

INFORMATION SERVICES: NEW PRIORITIES OF THE MARTYNAS MAŽVYDAS NATIONAL LIBRARY OF LITHUANIA

Irena Kvieselaitienė

Head of the Department of Electronic Information of the Information Centre
Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania
Head of Administration of the Lithuanian Research Library Consortium

Aušra Vaškevičienė

Head of the Reference Department of the Information Centre
Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania

Information services for remote uses become more and more important for libraries' patrons. Users prefer to get information sitting at the offices or at home. Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania provides services and resources which can be used off-site. The library should define the patrons' population and publicize information and a ways to get it on the Web site. The level of services to be provided should be defined and announced as well as the mission of the services. Library must strive not only to provide the best service to their users but also to teach patrons how to use resources available to them. Virtual reference should be undertaken with a view to the long-term integration of the service with the rest of the institution's reference services. The article presents possibilities to use services of the National Library of Lithuania for virtual users. Virtual reference together with the new sub-system of LIBIS is presented.

Preface

Interactive services also referred as virtual or electronic services having been provided lately in hundreds of libraries, ranging from research libraries to small public libraries. These new kinds of services have significantly affected both library information resources and services provided. Having established library Internet source as a common type of information patrons can raise questions and get answers by e-mail at libraries websites or the Internet discussion forums notwithstanding their location. Moreover they can use the information arranged by libraries. At present the following interactive services are provided at the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania (further referred as NLL): book search and order in the library catalogues, service *Ask a Librarian*, the catalogue of web electronic resources, Interlibrary Loan services and others. Recently use of these services has increased together with the ever growing process of introduction and use of Internet services in Lithuania. According to TNS Gallup Media data, in 2004 28.1% of the population had computers at home, and 23.5% of the population has used the Internet at least once a week and 29.2% - at least once a month [1].

The Internet Website: Gateway to Library Services

Users who get into the library in a virtual way can see the digital „face“ of the library. It is impossible to state exactly what part of the users of the library's website have readers' cards. On the other hand, it is not of utmost importance since anyone at the site www.lnb.lt has to be provided with detailed information and efficient services. Therefore our responsibility is to guarantee that anyone should get access to those services regardless of their nationality, geographic location or age.

It would be difficult to define the goals of the library's website users. However, hardly a major part of them have logged into it just from curiosity. According to the data of 2004 the NLL databases were searched by more than 4 millions virtual users. Our goal is to provide them with efficient and detailed information. Not all the users look for information about the library working hours, reading rooms, venues or rules how to register as a library reader. Today it is common to use a number of our services and resources off-site.

One of the priority services of our library as well as other libraries are library catalogues and databases. Remote users have possibilities to search a required document in the online catalogues: NLL Online Catalogue, the Card Catalogue, the National Bibliographic Data Bank (NBDB) and also the LIBIS Union Catalogue. The catalogues are being developed using original software – the Lithuanian Integrated Library Information System (LIBIS). NLL Online Catalogue provides information on all the documents published in Lithuania and also publications in foreign languages, notes, maps, periodicals and serials, records in CDs, electronic documents which were added to the collection of the library in 1992 and later. The NBDB provides all the bibliographic records of documents published since 1998. Since 2003 records of articles from Lithuanian periodicals and Lituanica records, the 19th century retrospective bibliographic records from Lithuanian periodicals, issued in Minor Lithuania and USA have been harvested. Bibliographic records of documents in Hebrew and Yiddish since the beginning of publishing of Jewish book since 1789 when books were printed in Gardinas by Romany publisher till 1940 are also included. The Union Catalogue provides access to information on documents located in the collections of the libraries which use LIBIS software. At present the Union Catalogue includes bibliographic records of 75 libraries. The Card Catalogue provides information on books, notes, place names, personalities received in the library up to 1998.

One of the most popular services among users is book order in the NLL Online Catalogue. Orders are placed three days in advance. This service is provided 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. Periodicals, microforms and CD-ROMs are still ordered only at the library. The publications on the open shelves may not be ordered.

Table 1. NLL catalogues usage statistics in 2003 - 2004.

