

ELECTRONIC INFORMATION: TRAINING OF USERS AND DISSEMINATION OF DATA ABOUT EI AT VILNIUS UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

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Today libraries meet with a number of problems related to electronic resources of information and organization of information spread. The report analyses achievements of Vilnius University Library in the field of user and specialist training how to use electronic information resources and its significance. Different ways and measures of spreading information about EI and their importance to the results of usage of electronic resources are discussed in the report using methods of analysis, material generalization and synthesis. The report is based on general reports of VU departments, overviews of statistical data and results of questionnaire investigation.

Role of libraries in the age of electronic information

It is very easy to get lost in the abounding mass of electronic information. Upon the appearance of electronic information the work of libraries traditionally connected with informational and educational functions, was raised to a new and higher level. New goals emerged that were related to the innovations of informational world:

- To select electronic information, to evaluate it, to determine the policy of acquisition of electronic information resources
- To ensure access to resources of electronic information, to create and develop technical basis
- To render electronic information services with regard to readers demands
- To spread information about EI to users and their training.
- To raise professional qualification related to EI resources, to obtain new skills and knowledge, to ensure qualitative services of readers

Upon appearance of WWW, and its rapid development opinions may be heard that libraries are unnecessary or they will become only traditional repositories for document storage and archiving. Possibility to obtain information in the Internet from work or from home place was the principal argument of sceptics. Why should we need a library if we may find everything in the Internet?

There is no doubt that there is plenty of information in the Internet however when a user starts looking for some specific information he meets with certain problems. Where to find information? How to look for it, how to formulate an inquiry, and how to write it? How to find the information that would be really useful and could satisfy the user's needs? How to use that information (how to save, to copy, to transfer to computer

memory, to print, or to send it by e-mail)? Users lack knowledge, search skills, they face technical and technological difficulties. It is one of reasons, why libraries and their qualified personnel still play an important role; they teach, inform and consult.

Another problem met by electronic information user is accessibility of information. Internet offers plenty of useful scientific information that may answer scholarly needs. Opinions appear more and more often that scientific information must be spread freely and accessed without limitations. Free accesses to EI initiatives and projects become more and more popular in the world. (*arXiv.org E-print archive*, <http://arxiv.org/>; *Directory of Open Access Journals*, <http://www.doaj.org/>; *Budapest Open Access Initiative*, <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/> and others). However it have been determined that greater part of information, especially scientific full text information, necessary to the education and study process is encompassed in databases, electronic books and journals. It is not accessed freely; it is fee-paying, and secured by passwords or firewalls. Therefore libraries become intermediaries, connecting-links between information suppliers, aggregates and users. Libraries provide access to paid electronic information resources thus enabling the users to search them.

It is obvious that libraries do not lose their position, they rather establish new guidelines in their work: they cultivate informational literacy, develop services of electronic information, and create their own effective user information systems. According to Ch. L. Borgman, „in the age of information you must choose not between libraries and computer nets. It is rather the task to envisage how to procure better access to information and to enhance the market of ideas ” [1].

Electronic information resources at VU Library

Organization of the “stock” of electronic information resources at libraries was stimulated by the following circumstances:

- Rapid development of electronic information and increase of its influence upon users
- Rise in prices of printed production designed for education and studying
- Initiatives of scientists and users demand to shorten the period of appearance of scientific production in print
- Boost of use of electronic resources is associated with EI features, enabling multitude of users to use the information at the same time, easy storage and copying of necessary documents, as well as possibility to reach the desirable information from any workstation at work, home, libraries, reading rooms, and classrooms.

At the beginning of 1993 the first book was catalogued using computer at Vilnius University Library. This date may be considered the starting point of Vilnius University Library electronic catalogue creation. Electronic catalogue and possibility to search publications via Internet was one of the first electronic information services at the University Library. Since March 1994 the electronic catalogue became accessible via Internet. 1 December 2000 the user service subsystem started to operate. It became

possible to order books from electronic via Internet and to renew their use term from any workstation.

