

World wide virtual veterinary library - perils and pitfalls, but why not?

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Introduction

It is a pleasure to be here. I am sure that we will all benefit from sharing our common experiences of attempting to facilitate worldwide scientific information exchange. I wish that more of our Eastern European colleagues could be here and more of the Western European and American funding agencies were more carefree and liberal in their assistance attitude. Before proceeding further, it might be helpful for me to describe our interpretation of the title of our paper so that others might not misconstrue our intentions.

Title definition

In the best of all possible worlds, every veterinarian (and serious scientist for that matter) should have complete and equal access to all available information contained in virtually all of the major veterinary libraries of the world. In the 21st Century it would seem reasonable and feasible for a single home page on the Internet to act as the venue for information access. Anywhere in the world, 24 hours a day, people with personal computers should have an equal and unimpeded ability to review the world's scientific literature. What are the problems and constraints, which may delay or block such a development? How can some of these problems be overcome? Is a worldwide virtual veterinary library even possible considering the delicate financial situation faced by certain special interest groups? This paper addresses some of these questions and considerations. We invite your active participation in this process by sharing with us your attention, specialised knowledge, comments, suggestions and ideas that may move the idea of a worldwide virtual veterinary library forward.

Background

Marta Prosbova, as the Vice-Rector of the University of Veterinary Medicine in Kosice, Slovakia visited the University of Georgia (UGA) in Athens, Georgia in April of last year. Since she had been the Director of the veterinary library, I had arranged for her to visit both our main library and our science library. We do not have a separate veterinary library at the University of Georgia. All of

the veterinary journals when they first arrive at Georgia are placed in the reading room in the College of Veterinary Medicine for one month, after which they are transferred to the science library for permanent storage.

At the time of Marta's visit we had the following inter-library loan arrangement with regard to the 34 separate campuses of the University System of Georgia. As inter-library loan requests were received at the main library at UGA, the articles would be copied using a Minolta PS-3000 face-up reader. This is a copy machine which copies the pages with the book or journal facing upward so that the binding of the books are not pressed downward and it is not necessary to turn the book over. The machine contains a computer program, which corrects for the distortion of the individual letters in the crease of the pages near the binding. The Minolta PS 3000 also stores the copied material in batches devoted to specific internet protocol (IP) addresses of the unit requesting the material. At the end of the day, all of the articles copied in a batch form are transmitted via the IP address using Ariel software. This Minolta PS 3000 face-up reader, besides being very expensive, saves wear and tear on the binding, saves staff time in the process of copying articles and saves the cost of postage and/or telephone charges for Faxes.

Parenthetically, I must add that a few weeks ago I was told in Washington, D.C. by personnel at the National Library of Medicine that Ariel software company is coming out with an Ariel II software package. Unlike the original Ariel, Ariel II can send material by e-mail and IP addresses to receiving units that does not have Ariel software.

As a convenience to all of the faculty and staff at UGA, there is a single home page maintained by the library that lists all of the 34 libraries of the campuses of the University System of Georgia. By clicking on the appropriate name, the entire listing of a particular library can be reviewed. In addition, the University of Georgia at the time was testing a new product offered by On-line Computer Library Center (OCLC) called "First Search" which would identify which of these library had a specific holding without searching each library individually.

As Marta and I were walking between the Main Library and the Science Library we talked about adopting such a system for the veterinary libraries of Eastern Europe. Following additional discussions with our director of libraries and our veterinary librarian, I was successful in obtaining a small grant to support a meeting in Budapest in August 1996 to consider such a co-operative endeavour. Present at this meeting were, besides myself, Lucy Roland (UGA librarian), Marta Prosbova (Slovakia), Mary Cserey and Agnes Tapolcai (director and assistant director, respectively, of the Central Library of the University of Veterinary Sciences, Budapest), Doris Reinitzer (assistant director of the library at the University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna) and Joseph Geges (representing OCLC).

At the conclusion of this meeting we all agreed to pursue the development of a co-operative international veterinary library for Eastern Europe. All of the libraries involved would place their home page on a single home page; eventually making available their electronic catalogues as well, whenever they became available. Once we had the co-operative home page established, we would have a mirror site in Kosice, Slovakia to provide more rapid access for the European libraries. Further we agreed to investigate an economical and rapid document delivery system. For the past 7 or 8 months we have worked toward development of the following short and long-term goals.

Short-term goals

At the present time we have accomplished the establishment of a single home page with the following Uniform Resource Locator <http://www.vetlibrary.org/>. The mirror site will be established in Kosice soon.

