Partnering for the Future: Integrating Traditional Interlibrary Lending and Commercial Document Delivery into a Seamless Service

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Abstract

Utah Academic Libraries developed a partnership with EBSCO to develop an innovative program to improve resource sharing. This paper discusses the original project initiation, the revised project after EBSCO was no longer a participant, and evaluates the success of the service from the Consortium's and the users' viewpoints.

It is hard to imagine an academic, public, or school library, today, whose stacks and associated collections would not be open to its general clientele for the purpose of providing personal access and selection of desired materials. Today's librarians are rapidly expanding the notion of open access to patrons for collections beyond the walls of their own library buildings. Library patrons, with the assistance of sophisticated library systems and digitized information, now have the opportunity to have "open stack access" to Virtual Libraries worldwide. We regularly read in library and information literature of new programs being established to empower patrons—allowing them to play a more direct and active role in selecting and accessing needed materials. Many of these new programs revolve around permitting patrons to order materials directly from commercial document delivery suppliers and having materials delivered to their home or office.

Recognizing both the need and the opportunity to embrace themes such as virtual libraries, digitized infor-

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mation, consortia strength, and patron empowerment, the Utah Academic Library Consortium (UALC)[1] began working in 1996 to develop new operational models, planning and accountability strategies, and a series of funding initiatives. These planning activities were based on the Consortium's long and successful tradition of cooperation with its aim focused on improving academic library collections and services on a statewide basis as we move into the twenty-first century.

One of the very most immediate needs was for a program to enhance patron access and rapid receipt of journal resources as a supplement to traditional interlibrary borrowing and lending services. With this in mind, the UALC Resource Sharing Committee accepted the assignment and challenge to develop such a program. In 1997 the Committee responded to their challenge by designing an innovative resource sharing service to provide articles to the Utah higher education community. The new service, named Utah Article Delivery (UTAD), was developed in partnership with EBSCO Information Services and was prepared to begin beta testing in February 1998. The development of this new service was based on the following objectives and parameters:

Objectives
- Increase awareness and access to relevant journals in an efficient and timely fashion.
- Satisfy the increasing expectation for information through solutions found in telecommunications technologies, electronic publishing, and World Wide Web access.
- Meet the challenge of providing article delivery in a time frame based on "patron expectation."
- Reduce article delivery time from the traditional average of six days to 24 hours.
- When possible, supply requested articles from UALC collections
- Promote the notion of a single Utah academic library collection as opposed to individual institutional collections.
- Provide opportunities for the end user to initiate and directly receive desired information.
- Establish a strong partnership with a commercial document delivery supplier who shares the same values of UALC, and whose access to scholarly journals is broad based and will supplement the UALC journal collections.

- Serve as a collection development tool and resource by identifying journals that should be part of a statewide collection and titles that would be more appropriately accessed outside UALC owned collections.

Parameters
- Funds for the program development were limited and based on a one-time funding commitment.
- In-state journals needed to be promoted and used as a "first source" whenever possible.
- The service must be easy to use and must allow for students, faculty, and staff affiliated with UALC institutions to equally participate.
- Simply adding additional staff to traditional ILL departments/units was not an acceptable solution.
- Acceptable article delivery time frames must be viewed in terms of hours rather than days.
- Service must reduce end-user document delivery from the current status of days to hours.
- Program must be developed and implemented without the aid of a current or complete union list of serials for Utah.
- The service must foster a statewide collection development program focused on diversity in holdings and decreasing duplication.
- An evaluation component must be associated with the program.
- Minimize the impact on existing ILL staff.[2]

EBSCO/Utah Partnership
In early 1998, EBSCO Document Services created a master list for journal titles held in Utah. While this list was not a complete representation of UALC journal titles, it did identify the majority of the Consortium's active holdings, since it was based on titles currently ordered through EBSCO Subscription Services. Additionally, considerable work with EBSCO took place to establish procedures for how the article delivery service would actually work. In brief, registered students at UALC institutions, as well as faculty and staff, could request journal articles via a World Wide Web form. Requests were sent via e-mail to EBSCO Document Services where staff members check the request against their list of UALC journal subscriptions. If the requested information was held in a member library, EBSCO then forwarded the order to the appropriate library to satisfy the request. Requests for articles from journal titles not currently available at UALC were filled by EBSCO Docu-

ment Services. In all cases the desired article(s) were delivered by fax to the end user's designated fax address. The only limitation to this service was that UALC set a maximum cost of $35.00 per article. The results of the testing with pilot sites were promising—UTAD was now ready to go live!