	Connections per day		Average data transmitted per day, Mb		Connections from different hosts	
	2003	2004	2003		2003	2004
LIBIS Union Catalogue	1 116	3 261	5.50	LIBIS Union Catalogue	1 116	3 261
NLL Online Catalogue	3 099	2 805	17.91	NLL Online Catalogue	3 099	2 805
Card Catalogue	6 627	6 007		Card Catalogue	6 627	6 007
NBDB		745		NBDB		745
Total:	10 842	12 818	23.41	Total:	10 842	12 818

The statistics of requests shows the popularity of the library catalogues (table 1). In 2004 there were 12 818 connections to the NLL web catalogues on average and transmitted 44.20 Mb data per day. According to the detailed statistics, commercial organizations and Lithuanian users constitute a major part of the virtual users. However, there are a number of requests from Poland, Holland, Germany and other countries. The statistical information harvested in 2003 and 2004 is not analogous, therefore some cells in table 1 are left void.

Analytical databases prove to be a significant tool in the reference work. They are used by specialists and users not only at the library but also outside Lithuania. Moreover, remote users can use the following library databases:

- Bibliographical Database of the articles from Lithuanian periodicals (1994-2002) archive. The database is for registered users only. It is also available on CD.
- The library compiles and provides access to Bibliographical Database of the Official Documents of the European Union which is available on-line. Users are provided with information on the European Union official documents since 1992, ordering of the documents' copies is also available.

The NLL website presents detailed information on Lithuanian publishers. At the beginning of 2004 an electronic catalogue of the Lithuanian Publishers was arranged. This catalogue is based on questionnaires distributed and also data acquired by ISBN, ISMN, and ISSN Lithuanian agencies. Information on publishers of books, serials, music, electronic resources is collected in the data base. Users are provided with factual data as well as useful information on publication issuing procedure, services provided, links to

addresses and other information about the organizations the publishers cooperate with. Lithuanian printing reviews and legal acts which are to be followed are put in separate units.

As regards remote users Interlibrary Loan should be mentioned. This service is provided to remote users both in Lithuania and abroad. Documents are ordered by post, telephone, e-mail and online. The loan period is determined by the loaning library; however, it cannot exceed a month. Services are fee based.

The national library offers some electronic publications to remote users. The publications provide information on forthcoming publications in Lithuania, press statistics, newsletters on depositary funds, etc.

As new information technologies have firmly established in the libraries databases for subscription it has become common to include information resources as part of the library collections. At the beginning of 2005 NLL subscribed to 5 Lithuanian and 15 foreign databases. The first subscribed database to which remote users had access to was *EBSCO Publishing*. We have made calculations taking into account the connections our users made. In 2003 even 55.5% of the connections were made not from the library and in 2004 – 55.6%. This type of service was of utmost significance at the period when our library was closed for readers for 4 months (in the autumn, 2004) due to reconstruction works. Since the beginning of 2005 remote users have had a possibility to get passwords of the database *Oxford Reference Online*. Only registered readers who are obliged to follow the general rules of the library and for using the Internet are provided with the passwords. In order not to infringe copyright this type of service is provided only to the citizens of Lithuania.

Since 2002 the specialists of Information Centre have arranged a catalogue of useful web links *Electronic resources on the Internet* and have made it accessible to the users. The catalogue is available through the Library homepage while subject references are also included in the web pages that provide information about the reading rooms. In the web links' catalogue information is collected and arranged on subject basis. References are carefully selected, however, the more detailed information about the page is submitted to users - in what language it is available, the specific reference if it is needed and also short comments are provided. While selecting the references we take into consideration Lithuanian information users. The heading *How to Search Lithuanian Websites if You Do Not Know Lithuanian* is presented in the English version of the web page.

Individual Services

The different digital references have been developed gradually on the basis of technical possibilities such as *Ask a Librarian*, *Ask Us*, *Ask Your Library*, *Ask the Library* and others [3]. World libraries providing these types of services use e-mail reference, different web forms, chat reference or web contact centres. Till 2005 the National Library of Lithuania provided these services only by e-mail.

