

A GLIMPSE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ENABLED LIBRARY SERVICES

By

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ABSTRACT

Libraries are service oriented institutions established in societies for providing different information based services. Nature of these services depends upon the category of library, nature of the library users, mission of the institution where libraries are located and so many other factors. Services provided by libraries to library patrons include lending of information sources, reservation of information sources, reference services etc. Advancement of information and communication technologies has influenced each and every facet of libraries and information centers. Present paper highlights services provided by the libraries with the aid of technologies.

KEYWORDS: Libraries, Library Services, Information Technology

1. INTRODUCTION

Libraries and information centers are existing in the societies from time immemorial. The basic functions of the libraries revolve around acquiring information sources and making these information sources available to those who are in need of information. Nature of these activities changed with passage of time. In the Pre-Gutenberg era, libraries were focusing on the collection of manuscripts and other such materials. Preservation of these manuscripts was the priority of libraries. But after the invention of printing press, focus of libraries shifted to the collection of printed materials like books, journals, newspapers etc. With the popularization of education among different sections of societies and democratization of knowledge, librarians shifted their focus from collection of materials to more and more accessibility of users to the library collection. Librarian in the Post- Gutenberg era were no more custodians of knowledge but were regarded as facilitators, who provide supporting services to users in accessing information sources with more convenience. Revolution brought about by information and communication technology (ICT) has influenced each and every facet of library and information centers. Whether it is acquisition of library materials or organization of these materials or preservation of these materials, all are being influenced by

ICT. Different services provided by libraries have and are witnessing transformation after transformation because of the impact of ICT.

2. IMPACT OF ICT ON LIBRARIES

With the developments and application of ICT, whole scenario of libraries has changed. There is shift from traditional libraries to hybrid libraries. We see emergence of libraries with different nomenclatures operating in the universe of knowledge. These libraries are automated libraries, electronic libraries, digital libraries or ubiquitous virtual libraries. In the web environment there has emerged the concept of Library 2.0. All these libraries are using different information technology applications for performing activities ranging from acquisition of materials to the dissemination of information. Brief introduction of these libraries is presented here:

2.1 Traditional libraries

These libraries are using different procedures operated manually for performing different activities. Patrons of libraries were / are approaching personally to the library professionals in the premises of the library for availing different services.

2.2 Automated Libraries

In these libraries some of the house keeping operations are being performed with the aid of mechanical devices. The graphic records are still print –on paper publications (Sharma, 2005).

2.3 Electronic Libraries

These libraries are possessing information sources in electronic format like CD-ROMs, DVD's etc. Thus for making use of these information sources, we need equipment and without these equipments, one cannot use these sources of information in an effective and efficient manner.

2.4 Digital Libraries

A library in which a significant proportion of the resources are available in machine readable format accessible with the aid of computers. In the words of Wikipedia "A digital library is a library in which collections are stored in digital formats (as opposed to print, microform, or other media) and accessible via computers. The digital content may be stored locally, or accessed remotely via computer networks. A digital library is a type of information retrieval system (Digital Library, 2013). Type of information sources in these libraries may be e-books, e-journals, e-zines, ETD's etc . According to Wiederhold "A digital library is popularly viewed as an electronic version of a library where storage is in digital form, allowing direct communication to obtain material and copying it from a master version (Wiederhold, 1995)."

2.5 Virtual Libraries

These are also known as libraries without walls. The access point as well as the graphic records are in electronic/digital form and when these electronic/digital libraries are connected via various networks, particularly the INTERNET, this is called virtual library. A "library without walls" in which the collections do not exist on paper, microform, or other tangible form at a physical location but are electronically accessible in digital format via computer networks. These libraries provide online library services to the library patrons.

2.6 Hybrid Libraries

These libraries are possessing the features of both traditional as well as other types of libraries whether electronic libraries, automated libraries or digital/ virtual libraries. In hybrid libraries information sources may be in both printed format as well as in electronic/digital format.

2.7 Library 2.0

In the web 2.0 environment library and information professionals are taking measures whereby users of the library participate with LIS professionals for making library services more effective and efficient. Library users as customers are able to tailor library services in such a manner whereby it is possible for library authorities to fulfill their information needs. This can be done electronically, such as through the personalization of library web pages.