A Setback in Service—A Contingency Plan

Only days before the formal announcement of Utah Article Delivery going into day-to-day operation in September 1998, EBSCO Information Services notified UALC with the disappointing news that they were planning to discontinue EBSCO Document Services. After a moment of discouragement, frustration, and doubt about the future of UTAD, a contingency plan was quickly developed. The void left by EBSCO Document Services was satisfied by adding three new components to UTAD. First, as an ARL library, the Marriott Library at the University of Utah would serve as the primary supplier for documents. Second, UALC hired a temporary full-time employee, located at the Marriott Library, to manage the clearinghouse functions of verifying holdings and directing requests which EBSCO had performed. Third, following an informal bid process Infotrieve Systems was selected as the vender of choice to supply document delivery services for articles not owned by member libraries.

On December 1, 1998, UTAD was officially introduced to the entire Utah higher education community. Initial service was limited to article requests from journals available at member institutions. Beginning January 2, 1999, the service was expanded to include ordering from Infotrieve Systems. UTAD requests trickled in slowly the first month; however, usage of the service seemed to explode in January.

Initial Observations

While the initial project seemed simple, it soon became apparent the overall task of actually implementing a document delivery program founded on the established objectives and working within the limitations of our project parameters proved to be a more complicated process than originally envisioned. Fortunately, while we were extremely disappointed EBSCO Document Services was not able to continue as a business partner and key foundation piece to Utah Article Delivery, the time, experience, and lessons learned during the testing period proved to be a tremendous benefit. The associa-

tion with EBSCO Document Service coupled with information gathered during the beta phase provided useful information, allowing the Resource Sharing Committee to:

• Solve problems associated with identifying and delivering articles from state owned serial holdings before forwarding article requests to a commercial supplier.

• Establish effective communication channels and protocols with appropriate Consortium staff members, the commercial document delivery supplier, and with UALC clientele.

• Program staffing requirements and operational procedures.

• Resolve issues relating to copyright permissions, royalty payments, and billing/payment procedures.

• Establish reporting and evaluation methodology.

• Develop institutional promotional materials and strategies.

• Bolster institutional commitment to the overall project.

By the time the Committee had made changes necessary to accommodate the loss of EBSCO and launched UTAD as a statewide service, renewed commitment and enthusiasm to the goals of the project had been restored.

During the inaugural month of December 1998, client activity was relatively low. However by January 2, 1999, we were encouraged by the number of patrons who had learned of the service and were now placing self initiated orders and directly receiving journal articles without the aid of Interlibrary Loan personnel. Table 1 identifies the institutions of the Utah Academic Library Consortium and lists the activity of each college and university, along with their associated percentage of total requests placed during the first six weeks of the new year.

Table 2, documents the UALC libraries and commercial vendor providing requested articles, the number of journal articles supplied, along with corresponding percentages of the total.

Obviously, at this early stage of the program, there is too little data and experience to make solid conclusions or judgements about the success of the service or need to make operational adjustments. There are, however, a number of interesting observations, considerations, and questions generated by this first glimpse of data:

• The nine percent unfilled rate represents requests for materials available at the patron's home institution,

Table 1. Patron Requests per Institution Jan. 1, 1999—Feb. 12, 1999

Institution	No. of Requests	% of Total
Brigham Young University	397	24
College of Eastern Utah	0	0
Dixie College	5	1
Salt Lake Community College	10	1
Snow College	56	3.4
Southern Utah University	64	4
University of Utah	369	21
Utah State University	371	22
Utah Valley State College	112	6
Weber State University	72	4
Westminster College	184	11
Total Requests	1,640	100

inappropriate requests (i.e., book loans, etc.), incorrect citations, and copyright fees that exceed $35.00 cap for ordering.

• The number of patron initiated requests placed at several of the smaller colleges is significantly higher than historical Interlibrary Loan borrowing. If this pattern continues, it will be interesting to determine the factors contributing to this trend.

• The three research universities generated majority of the use, which parallels traditional Interlibrary Loan trends.