The first requests by e-mail were already received in 1995. However, there were only few requests and it was not difficult to cope with, therefore there was no need for a centralised system. The recent growth in number of the Internet users in Lithuania when the young people prefer virtual way of communication has given rise to the growth of electronic requests. As the main e-mail address was not indicated for the users, requests were addressed to different divisions of the library. Very often different divisions responded to the same requests. Having analysed the websites of foreign libraries and how the virtual services are handled the NLL decided to use the experience of other libraries and to introduce a new interactive service. The service *Ask a Librarian* is provided since October 2001.

Having introduced this new type of service users are to fill in a special form. The certain conditions which are to be followed by the library are also indicated. There was no appointment of a specialist to fulfil this task therefore the staff of the Information Centre are responsible for the requests. Some requests are redirected to other divisions if there is a need. The staff of the Information Centre meet 93% of the received requests.

The staff respond to users bibliographic and factual requests by e-mail, basic information about the library, its collections, reading rooms, catalogues and services is provided. Subject requests require special arrangement. Copying, scanning of required documents is provided and then sent by e-mail, post or fax. Requests are fulfilled within 48 hours on working days. The content of requests is changing constantly. At first our users sent us simple questions while now they have become more complex. Arrangement of subject lists or other complex requests are charged according the price-list of the Library. We have been trying to limit these types of requests because of an inconvenient way of payment, however, a large part of the requests namely are of this type. Therefore we are planning to offer an opportunity to make payment by mobile phones.

While responding to our requests we always indicate or advise to use the nearest library one could address to in order to use NLL catalogues, databases and also indicate the Internet resources useful to seek information, how to use databases subscribed by library, etc. Almost every interactive communication with a user provides a possibility to impart information about electronic resources and their usage. Therefore information specialists become teachers as well.

Chart 1 presents statistical data of requests fulfilled over 10 years (1995-2004) at the Information Centre. According to the chart, a number of requests has increased. Over the last 2 years (2003-2004) more than a half of all requests submitted over the decade were fulfilled. This can be explained partly because of the development of the Internet services in our country. Since few years ago we received requests only from the largest cities while at present we are getting them from remote locations.

