Web Portal for Resource Sharing Among Medical Libraries in India

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Provides a conceptual plan of designing a Web Portal for sharing periodical holding details among medical libraries in India.

1. Introduction

Human health care is heavily depending on the timely access to medical information. Since the serials/journals cover research and development news in the form of scientific articles, news items, new result of research, etc., meant for scientific community, they are proven prestigious communication vehicle amongst the scientists in the world. Though the Internet revolution has begun to transform scholarly communication of medical information to an easy task, the quality of health information available over the Internet has become a subject of interest to healthcare professionals, information specialists and consumers of health care information since 1990s.

A number of studies on the quality of healthcare web sites proved that the material provided even by some professional advocacy groups and government organizations is of poor quality and severely biased. Under the circumstances, one can take the Internet resources only as a supplement to the existing print resources viz., scientific journals and other primary sources of information. The print journals still play a vital role in scientific medical information dissemination. But, no library, not even the largest, however big its budget be, can afford to subscribe to all journals needed by its users because of fiscal restrictions. Even though most of the libraries are spending more than 75 – 80% of the library budget on journal subscription, libraries are not in a position to meet the requirements of its users due to ever increasing cost of foreign journals.

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However, it is possible to develop specialized access tools like archival finding aids, that offer users detailed information about the holding details of the periodicals collection of medical libraries. In this context, designing of a web portal for resource sharing among medical libraries become necessary to ensure maximum availability and accessibility of resources to the medical professionals and researchers. This paper discusses the need to design a web portal with location tools to identify the needed materials for sharing the LIS resources among medical libraries in India.

2. **Web Portal**

Technically, a portal is a network service that brings together contents from diverse distributed resources using technologies such as cross-searching, harvesting, and alerting, and collates this into an amalgamated form for presentation to the user. This presentation is usually via a Web browser, though other means are also possible. For users, a portal is a single point of access where searching can be carried out across one or more than one resource and the amalgamated results viewed.

3. **Need for the Medical Library Web Portal**

A number of surveys revealed that most relevant and frequently required medical journals are not available in most of the medical college libraries. Skyrocketing subscription rates of medical journals, inadequate library budget and space constraint are some of the reasons for this. But, the library community is committed to help the medical students, practitioners and researchers.

It is a well known fact that serials are the primary documents for the medical research endeavors of any research institute. Hence, most of the medical universities, medical colleges and research institutes spend a huge amount for serials subscription. Though these institutes spend a huge amount for journal subscription, it is not possible to procure all the required journals because of financial constraints.

The subscription cost data of periodicals in demand for ten years viz., 1984 – 1993 were taken from the records of the National Medical Library, New Delhi on a random basis. The study analyses
the impact of the rise in collection building, services and the resultant damage it may cause to libraries and concludes with the plea for sharing of resources in an organized manner to overcome the challenge. The soaring cost of library materials as against tighter and inelastic budgets force libraries to share resources and the only solution is resource sharing.

4. Objectives

- To design a virtual union catalogue of medical journals and back volumes subscribed by the medical universities/colleges/research institutes.
- To compile medical information web sites after assessing the reliability and quality of the web sites
- To compile the open source medical journals available over the Internet
- To compile the web sites of worldwide medical schools and research institutes
- To design and develop a web portal for virtual resource sharing among the medical libraries in India

5. Methodology

The following steps should be taken to design and develop a web portal for resource sharing among medical libraries in India.

- Identification of participating medical libraries
- Collection of the list of current periodicals and back volumes
- Development of a Virtual Union Catalogue (database) of current periodicals and back volumes
- Compilation of medical information available on the Internet viz., web sites, gateways, search engines, online journals, open source journals, etc.,
- Designing and development of the web portal
- Registration of the domain name and hosting the Web portal
• Provision of user ID and password to all participating medical libraries so as to update the virtual union catalogue from their desktop itself.

6. **Web Portal Administration**

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is considered to be the suitable organization to serve as the focal point for this proposed project.

The Director-General of the ICMR can be the Chairman for this committee and it should also include the following:

• Secretary, Ministry of Health
• Secretary, Ministry of Education
• Vice-Chancellors of Medical Universities
• Directors of National level medical institutes viz., AIIMS, JIPMER, etc.
• Librarians of Medical Universities and Colleges
• Director of Medical Education of States / Union Territories
• Director of INFLIBNET/NISCAIR

The committee should be competent to allot budget and to decide on technical matters related to the proposed web portal. The committee can subscribe to online journals from aggregators or medical journal publishers on consortia basis and provide access.

7. **Hardware and Software Requirement**

The following are the hardware and software required for the proposal.

a) **Hardware Requirement**

• PIV Computer (for each participating library)
• Multimedia Kit
• Modem
• Broadband Internet connection

b) **Software Requirement**

• Operating System (Windows 2000 / Windows NT)
• Ms-Access (for database)
• VB-Script (for designing the Web Portal)
• Web browser (IE 5.0)

8. Conclusion

A paradigm shift to commercial ownership of scholarly and scientific research over the last 20 to 30 years has put academia throughout the world in the individious position of having to buy back the knowledge it created in the first place. Publishing monopolies and escalating prices mean institutions face the real possibility of not being able to afford their own published research. The problem is a complex one and cannot be simplified by buying fewer publications, or cheaper alternative titles. It is time to correct the situation. Hence, there is a need for designing and development of a web portal for resource sharing among medical libraries in India.

Bibliography


