North American Coordinating Council on Japanese Library Resources (NCC) main Web site can be found at http://guides.nccjapan.org/homepage. Details about the NCC’s Global Interlibrary Loan Framework and a registration form are available at http://guides.nccjapan.org/content.php?pid/H11005190477&sid/H110051601139
4 The CiNii Books online catalog is at http://ci.nii.ac.jp/books/?l=en
5 The National Library of Venezuela online catalog can be found at www.bnv.gob.ve/consul_linea_bd.php?sw=5&f=31
6 The National Library of Mexico Web site is at http://bnm.unam.mx/
7 The Digital Librarian: A Librarian’s Choice of the Best of the Web is available at www.digital-librarian.com/latinamerican.html
8 Red de Repositorios Latinoamericanos is at http://repositorioslatinoamericanos.uchile.cl/

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