

## **Development Strategies Of Electronic Information Access Services In The Multimedia Room**

*Carmen CRIȘAN*

*Librarian*

*“Lucian Blaga” Central University Library*

### **I. A concise presentation of the Multimedia Room**

The Multimedia Room opened in April 2000, following certain arrangements of the exhibition hall on the first floor of our library. Taking into account the potential of the library at that moment, and the overall situation of similar libraries in the country, one may affirm that the creation of the Multimedia Room truly was a major achievement. The creation of this room aimed to offer new and attractive services for the users, such as Internet access, use of online databases, or the consulting of the CD collection.

The opening of the Multimedia Room, and its endowment with 15 Hewlett Packard computers imposed as a first technical measure the solution of a quality Internet connection. Our library had at that moment an Internet connection on the national education network Ro Edu Net. The intensive traffic on this network no longer allowed access to online electronic information. It would have taken up too much time to download an article from the database. Back then, our library had a subscription to the **Academic Dialog** database, one of the most important databases available.

The “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library was among the first ones in Romania to have a subscription to an online database beginning with 1996. This database was consulted at that time in the Catalogue Room, on a single computer.

Now, looking back, based on the information gathered in years about these databases, we might state that it was perhaps unreasonable to acquire such a database, fairly expensive, without having an adequate Internet connection. Our desire to offer as much new information as possible to the users, and to catch up with the Western libraries we had seen, outweighed our actual practicability.

It is now that we realize the importance, in elaborating the development strategies of these kinds of services of access to electronic information, of a most coherent evaluation of all the aspects connected to budget, of as many offers on the electronic market as possible, and, last

but not least, of the technical conditions we dispose of. The problem of Internet connection has been solved, our library having a yearly subscription to an Internet service supplier. Since possessing a quality Internet connection, we tried to select the most appropriate databases, which covered all fields and were reasonably priced, matching the current budget for periodical subscriptions. This stage of analysis was more seriously executed in the latter case: offers were requested, and each database offered was tested for a month. With the collaboration of colleagues, specialists in different domains, searches were made in various fields, and the results were evaluated at the end. The evaluations were nonetheless empirical: a database cannot be assessed only based on 5-6 searches in a field. A much more thorough testing is required, and to obtain it, it would be optimal to have the full assistance of the university's scientific council.

The stage of assessment of a database, the choice of one or the other, is difficult, yet very important, and therefore needs to be well organized.

In the end, the **Info Trac (General Business File, Expanded Academic)** and **Engineering Village** databases were chosen. The license was paid for five stations. Info Trac is a database that covers almost all academic disciplines existing in the Babeş-Bolyai University, and gives access to articles from known scholarly periodicals (full text and abstracts).

At the end of the year 2000, this choice also proved not to be the most appropriate one. These collections had a high price, and the statistical analysis showed that they were insufficiently used. A license for 3 stations would have probably sufficed. We consider that, taking into account the novelty of this type of access to information, the users of our library are not familiar enough with the modern modalities to acquire it therefore they restrain from using the new methods of information. Bearing this in mind we gave special attention to user formation courses.

The Multimedia Room also offered the consultation, free of charge, of the **EBSCO** database (**Academic Search Elite, Business Source Premier, Newspaper Source Plus**). **EBSCO** is an impressive reference database, which offers substantial collections of full articles covering disciplines like political sciences, social sciences, humanities, public administration, education, history, economics, linguistics, literature and arts, but also engineering, communications, information science, and medical science as well.

On the basis of a common project of the Open Society Institute (OSI), member of the Soros Foundations Network and EIRO

Publishing, almost all Romanian libraries that had Internet connection benefited of access to the EBSCO database until August 2001. It was a most generous project, covering 39 countries, but unfortunately, Romania lost the necessary funds to extend the subscription.

In the year 2000, based on a common project of the United Nations Program for Development, Office of Romania, and of the United Nations Information Center in Bucharest, an *UNO Information Office* was created in the Multimedia Room of our library. There was a possibility to have online access to information, not only to the one available in the United Nations Library in Bucharest, but to the entire information system of the United Nations.

The Multimedia Room was also the place to consult the fairly modest CD collection: a few encyclopedias, language courses on CDs, dictionaries and magazines. I mention here that the entire material on CD and DVD support acquired by the library is located in the Multimedia Room, regardless of its content.