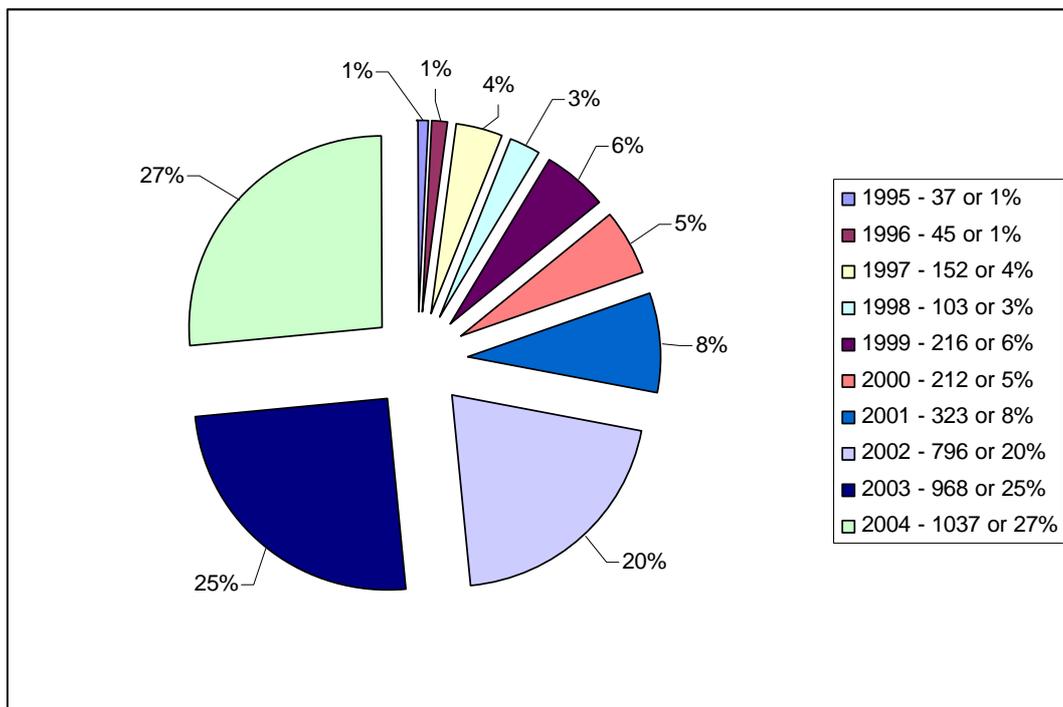


Chart 1. A number of requests received at the Information Centre in 1995 – 2004.

The steady growth of interactive services affects the change of requests. Users have been offered by an expanded possibility to seek the useful bibliographic information and full-text documents by themselves. They address to librarians in a virtual way only for consultation or in case of a complex request when they are unable to find an answer for different reasons. These services demand much qualified work of a bibliographer. This tendency has also been proved by Carol Tenopir in the article *Virtual Reference Services in a Real World* having surveyed 70 libraries [4].

As can be seen from the chart 2 users usually ask about the library services, venues, training or working hours. Subject requests constitute a significant part (31.3%). A substantial number of requests are on law, politics, economics, statistics, literature and linguistics (chart 3). These requests are redirected to special reading rooms which have compiled fascinating information collections.

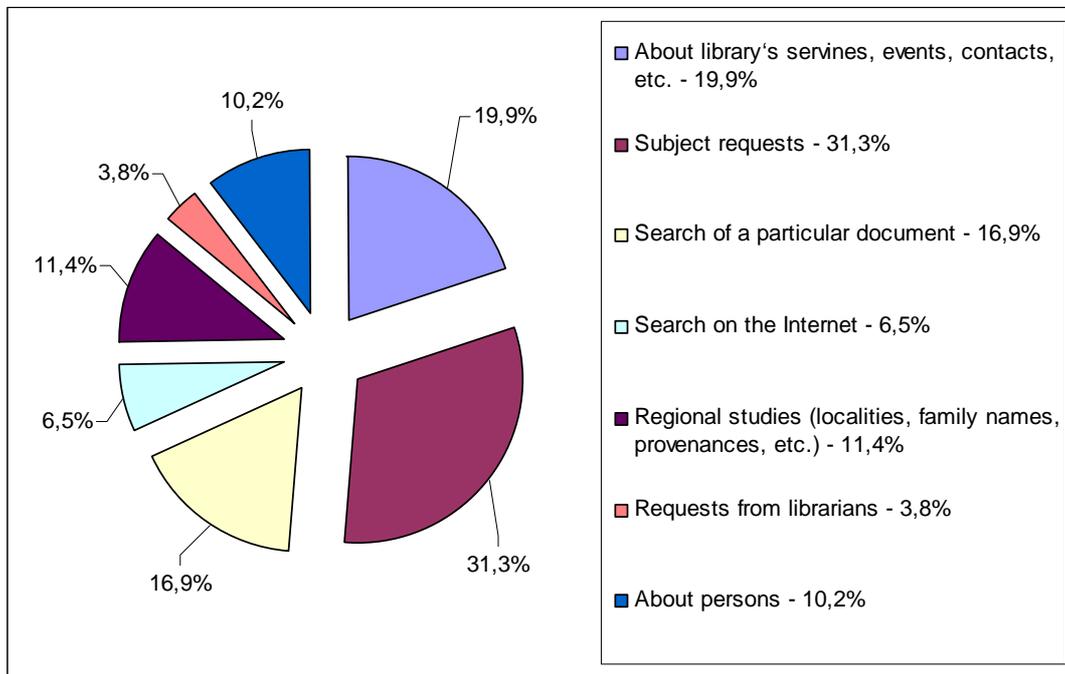


Chart 2. Distribution of requests, 2004.

