Chapter 5
Going Online:
Subscription of Electronic Journals and its Cost Benefit Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discussed in detail electronic journals (e-journals), their advantages and disadvantages, and need for subscription. In selection of e-journals, identification of e-journals, their evaluation and purpose for subscription are important considerations for selection of more relevant resources for patrons. The authors also discuss cost benefit analysis of e-journals and elaborate cost involved in subscription of print and electronic journals and provide their cost benefit analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Presently academic libraries are shifting from print to electronic resources because of their ease of accessibility and convenience. Patrons can instantly retrieve numerous full-text articles from a search and they appreciate the convenience of electronic access. Electronic resources consist of variety of resources including electronic journals (e-journals), aggregated databases, electronic books (e-books), encyclopedias, indexing and abstracting databases, etc. In subscription of these resources libraries are making big investments. But selecting a relevant resource for the library is a very difficult issue as over the last few years, there has been a good increase in subscription of e-journals. Often the decision to subscribe e-journal(s) should be made after evaluation of the resource(s) and studying whether it is economical and better choice(s) rather than traditional resource(s) i.e. print. Furthermore, budgets of libraries are decreasing and libraries have to justify their demand for more budgets and subscription of such resource(s). Author had discussed various issues for evaluation of such resources and their cost-benefit analysis (CBA) for these purposes.

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ELECTRONIC JOURNALS

The introduction of electronic resources can be traced to the 1960s with the development of machine readable files such as ERIC and an early version of the National Library of Medicine online database. In the 1970s OCLC and third party online database vendors, such as Dialog, BRS, and Orbit, became standard sources. The 1980s saw the arrival of personal computers, online public accesses catalogue (OPACs) to replace the card catalogue and databases on CD-ROMs housed on standalone workstations. The early 1990s saw the arrival of local area networks (LAN) to replace standalone workstations. The mid 1990s brought the latest changes are operating system with graphic user interface, Windows, and the Internet. By the late 1990s many OPACs and CD-ROM based databases became available in Web-based systems, and many services became available via remote access to patrons outside the library. The increased reliance on electronic resources was accelerated by decisions to cancel subscriptions to the print formats of sources that became available electronically and the increase of technical to access them.

Any journal available over the Internet can be called 'Electronic Journal' or 'e-journal'. In many cases e-journals are counterparts to familiar print publications, although an increasing number of titles exist only in electronic format. Frequently e-journals appear on the screen exactly as they do in print with similar page design and typeface. These are 'Portable Document Format' (PDF) images of print pages.

Gail Mc Millan defines, "any serial produced, published and distributed via e-networks such as Internet, e-journals may be defined very broadly as any journals, magazines, e-zine, newsletter or type of e-serial publications, which is available over the Internet."

According to Wikepedia (2009) electronic journals, also known as e-journals, and electronic serials, are scholarly journals or intellectual magazines that can be accessed via electronic transmission. In practice, this means that they are usually published on the Web.

According to the Online Dictionary of Library and Information Science by Reitz (2004), e-resources are materials consisting of data and/or computer program(s) encoded for reading and manipulation by a computer or by using a peripheral device directly connected to the computer, such as a CD-ROM drive, or remotely via a network, such as the Internet. The category includes software applications, electronic texts, bibliographic databases, institutional repositories, Web sites, e-books, collections of e-journals, etc. Electronic resources not publicly available free of charge usually require licensing and authentication.

QUESTIONS FOR LIBRARIANS

According to Odlyzko (1995), the development of e-journals is the inevitable outcome of two forces. One is the technology pull, more and more tool are becoming available for scholars to run the publishing business by themselves. The second forces an economic push caused by the exponential growth in scholarly literature. Transit from print to e-journals for librarian poses a number of critical questions, and many authors have commended on the dilemmas associated with e-journals (Boyd, 1997; Brand, 1996; Brown, 1996; Kidd, 1977). In subscription of e-journals, libraries are getting access to the contents saved on publisher's servers. Barnes (1997) has raised whether the e-journals be cost effective than the print journals; what will be the terms and conditions of license agreement; how quickly should I make the transition to e-journals; should library discontinue print subscriptions?; and which e-journals bundle will provide library patrons maximum relevant journals?

Nisonger (1996) points out that "the wider diversity of electronic publication and the rapid changes they are undergoing in the terms of technology, what is available, and the social,