

Chapter 1

Electronic Resources: History, Scope, and Challenges: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

The chapter addresses some issues with e-resources management in libraries, including the concept of e-resources, scope, and challenges of e-resource management in libraries. It defines e-resources as sources of information that are available and accessible electronically through the use of computers. Using such terms like e-journals, e-books, Websites, File Transfer Protocol (FTP), etc., the chapter defines the scope of e-resources and traces the origin of e-resources in the library environment back to the introduction of the Machine Readable Catalogue (MARC) in the mid-1960s. Infrastructure gaps and other sundry issues like funding, access model, archiving, preservation, ownership versus access, and lack of continuity in publication are some of the challenges highlighted in the management of e-resources in libraries. The chapter finally presents a brief overview of e-resources in the library environment today and maintains that e-resources are a welcome development in the library.

INTRODUCTION

The term electronic resource is an umbrella term that encompasses such expressions like digital resources and digital collection. While some authorities use the terms interchangeably, others see them as a subset of one another yet others see them as similar with no marked differences between them. In library parlance, Harter (1997)

submitted that, terms like electronic library, virtual library, library without walls and bionic library are simply umbrella terms that are coined to refer to digitized libraries.

Also, Reitz (2004) defined digital collection as “materials converted to machine readable format” or “produced in electronic forms” (p.216). In a virtual library and library without walls, the collection is said to exist, not in physical forms

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4761-9.ch001

like paper and microform but electronically in digital format and accessible via computer networks. Martin (1994) looked at digital library as “information housed electronically, delivered electronically and delivered without regards to location and time” (in Idiegbeyan-Ose & Ukpoghome, 2009, p. 79). Agreeing with this submission, Clifford Lynch stated that, a digital library is an “electronic information access that offers the user a coherent view of an organized, selected and managed body of information” (in Sharifabadi, 2006, p. 40). This therefore gives us an impetus to treat the two concepts of digital and electronic information with an aura of similarity and a consideration of the terms as umbrella terms with a similar connotation.

Remarkable electronic resources of current use in the information world include but not limited to Electronic Journals, Electronic Books, Reference sources in electronic format etc. Their debut in the information society has brought a great boost in the information sector. They have the advantage of speed, transferability, ease of use, capacity to save space, ease of search etc. It is expected that, this chapter will provide an understanding of what electronic resources are, their origin, scope and challenges in provision and management of such resources. This will then lead the reader into a full and better grasp of the content of the book.

BACKGROUND

Concept of Electronic Resources

An electronic resource, according to Allword English Dictionary (2012), is information which can be stored in the form of electronic signals and made available usually, but not necessarily on a computer.

According to AACR2, they are “materials consisting of data and/or computer program(s) encoded for reading and manipulation by a computer by the use of a peripheral device directly connected

to the computer or remotely via a network such as the Internet” (as cited by Reitz, 2005, p. 244). They are electronic sources that are made available electronically and can also be accessed as such (electronically) through such facilities like online computer catalogs, the Internet and World Wide Web, digital libraries and archives, government portals and websites, CD-ROM databases, online academic databases such as Medline Online, or commercial databases such as LEXIS and NEXIS all of which are computer networked facilities (Ekwelem, Okafor & Ukwoma (2009). International Records Management Trust (2009, p. 5) define an electronic record as they call it as any:

... component of information created electronically that forms part of an electronic record and that is usually stored separately within the digital file making up the electronic record as a whole. Every electronic record consists of at least one digital object, component or element, such as the bits of data that come together to create a word processed document. And some electronic records, such as photographs, video clips or web pages, may contain many different objects or elements.

Making resources available electronically can be through the use of digital devices like computers to input data in the form of typing and saving, snapping with digital devices like computer webcams, digital cameras, hand phones, etc. It can also be done through the retrospective conversion of already existing traditional print sources or versions through the process of digitization into machine readable forms. This demands the use of scanners to scan photographs, printed texts, manuscripts etc and digital cameras to snap artwork, scenes of events, three dimensional objects, realia etc (Eke, 2011). Accessing them on the other hand can be done through the use of the computer and other accompanying devices like projectors etc.

Libraries are usually identified and sometimes labeled according to the type of holdings they have. Thus mention is made of toy libraries, children’s

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