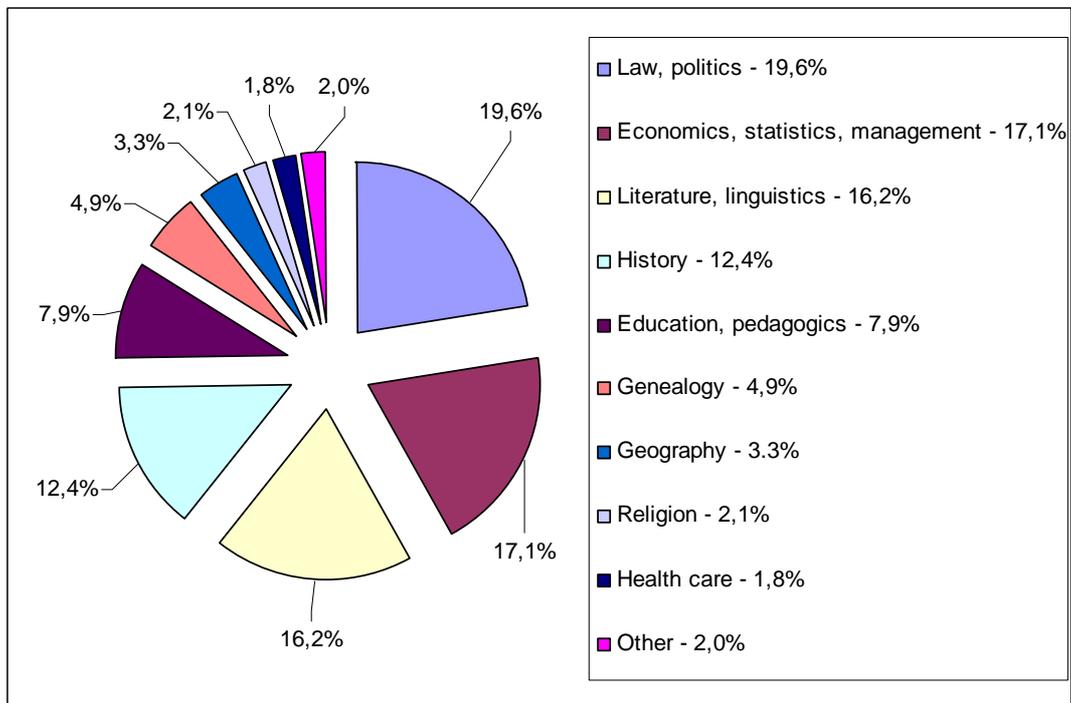


Chart 3. Subject requests, 2004.

The majority of requests have been received from Lithuania. In 2004 these requests constituted 85.7% of all requests. The most frequent foreign requests reached us from the USA (3.2%), Germany (2.3%), and Russia (1.6%). The geography of requests is shown in the chart 4.