Internet usage potentials allowed VU Library to start organizing access to global information resources. Freely accessed from network information does not satisfy the demands of academic community. Scientific information required by university scholars, professors, and students is accumulated in databases (DB) that are accessible only to subscribers. Since 1998 forty databases have been tested in VU Library. Some of them have been subscribed.

First acquaintance with databases at VU Library started in 1998 when Vilnius University was offered to test for some time (one, two or three months) the databases UMI, ANBAR, MCB University Press, Emerald. At the end of 1999 VU Library jointly with other Lithuanian libraries started to subscribe the first full text database - EBSCO that is being used up to now. In 2001 VU Library and Kaunas University of Technology became subscribers of the database ISI Web of Science. Each year the number of subscribed databases is increasing – this year our readers may use 7 databases: EBSCO, ProQuest, Science Direct, Springer LINK, Cambridge journals online, ISI Web of Knowledge, IEEE/IEE. Subscription of the databases Emerald, Oxford University Press a.o. is in prospect.

Spread of Knowledge of electronic information at VU Library

Increase of EI resources at the Library conditioned the development of electronic information services and the demand to disseminate information among users about electronic information present at the Library. For this purpose we used potentials of the homepage of the Library, sent information by e-mail, organized informational days for readers and provided other similar measures.

The homepage of the Library performs an important informative role organizing information spread to the users. Analysing the experience of Vilnius University Library it may be stated that information about EI resources is being spread in the Library homepage using different ways. The first version of the Library homepage was created in 1994 and was used mostly to disclose the activities of the Library. The new version (2003 m.) was updated by information about EI resources, EI services and options of their usage. The homepage presents the electronic catalogue of the Library, the rules of ordering publications, the readers are acquainted with the potentials of electronic catalogue how to find, to order, to renew book lending via internet. Databases accessed via Internet are presented as well as those in CDs, with their description, access data, manuals how to use. Library readers are offered WWW resource lists that are collected, evaluated and classified according to the subjects.

An important way of spread of news about electronic information is usage of e-mail. All news about electronic information services is being sent by e-mail to faculties, dean's offices, to all academics and lecturers who have their e-mail. This kind of service has been provided since 1998. The information is being sent with regard to researcher's demands.

Lately the activeness of users has considerably increased in the sphere of solving various questions associated with EI at the Library, there is a certain feedback: we receive positive evaluation and criticism, users submit various wishes, possibilities of subscription of EI resources are discussed as well as issues related to the search in databases, different problems that emerge in the work process are being solved.

Information on electronic resources held at the Library and services may be found in the newspaper of Vilnius University *Universitas Vilnensis*, in the homepage of Vilnius University, in the notice boards at the University. Presentations of databases are being organized as well as training for the Library staff. The Library work experience is publicized participating in conferences and seminars reading reports on various subjects.

Training of users

„The slowest part of any computer is the user“, says Peter Squier, president of the Information Technology Training Association. „If you want optimal performance from your system, the best return you can get is by upgrading your user“ [2].

The concept of the teaching library and the librarian as teacher will require a fundamental shift in the role of professionals. The historic role for the library and librarians has been largely collection and building centered with the individual (faculty or student) coming to the library to seek assistance or to locate material. The new paradigm of the teaching library, librarian as teacher, is one in which librarians actively seek out users in a variety of settings to provide instruction about information resources and to assist them in acquiring skills in locating and evaluating information. Using a variety of methods and locations for teaching (e.g., classrooms, interactive networks, multimedia presentations and computer assisted instruction), librarians will create a "library without walls".

Effective spread of knowledge about electronic information resources has a direct influence upon the quality of science and education process, and helps the users to assess properly and to choose the right resource, saves their time and labour expenditures.

Alvin Toffler warns us that the ignorants of the future are not going to be the ones who do not know how to read and write (“illiterates”) but those who do not know how to find and get access to relevant information (so called “information illiterates”) [4].