This fact nevertheless raises a problem: what will happen to the Reference Room, for instance? What about the Periodicals Room? Will these rooms have any use any more? It is well known that lately most reference materials (dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc.) are published in electronic form, and if this material goes to the Multimedia Room, the Reference Room remains uncovered. The prefiguring of clear directions in this respect is a problem as well. It would be a bizarre situation, to find the Encyclopedia Britannica in print format up to 1997 in the Reference Room, and the 1998 volume on CD in the Multimedia Room.

In the year 2000 our library signed a license contract with **Elsevier Publishing** for the first time and profited of access, for a year, to 12 full text electronic journals amounting to 41.713 USD, from the fields of biology, geography, geology, mathematics, pedagogy, and literature, as follows:

**Biochimica et Biophysica Acta. Bioenergetics**  
**Biochimica et Biophysica Acta. Biomembranes**  
**Cognition**  
**Cognitive Science**  
**Computers & Education**  
**Geoforum**  
**Geomorphology**  
**Journal of Magnetism and Magnetic Materials**  
**Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology**

**Poetics**  
**Political Geography**  
**Soil Biology & Biochemistry**

Free access to electronic versions is automatic with the usual subscription for the print versions of these periodicals, which can be consulted in the Periodicals Room. Access to the electronic version was controlled by the IP numbers of the computers, made known to our partners.

It was for the first time that we had the chance to understand what a license contract meant, how important it was to respect the terms of such a contract, and, what's more, how important it was for the supplier (publisher, firm, etc.) to control access for the periodicals that it possessed.

Besides the free access to the mentioned databases and the CD collection, the Multimedia Room offered paid access to the Internet on 10 more stations. Printing and scanning services were also paid for.

The **Document Delivery** service was also free of charge, but unfortunately, it was very slow in developing.

This was the situation of the Multimedia Room in 2000.

The principle of gratuity for scientific information services (databases and CDs) and collection of a fee for commercial services (Internet, email) still exists today. In the academic year 2002-2003, the Multimedia Room offered online access to the **Info Trac. Academic Search** database (this time the license being paid for only three workstations), to 10 full text electronic journals, to the United Nations database, the **EBSCO** database on DVD support, and, as a novelty, to the **JSTOR. Arts & Science Collection** database. The license for the JSTOR database was paid for two years (2003-2004) by the Faculty of History and Philosophy, and they would continue paying the maintenance fee for one more year.

The CD collection remained on the level it was in 2000; new CDs were not purchased because of financial reasons.

**II. Configuration of a new strategy: bibliographic databases, electronic journals, or CD (DVD) supported databases?**

In her article "Accessing Electronic Journals", Sarah Cline McKay highlights some problems that all libraries confront with at present, especially the specialized ones. She states:

“You’re a library professional providing information to your clients. You’ve decided it’s time to offer access to electronic journals. Where do you start? How do you know what titles to provide? What is required for your clients to find what they need? What’s the best way to gain access to the electronic articles? How much will it cost? These and other questions will need to be answered, whether you use an aggregator service or set up access to electronic journals yourself.”<sup>1</sup>

These and many more other questions we ask ourselves as well. In the future, we will try to analyze the most important problems these questions raise from our viewpoint, and this final analysis may serve in the evaluation of the different options that the market offers us in this field.

We consider to have answered the first question, that of the moment when a library decides to offer online access to electronic publications. The decision was made with the creation of this room in our library, or, experimentally, even somewhat earlier. At present, the question posing itself is the one whether we can still afford the subscriptions for these online databases. Would it not have been more suitable, considering the annual modifications in budget allocations, to purchase databases on CD (DVD) support? As I have said above, online access to a database requires as a first step technology, a quality Internet connection, and this always means supplementary costs. Will we still be able to afford it?

The advantage of bibliographic databases is the fact that they are updated on a periodic basis, and thus one can always reach the newest scientific information, which is a fact that should not be neglected. On the other hand, if in the future, the library will not be able to afford a subscription because of financial reasons, it will permanently lose access to the information of the preceding years, only acquired through virtual databases.

If databases were acquired in physical version, on CDs or DVD, there would still be an advantage, that, regardless of the fact that the library did not manage to continue subscribing to these databases, it would still have the data of the previous years stocked. This way it is faster to consult the databases, access does not depend any more on the capacity of the Internet connection. A disadvantage would be the fact that these collections are less frequently updated. This is, for instance, the case of the **EBSCO** database. Although the project could not be continued in an Internet system, we have received the DVD collection

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Cline McKay, “Accessing Electronic Journals” in *Mark Database*, vol. 22, Apr. 1999, p. 16

that contained the full text articles or abstracts existing in the online version for a certain period. The updating interval was of 3 months.