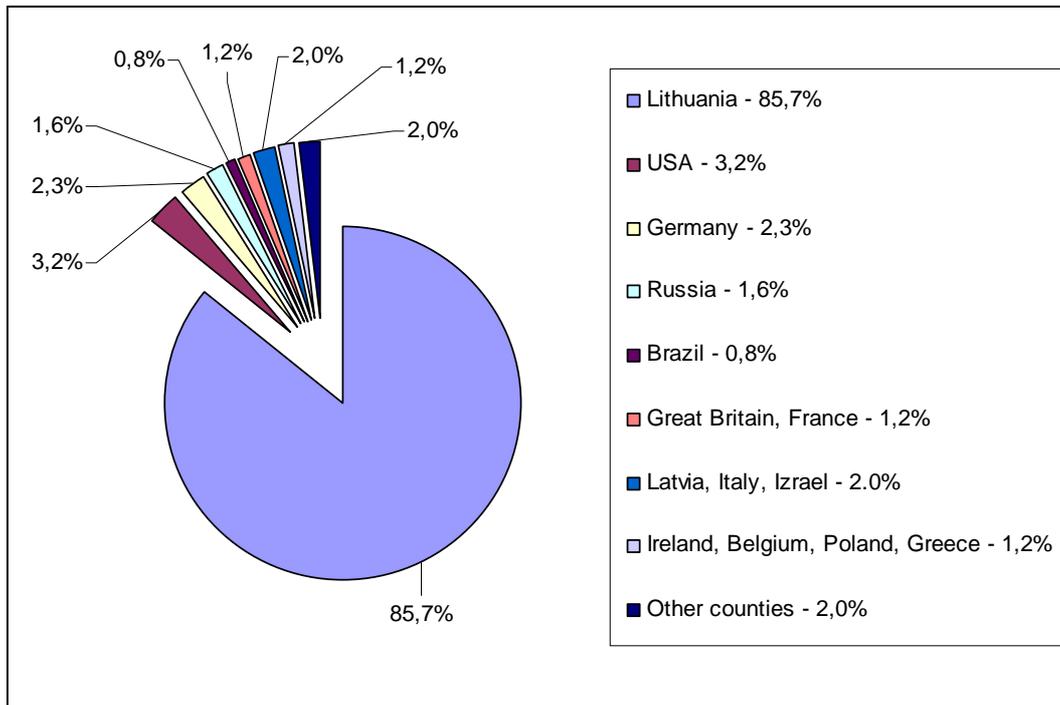


Chart 4. Geographical location of the received requests in 2004.

Remote users highly appreciate qualified work required to fulfil their requests. In 2004 108 users expressed their gratitude, some patrons donated some books to the library. Moreover, one response to a request has been placed in a publication [5].

Information Centre News by E-mail

Today you can easily get lost in the data flow. Moreover, the abundance of documents available on the Internet can complicate even more the search for information. Therefore it is important to get the latest news about the recent publications available only in libraries. In order to spread knowledge and Information Centre's news rapidly since 2003 we have started to supply a new interactive service – distribution of the publication *NLL Information Centre Newsletters by E-mail*. This service has been providing information about the recent publications in the reading rooms of the Information Centre complemented by professional comments as well as information on subscribed databases and other databases for limited access, also events, opening ceremonies in the library, etc. The service is available in Lithuanian only.

Problems and Future Prospects

Virtual reference service allows librarians to help patrons' access information in a virtual environment. Such type of service has positive and negative features. Virtual reference lacks the face-to-face communication that is an integral part of reference service. And it takes several communication efforts between the librarian and the user to make sure that the information provided answered the user's question.

To foster knowledge, connect people with information, and promote the library, librarians must continue to evolve and learn. In order to promote information and access to information, librarians constantly need to stay up to date with technology, to improve knowledge of foreign languages, searching on the Internet and other information sources.

Users want more online resources, including access to full text material and not just abstracts. Library needs not only time and the staff but also the funds for ensuring subscription to full text databases and creation of the new ones. The Library used possibility to get funding from the European Union Structural Funds by starting the project *Creation of an Integrated Virtual Library Information System*. It will ensure the usage of the full text resources available in the libraries, archives, and museums.

Users prefer to get much more information on-line or via virtual references. This influence the number of library's visitors, delivering services at the library. It is very important to record not only statistical data in the library but the virtual services of the library as well. The standard *ISO 2789:2003 International library statistics* is approved in Lithuania and we hope that it will help us to show the value and impact of virtual references.

Digital reference service has introduced new opportunities as well as challenges for librarians, users, and vendors. Librarians should embrace this challenge and seek out new and improved methods to provide reference service. As a result a subsystem of LIBIS has been developed with special function to provide the service *Ask a Librarian*. It guarantees a better distribution of requests to different divisions of NLL, to control the efficiency and quality of answers, protect from viruses, spam, to transmit enormous amounts of information, handle payments for the services by mobile telephones and also receive necessary statistical data.

Virtual bibliographers representing the National Library of Lithuania are taking part in creating its image. Their immediate, precise and detailed answers have to meet a variety of needs. A wide geography of requests, different languages and subjects require professional qualification and responsibility. While supplying interactive services it is necessary to improve a quality both of answers and services.

There are mixed feelings in the profession of librarianship about what the future of digital reference holds. Some librarians feel that traditional library services will fade away, while others think it is here to stay and will evolve. The general feeling is that digital and traditional services will coexist.

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