



Using Digital Library Content and Services

I recently had a series of e-meetings with friends and colleagues who work for different Digitization and preservation centers in the West. We discussed the changes that have taken place in the field over the past few years as a result of the increasing quantity and quality of information resources available in digital format. Looking at the evolution of the information center and how it functions today provides an example of how libraries make good use of digital library content and services in Western World.

The first thing we notice is that what was formerly known as the "corporate library" is now known as the "information center". Previous job title of "librarian" and later "liaison librarian," now have become "information analyst". These changes are not merely cosmetic. The information services culture itself has changed as librarians moved from providing traditional services (such as ready reference) within the Library, to being more aligned with other organizations and Digital libraries, by becoming their members and truly acting as information analysts. Today, these information analysts proactively gather information, rather than just respond to questions, and they are creating databases of digital information that, in some cases, become deliverables to the library's clients.

Isolated libraries once held large print collection of monograph and serial publications. The print collection today is much smaller, and the physical space needed to house it has been reduced by at least two-thirds. In addition, the consequent savings from the print acquisitions budget were used to buy licensed access to commercial digital resources. For example, instead of subscribing to all the periodicals, the information center has licensed access to the digital content. Technical staff who once had to physically travel to the library to use print resources, or had to request that such resources be sent to them as available, now have access to many of the resources in digital format from their own desktops.

Another development that has resulted in significant savings in time, effort and financial resources is the creation of an intranet connecting several local and remote sites, some as distant as Japan. The intranet has enabled the information center to provide a portal to corporate digital resources and information services, and it has led to many forms of knowledge-sharing within the libraries. One example of knowledge-sharing enabled by the intranet is the electronic newsletters produced by different corporate divisions and made accessible online.

The changes described here are but a few of those that have occurred over the past few years in the information centers, where utilization of digital technologies and increased access to digital resources and services has made the libraries more efficient, productive and competitive. The skills of information center staff have been leveraged to improve the library's "bottom line," and that has benefited its work force as well as its clients.

But we in India are still not learning. Our libraries are still libraries with librarians. They don't want to share their belongings with others. Libraries of the sub-continent must move ahead to become information centers. We have lost much of our hand-written material because of internal feuds. As sometimes only a single copy existed of a manuscript and now we don't have even a copy of the ones lost in fire.

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