Here it is, then, perhaps the greatest dilemma of the moment, that of the type of electronic information to be acquired in the future.

The problem of database selection also remains on the agenda. There are databases that contain all the articles in full text. Such a database is the **JSTOR**. As a rule, the price of these kinds of databases is quite high. There are also databases that contain a part of the articles full text, and the other part in forms of abstracts. Such a database is the **Info Trac**.

It is a difficult task to compare the price of these collections, and a hard job to assess and choose the right offer, measured both in terms of content and of price. If one considers that the Elsevier Publisher offers free access to all their database of electronic journals, 1700 online periodicals, with all the abstracts, one might appreciate that Info Trac is quite expensive for what it offers. Therefore, we have to know exactly what we get, the percentage of full text information, and that of abstract versions. I only wish to underline the difficulty of the task to consider all aspects, to compare and to decide. In the end, the starting point in this analysis is still the budget at our disposal.

A database allows searches based on keywords and subjects, as well as the option of advanced search, an algorithm that combines more data on the searched subject. Usually bibliographic databases are joined by a search program, and this is one of their advantages. In this case, however, proficiency in using such a program is essential for the success in searching and the efficient use of the database. This task pertains to the librarian. The librarian has to know how to perform professional searches, using the Boolean operators.

Another advantage is the fact that the majority of database systems can produce reports, to see which fields and titles were most used, which articles were accessed, which types of searches were made, and many other kinds of statistics. This data is important as it assists one in taking the right decisions in order to efficiently use the budget allocated for these services.

Consequently, there is a possibility to access electronic information, whether from an organized bibliographic database, or through separate subscriptions for each electronic journal. In this case, access is done step by step, from title to year, volume, number, and finally article, lacking the possibility to search for keywords, or other criteria. This is the case of the electronic journals with license contracted by our library, also having

subscriptions to their printed version. The electronic journal is available in full text, but there is no specific search program to it.

The question asked in our situation is: what journal titles should we select so that we may cover all fields of research? And how much would the subscriptions cost only for the electronic versions?

It would probably be a good solution for a specialized library. A few representative journals could be selected to cover the field in question, and these could be subscribed to both electronically and in print.

For our library however, this solution seems to be out of the question on account of the problems it raises. First, due to the character of our library, a wide range of fields should be covered, even fields that do not have an electronic version of their journals. Second, not all electronic journals are available through one source of selling; it is difficult to contract licenses separately with each publisher on specific conditions of acquisition. Other publishers have created electronic versions of their publications, but they do not offer access to their servers; the users and libraries may access these only through specialized agencies. Others do not work with agencies, and subscribers have to contract them directly.

In such conditions, it is easy to imagine the situation, with so many license contracts, each with its own particularities, with a huge correspondence: an extremely complicated and hard-to-administrate working strategy. We had to make contracts directly with the publishers to have access to each subscribed electronic journal, although the printed versions were subscribed to through one single agency.

Paradoxical though it may seem, for us this could still be a solution in the future. Why am I saying this?

Carol Tenopir, in her article "The Complexity of Electronic Journals", says: "For now, only a small percentage of the total pool of scholarly journals is available electronically. These titles may not be as high or higher than print journals: and electronic- only versions may not be as rigorously referred. Print journals from the commercial publishers remain dominant"<sup>1</sup>. However, this situation was valid in 1997. Very soon scientific journals will increasingly be available in electronic format. I say this having in mind the fast growth of the web editions of different journals, recorded in the last years and emphasized in all the specialized materials. Doubtless, this is the new tendency in the world of information transmissions.

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Tenopir, "The Complexity of Electronic Journals" in *Mark Library Journal*, Vol. 22, Feb., 1997, p. 37.

As I have said, in the case of a small part of the journals subscribed we also have free access to their electronic versions. These journals are mostly distributed to the specialized branch libraries. Usually, a small additional sum of 1-2% over the subscription fee permits access to the web editions of these periodicals as well. I am convinced that this will be the future option. In fact, there have already been requests in this respect. The subscriptions will doubtlessly continue. We may foresee that specific budget will continue to be allocated for these scholarly journals. Thus, the Multimedia Room would permit access to the web editions of these journals. The only problem remains the possibility to order the electronic versions through one agency, since this would simplify the administration of the subscriptions and would reduce the costs and access problems. So, with one single password all subscribed journals could be accessed. All these electronic journals would be integrated into the OPAAC. Consequently, with just a small extra expense, access could be offered to electronic information as well.