Students, lecturers, scientists and other Library readers find useful information in the VUL homepage however that is not sufficient. This supposition was confirmed by a survey “Electronic services at Vilnius University Library” made by the Library in 2002. The aim of the survey was to find out how frequently the users use databases, electronic catalogue and CDs, how they rate these services of the Library and which channels of user information are most effective.

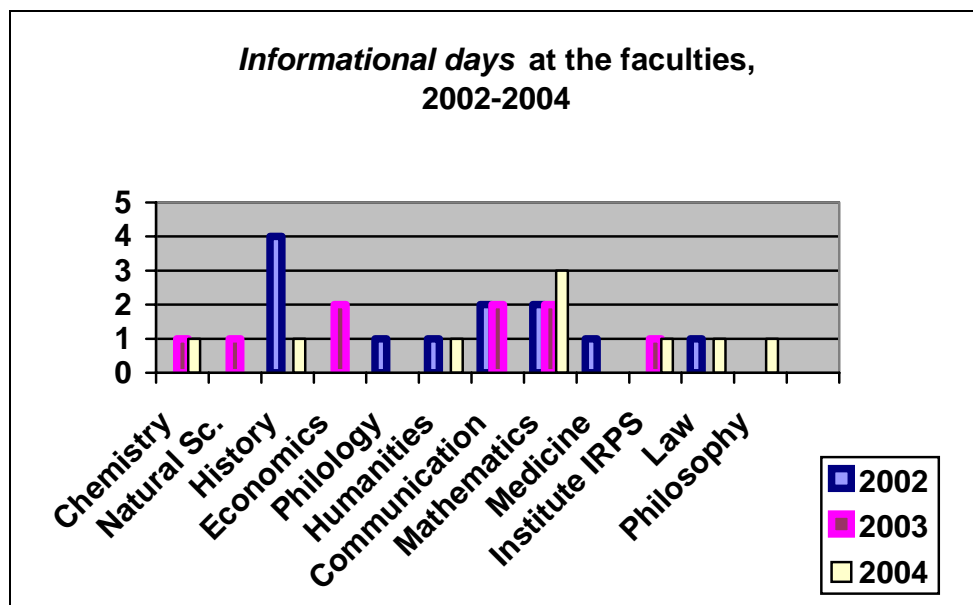
During the survey 250 questionnaires have been distributed among six faculties: (Economics, Philology, History, Communication, Mathematics and Information, and Law), and 224 respondents have responded to the questionnaires [3].

Generalization of the results of the survey showed that almost half of respondents (46 proc.) have used databases however only 7 percent frequently searched for information in them. It was stated that about 50 percent of the respondents use electronic information resources provided by VUL, however such results are not considered as positive. The analysis of the questionnaire data led to the conclusion that one of the most effective ways to improve user information about EI resources is the *Informational Days* at faculties.

They were organized throughout October-December in 2002–2004. 11 faculties and Institutes have been visited with 34 presentations; VUL homepage and its potentials were presented as well as databases, their particularities and the information contained in them, electronic catalogue, potentials of information search, book ordering, and other facilities, CD collection and options of their usage. Presentations were prepared by a group of 4 persons, best specialists in their sphere. The leader of the group (coordinator) coordinated all organizational issues with representatives delegated by each faculty. During those presentations direct communication with the audience brought forth many questions, suggestions and critical comments concerning organization of access to electronic resources, EI acquisition policy and information spread.

However it must be noted that not all of the faculties pay proper attention to the informative education of their lecturers and students. (1 chart).

Chart 1



Without positive attitude of faculty leaders it is very complicated to organize presentations of *Informational days*. The Library plans to keep providing this form of

information spread and from the beginning of the next year strives to include presentations of knowledge of electronic information in the curriculum of first grade students as mandatory.

Enhancement of staff qualification

The librarian's role should be characterized by visibility and vitality. Specifically, librarians should be highly visible and well integrated into the activities of their institution and the community they serve. This means that academic librarians should be valued as essential to the teaching, learning and research activities of the university. Librarians, not solely the collections or the library building, should be valued and considered an integral member of the university teaching and research team.