3. LIBRARY SERVICES: BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Library professionals have been delivering a wide range of information products and services to fulfill the needs of their clientele. These range from simple issue/return of documents to most complex and value added information products and services in both online and off-line manner. Traditional modes of providing information services like CAS, SDI, document delivery service, reference services have been redefined due to the penetration of ICT. With the application of ICT library and information centers can extend their services globally with 24 x 7 concepts in effective and efficient manner. A brief introduction of the library services in ICT environment is discussed under following headings:

a) Catalogue Based Service

Libraries and information centers are facilitating the access to information resources through the catalogues. However, with the automation in libraries, physical form of catalogue changed into Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). OPAC provides access to the catalogue through a computer terminal. OPAC allows searching the entire catalogue online, conveniently and quickly, using one or more search criteria. One can search by author, title, keywords, class number or one or more of these combined together. OPAC even shows the current status of a book, whether it is loaned out, available on the shelf or lying elsewhere. With modern library systems offering interface to OPAC, it is also possible to provide access from anywhere in the world through Web OPAC.

b) Reference Service

Personal assistance provided by library professional to the library users is called reference service. Reference services are provided with the aid of technology and are thus in virtual form. These virtual reference services are provided in a variety of modes. Asynchronous tools such as e-mail, subject gateways, FAQs, electronic libraries and interactive tools like chat rooms, virtual reference desk, ask-me etc. are replacing the conventional means of post, phone or in-person reference enquiries. Ask-a-Librarian allows the user to click on ask-a-librarian link to send a formatted enquiry to the reference librarian. The reference librarian either provides an answer, links to resources or links to a subject expert. Interactive tools now

allow a reference interview online. As such Chat reference service can be provided through computer applications (Coffman, 2003; Luo, 2007).

c) Bibliographic Service

Compilation of bibliographies, reading lists and state of- the art reports is one of the most important aspects of LIS work, particularly in research and academic libraries. Availability of databases in electronic form (off-line and online) offers convenient, efficient and cost effective information retrieval. Electronic databases also provide unique search features such as searching on multiple criteria (keyword, subject, author, source, classification code, year of publication, Language, etc.), and variety of display formats and styles.

d) Current Awareness Service

Current Awareness Service is important means for keeping the users up-to-date in their areas of interest. Libraries now compile current awareness bulletins using predefined search strategy and running on the database either on CD-ROM or online periodically and getting the desired output. Subject to copyrights, the output can also be stored on a local system, and disseminated online (Internet, Intranet) and offline (print, CD-ROM, e-mail). Table of Contents (TOC) of most journals are available free from the publisher's sites. Some publishers even offer free e-mail update of table of contents e.g. Sage publishers etc. Internet has enabled a lot of innovations in contents, methods of production and distribution of current awareness products. Tools such as Listserv, Weblog, Webzines and e-newsletters are common.

e) Document Delivery Service

ICT has made the document delivery service very simple and reliable. From searching the holdings to ordering and delivery have been benefited by the use of ICT. Some of the commercial document delivery services are Ingenta (<http://www.ingenta.com/>), BioMedNet, OCLC (<http://www.oclc.org/>) and Science Direct (<http://www.scienceDirect.com>) etc. Full-text of electronic journal articles that are available in electronic form may also be downloaded through links provided by aggregator.

f) Audio-visual Service

The new multimedia of audio CD, Video CD (VCD), and Digital Video Disks (DVD) have advantage of higher storage capacity, random access and longer life than audio and video tapes and cassettes. Many libraries build such collections and loan them out to their clientele. Multimedia documents can now be played on standard PCs, stand-alone or networked. Recent developments in storage media, compression and encryption technology have made it possible to store large amount of multimedia documents on hard disk and disseminate through Internet. Software such as Quick Time Player, Microsoft Media Player, etc. is now freely available to play or see these documents in a browser.

g) New Services

Libraries use different channels for making e-journals, e-books, ETDs and other categories of information sources accessible to users. LIS professionals can use subject gateways and subject directories. Digital repositories developed by different institutions can provide opportunity to the library professionals for designing digital library that will be accessible round the clock to the users. These services can be provided only by a competent professional

who having knowledge on all the above mentioned aspects of the library services. Library professionals can utilize web 2.0 technologies for providing library and information services to the patrons. By creating blogs, twitter, SMS and many other social networking tools are being exploited by library professionals for providing library services in an effective and efficient way.

4. CONCLUSION

Information and communication technology has an impact on all spheres of life and libraries are not free from this impact. Libraries are adopting ICT for performing both housekeeping operations as well as for providing services to the library patrons. Application of ICT has added value to the services and libraries are becoming popular among the patrons. With the aid of ICT libraries are actually marching towards achieving the goal of providing pinpointed exhaustive and expeditious information to those who are in need of that information. Information and communication technology is applied for providing information services which are more convenient, better accessible and cost effective. Library professionals before introducing any particular service should study the user population in order to know their information needs and their information seeking behavior. Results of such studies will provide some roadmap to the library professionals for adopting a particular type of ICT enabled service in the library on cost-effective and cost efficient basis. All these things demand that library and information professionals must keep themselves abreast and current about the latest trends and developments not only in LIS discipline but also in all the related fields. In nutshell we can say that application of ICT in libraries will provide a way to LIS professionals for achieving the main objective of libraries and that main objective is to provide right information to the right user at the right time in the right form and format.

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