There is also a possibility to pay only for the requested electronic information, that is, only for the articles consulted by the users. Some of the agencies have introduced among their services the option of "pay-per-view", allowing users (libraries, individuals) to pay from a previously established account only for what they consult, without needing to fully subscribe to the journal. This is a document delivery service. This variant has not yet been offered in our library.

In the same article, "The Complexity of Electronic Journals", Carol Tenopir states: "As serials budgets decline, the fastest-growing alternative is to obtain individual articles through interlibrary loan (ILL) or document delivery services."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this service should be the priority in our case.

Cooperatives represent the last strategic front in the electronic revolution. Libraries unite their forces and organize themselves in cooperatives in order to use more efficiently their financial resources. At present, a cooperative of the university libraries of Bucharest, Cluj, Iasi and Timișoara has been founded in Romania as well. We hope this formula will work efficiently in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Tenopir, op.cit.

### III. Licenses, user restrictions.

Who has access to electronic subscriptions of the institution? If the library offers access to a well-defined clientele, then these are the users who can practically access this electronic information. But what if the library has departments in different locations or it is situated in a student campus and it serves a larger public (students, faculty, staff)? Would the publishers allow access to every person in this field? Would everybody have this information at the residence or at the office, or the articles would have to be accessed only from the library's workstations? Are correspondence courses included in the license, as the right of the subscriber? What about neighboring libraries, or the ones connected by loan relations? If the library is being supported by a governmental corporation or agency, how many locations could be accessed? All these are possible situations.

All rights and restrictions of the library have to be stipulated in a document signed with each supplier individually. Some publishers require an official license contract, others a simple document which would describe the terms and conditions that govern the use of their publications. Some intermediary agencies will not sign the licenses in their own name, others (very few) are willing to assume all contract terms and take over the control of the access. Agencies may also assist the negotiation, if required, to best satisfy the needs of the institution.

We had to negotiate direct access ourselves with the publishers; the agency we worked with did not accept this role.

This year we have tried to give access to electronic information in the university as well. There were problems however, connected to technical aspects of the university network, to the proxy servers through which access is made. The publishers that we have signed contracts with ask numerous questions about the control of the access. The fact is, that everything stipulated in these licenses has to be respected by both us in the library, and by the university, and we, who sign the contracts, answer for the conditions of the licenses to be respected. It is a serious matter, and I do not know whether we are sufficiently prepared for it, both legally and technically. We have been warned that such databases are frequently stolen from all over the world, if not sufficiently protected.

The president of the JSTOR Company, Mr. Kevin Guthrie has indicated that he had been struggling with this alarming phenomenon. He says in his message that 51,000 articles were illegally downloaded from

the JSTOR database, the users taking advantage from unprotected proxy servers.

Therefore, we must also keep in mind these aspects of the licenses, when we acquire any kinds of databases.

#### **IV. Efficiency of the Multimedia Room**

It is useless to discuss the timeliness of founding such a service in our library. We cannot close our eyes any more to the present. A large library must offer its users such services, as access to electronic information. It was a great investment, and the maintenance of these services will continue to cost us. Thus, in the present conditions of an information society, when virtual libraries are at issue, it is no longer a problem of timeliness, but of financial efforts that we should make to maintain these services functional.

The Multimedia Room has brought our library significant income from the taxed Internet access, and this fact allowed us to maintain free access to quality scientific information. Estimations could be made, and if we only propose ourselves to achieve a bigger income, we could decide to offer paid services for the consultation of scientific databases. Information is paid for everywhere in the world. Consequently, a detailed income analysis would give us a view of the strategies to adopt in the future.

We have made significant efforts to mediate the services of our room, unfortunately by means fairly modest, and this fact was undoubtedly felt. Lately, we have observed nevertheless an obvious growth of the request of access to databases, users being increasingly interested in quality and up-to-date scientific information. This encouraging fact determines us to keep in mind future subscriptions to scientific databases as well, regardless of the ways they would be acquired.

#### **Conclusions**

We may conclude that, having analyzed the activities that have taken place in the Multimedia Room over the last three years, the future organizational principles of this room should be better configured, in view of a more efficient administration of electronic information. These principles outline a strategy that should keep in mind:

- the acquisition of scientific databases in a version as competitive and attractive as possible for the needs of the library
- the development of subscription offers of online journals
- the flexibility of the agency that offers foreign subscriptions, regardless of their format
- to outline the national consortium in view of common subscriptions to large databases
- to define precisely the space of virtual access for a clear registry of the contract terms of electronic license
- to maintain a competitive Internet connection
- to enrich the CD collection
- the level of the allocated annual budget.