The title of the home page is the "International Cooperative Veterinary Library Home page" (ICVL). It consists of the home pages of the veterinary libraries of Kosice, Budapest and Vienna. The UGA science library page is also included which currently contains over 1700 electronic journals. The following veterinary libraries of Eastern Europe will join and include their home pages as they are developed, i.e. Brno in the Czech Republic and Timisoara and Cluj in Romania. The ICVL also has links with Medline, World Health Organization, U.S. Centers for Disease Control, Food and Agriculture Organization, National Library of Medicine and the National Agricultural Library. The Library of Congress will be linked soon as well.

The major short-term goal presently occupying most of our time involves trying to get all of the libraries involved connected to OCLC. OCLC provides 95% of all of the inter-library loans in the United States and is the key to having a truly co-operative sharing of the various library holdings. To this end we are waiting to get an estimate for the cost of implementing a retrospective conversion of the library holdings of the respective co-operating libraries. OCLC currently possesses from 48% to 68% of the random citations sent in from the co-operating libraries. We hope to negotiate a consortium price for this retrospective conversion.

As soon as all of the libraries are connected to OCLC, then by means of "First Search", a citation can be typed on the computer screen of the ICVL and a location listing will be immediately generated to identify the nearest library that has that specific citation. The long-term goals involve the development of the most efficient and economical document delivery system possible.

Long-term goals

It is obviously desirable that all scientists in both the developing and the developed countries of the world should have equal and immediate access to the full scientific literature. The ICVL would strive toward this goal. Even today it is possible, using the ICVL home page, to read full electronic text articles from Science, Nature, American Scientist and other journals without infringement of copyright laws or invasion of intellectual property through the doctrine of fair use. It is readily acknowledged, however, that the whole area of legal use of printed material internationally via the Internet is currently in a state of flux, with many ancillary issues to be resolved in the future.

It is envisioned that in the future the following scenario will be possible. When an article is needed which is not available at a specific university or research facility, the scientist can call up the ICVL home page and type the citation on the screen. After hitting the enter key the citation will be sent to OCLC. OCLC will in turn supply a location listing of libraries that have the appropriate journal. The appropriate library can then be contacted and the full electronic text retrieved over the Internet. If the full electronic text is not available immediately, then it may be possible to have a hierarchy of potentially co-operating libraries to contact for retrieval of the article in question. For instance, those libraries with which there exists a reciprocal agreement for exchange of articles with no charge could be the first tier. The second tier could be those libraries supported by governmental

subsidies to reduce the cost of inter-library loans. The third tier of possible libraries to contact for the article could be those nearest geographically with email capability.

Today, it is not necessary that a sending library have sophisticated expensive equipment such as the Minolta PS 3000 and Ariel software to send articles via the Internet. It is possible to purchase low cost scanners for less than \$100 in the United States. Articles can be scanned, placed into a file which can easily be shifted into an email message and then sent by email throughout the world. The money saved from postage and telephone charges will pay for the scanner rapidly.

To summarise, our long-term goals are to create a consortium electronic union list catalogue via the help of OCLC such that the co-operating libraries can have a relatively free and economical exchange of their entire holdings via the Internet or email. Once this is in place the co-operating libraries will be able to save money by not having each library subscribe to the same journals or retain the same monographs. What are some of the major constraints to the development of such a desirable system?

Major constraints

The system described above is obviously attractive to the scientist and the libraries involved. The system is unattractive to the publishers who want to maximise their profits by selling the largest number of journal subscriptions possible. However, there are cogent arguments as to why they should offer assistance and not resistance to the institution of these shared systems.

In many libraries of Eastern Europe there has been drastic reductions of the number of journal subscriptions and new books purchased. If a given journal is subscribed by one library and shared by many, that is preferred to the fact that otherwise the journal would not have any availability at all in the area. By having some exposure, rather than no exposure, when these libraries begin to have more realistic budgets, they will be more likely to subscribe to those journals to which they have had some access.

Another major constraint involves lack of current access to the Internet or even email capability. However, it seems that these constraints will eventually be overcome in the future. Even though electronic catalogues of library holdings are not universal, that too will be gradually instituted in time. More and more journals will inevitably enter the electronic publishing field. It is like holding back water. The economics, the rapidity of service, the ease of access, the universal exposure to markets, plus a myriad of other yet-to-be-determined reasons, all point to electronic publishing to be the wave of the future. Hopefully, we will poise to take advantage and benefit from this inevitable development. Thank you for your interest and attention.