• What impact and role will commercial document delivery suppliers, such as Infotrieve Systems, have on institutional and state collection development policies, decisions, and practices?

• What liabilities and opportunities will UTAD present UALC libraries in terms of reallocating personnel resources?

• How discriminating will patrons be in their selection and appetite for journal articles in a self initiated document delivery environment?

• At the present time, no usage fee is assessed to the patron. Can or should UALC support this policy?

Are We Meeting Our Objectives?

UTAD is built on a number of desired objectives and goals. Perhaps most fundamental of these objectives is the intent to enhance patron access and delivery of required information resources by offering both rapid fulfillment of requests and providing quality copies. With this in mind, relevant client survey and assessment tools will be administered. The ultimate measure of the success and worth of the service is determined by the end user. While knowing our experience with UTAD is too brief to make formal assessments, we were curious to receive some initial feedback. A simple survey was sent to 30 UTAD clients seeking input on the speed of the service, quality of the articles, and service expectations. Fifteen individuals responded, with 87% indicating UTAD had satisfied their information needs. Table 3 reports the survey rankings on the timeliness and quality of articles delivered.

The majority of the respondents reported turnaround time and quality of the delivered article as being adequate or better. While this small and unscientific survey appears to be positive, it is clear there is room for improvement. Knowing the importance of patron satisfaction, UALC will be responsive to patron input.

The Future

We are encouraged with the initial implementation of UTAD and are optimistic about its future. We recognize there is more work to do on our part in meeting the Consortium's objectives.

Table 2. Articles supplied for UTAD Requests: Jan 1, 1999—Feb 12, 1999

Supplier	No. supplied	% of requests supplied
Infotrieve Systems	528	32
University of Utah, Marriott Library	435	26
University of Utah, Eccles Health Sciences Library	248	15
Brigham Young Univ. Lee Library	76	4
Weber State University	68	4
Utah State University	60	4
Southern Utah University	30	2
University of Utah, Quinney Law Library	29	2
Westminster College	10	<1
College of Eastern Utah	7	<1
Dixie College	1	<1
Unfilled or Canceled	148	9
Totals	1,640	100 %

Speed of Service	Faster than expected	Fast	Adequate	Too Late	Too late couldn't use
Number of Responses	6	4	3	1	1*
Quality of text and Graphics	**Very high**	**Good**	**Adequate**	**Poor**	**Couldn't read**
Number of Responses	3	4	4	1	1*

Table 3. Survey Respondents Rating of UTAD Services

*Note: Did not receive requested article(s).

Undoubtably there will be a number of operational adjustments that need to take place as the service evolves.

Work is continuing on the development of a comprehensive electronic UALC Union List of Serials. This resource will significantly benefit both patrons and library staff by providing complete and accurate journal information, plus serve as a major aid in reducing labor costs and delivery times. We are hopeful that we will find a document delivery supplier who is willing to assume the clearinghouse responsibilities, which where originally intended to be supplied by EBSCO Document Services.

The print quality of articles delivered by fax is a continuing concern. Future document delivery enhancements include providing journal articles by either scanning requested materials into a digital format housed at a secure web site for patron pickup, or delivering articles via e-mail. If these delivery opportunities are realized, UTAD will take a big step forward.

Building on a history of cooperation, we are succeeding in developing a creative, beneficial, and popular service. It is anticipated UTAD will become an important tool for developing stronger and more responsive cooperative statewide collection development programing, along with the additional benefits associated with consortium purchasing opportunities and leverage. We are confident Utah Article Delivery will prove to be a valued foundation piece in UALC's efforts to improve library and information services through cooperation, shared goals, and values.

Notes

1. Membership in the Utah Academic Library Consortium is composed of Brigham Young University (Howard L. Hunter Law Library and Harold B. Lee Library), College of Eastern Utah, Dixie College, Salt Lake Community College, Snow College, Southern Utah University, University of Utah (Spencer S. Eccles Health Sciences Library, J. Willard Marriott Library, and the S. J. Quinney Law Library), Utah State Library Division, Utah State University, Utah Valley State College, Weber State University, and Westminister College.

2. Kochan, C. A. and D. R. Lee, "Utah Article Delivery: A New Model for Consortial Resource Sharing." *Computers in Libraries* 18 (4), (1998): 24–28.