Most important, librarians should be seen as part of the solution – contributing to quality education, rather than as part of the problem – contributing to escalating costs. Librarians need to be bold and imaginative in defining their role and decisive in acting upon it. They should be visionary in conceiving of the present and in imagining the future, and they should be willing to take the risks inherent in translating their vision into action even though many in the academic community may be as wedded to tradition and what is comfortable as are many librarians.

Qualitative development of services of information technologies at the Library is directly dependant upon the qualification of the staff of the Library. Recently the development of lifelong learning human resources started to be promoted to ensure competence and demand of appropriate specialists. Especially great attention must be devoted to the work in the sphere of reader services. Qualified specialists are necessary who are capable to consult about information search both in traditional information sources as well as in the Internet and databases. They must also know how to work with text and graphic processing programs, and provide scanning, printing, copying and CD recording services. Libraries face a number of problems: on the one hand it is necessary to improve continually library staff qualification with regard to rapid development of informational technologies and need to provide qualitative information to the users; on the other hand unnaturally small investment that the Library may allot to raise qualification of the staff, impedes this process. One of the ways to get out of this situation is rational usage of the existing financial resources and human resources. At the end of 2003 at VU Library a work group *Continual training and qualification raising strategy* was established to determine strategy of qualification improvement and continual training of VU Library personnel, to investigate their professional needs, to organize thematic courses, seminars and lectures.

At the beginning of 2004 a questionnaire was prepared and disseminated at the library to find out informational needs of VUL employees. The analysis of the results of the investigation defined the following skills necessary to the operating personnel:

- Computer literacy
- Evaluation of information resources and adjusting to a specific user

- Mastering of the integral library information system ALEPH
- Competence to perform information search in electronic information resources: internet, databases
- Capability to consult readers how to search in the electronic catalogue, on-line databases, compact discs
- Knowledge of copyright, information rights and other legal documents regulating library activities

With regard to these provisions it was decided that library staff needs supplementary and consistent knowledge about information search via Internet, databases at Vilnius University Library, MS Office programme package options. It was also decided to enhance collaboration with the Faculty of Communication and invite them to read lectures on different topical issues to library employees.

The following courses were held:

- *Databases at Vilnius University Library.* Content of the course:

Presentation of databases, acquisition, statistical analysis of usage, information search, and copying. 69 library employees mostly from the operating sphere heard the course.

- *Information search in the Internet.* Content of the course:

Internet – short history, structure. Internet service types.

Functions and options of Internet Explorer browser: menu, toolbars. Recording of parts of network information, sending and printing.

Search system options.

Overview of Lithuanian search systems. Internet resources for research and studies. 28 Library employees heard the course.

- *Cataloguing in UNIMARC.* 24 Library employees heard the course.

The following lectures were organized:

Professors of VU Faculty of Communication read lectures *Professional ethics of a librarian*, and *Functions of modern information centre and introduction into information management*. The invited lecturer held the seminar *Management and prevention of conflicts*.

Participation in courses

The Library strives to implement the mechanism of “stuntmen training” (a way of teaching when employees who have already acquired certain skills/knowledge teach their colleagues)

VU Library financed courses of computer literacy at the Centre of Economics for two librarians:

- *MS Excel* and
- *First principles of work on personal computer.*

At present similar training courses are held for Library employees.

Conclusion

The increasing amount of information, especially electronic information, available to users and the ways in which it can be accessed has in theory made it easier for users to get the information they require. However, in practice there is now certain danger that they

can be overwhelmed by the amount of information they receive making it difficult to locate the exact information they seek as well as overseeing issues of accuracy and authenticity. The role of librarian as both user-educator and intermediary is prevalent in this environment.

It is evident that different institutions take part in the formation of information community however in this process libraries play one of the principal roles. The role of librarians in this context is to help users find relevant information they require, then provide them with the tools to access and use the resources for their individual needs. The priority objective of library activities is to spread information about electronic information resources, to ensure qualified information designed to science and education process, to train users and library professionals, to improve their skills and to ensure lifelong learning. These goals have to be implemented bringing in different ways and measures.

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