

## RESOURCE SHARING: NAVIGATING THE RIVER TOGETHER

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Libraries in Australia have a strong tradition of cooperation and resource sharing. Special libraries, which by their very existence are designed to serve particular client groups, have added value and support to their own operations through the creation of informal and formal networks. With the wide uptake of computer technology over the past ten to fifteen years, and the availability of library systems which can be tailored for any size or type of library, there has perhaps been a tendency to 'go it alone'. The advent of the internet enables a mode of sharing and provides opportunities which were not previously possible. This paper explores some of these possibilities, looking towards the next generation of resource sharing partnerships, especially in the digital era with particular reference to the empowering of library clients.

I know it is not the 'done' thing to start a paper with an apology. However as one of the points I want to make this afternoon is that we should question what we do in our libraries rather than do things because it is 'done', I will do so. Although I do have some experience in special libraries, my most recent experience has been with academic libraries, but I believe that what I want to say applies to all types of libraries, including special libraries. However I am also prepared to be told that the emphasis may differ.

There are many factors influencing the library environment today. These include the changing nature of the information publishing industry, exemplified by shorter print runs and the emergence of e-books. There is a strong drive for libraries to deliver both print and electronic resources. There are new challenges in searching for appropriate service models and systems which can deliver these services. Existing Library Systems, which are generally proprietary systems, may not have the capacity to interface with developing open systems architecture. It is often difficult to balance local library systems development and collaborative solutions with other parts of the organisation or with other libraries. There are economic constraints within libraries and within organisations, which need to be balanced against new expectations of online delivery.

There are many players in today's library market place, many of whom believe they can satisfy the needs of our users. So the first navigational instruction as you paddle up the river is to "watch your back".

Libraries have debated the issues of "user-pays" for a long time. In the meantime users are becoming more internet and technology aware. They want information, and not necessarily quality or comprehensiveness or from a particular source. If you think these things are important then you need to educate your users while you still have a chance. Keep paddling but look around and see what other water-craft are sharing the river with you.

Review your existing service provision. Do you need to continue to do all that you currently do? Do you need to provide all the services you have? Just because you have always provided a particular service does not mean you have to continue to provide it. Can you obtain some services from somewhere else and still 'badge' them as your own? Perhaps you can put aside your worn wooden paddle and get there faster in someone else's motor boat, or lash your boat to another and travel downstream together.

What sort of boats might be around with which you can form partnerships? Some possibilities are vendors (such as Blackwells, YBP), library consortia (such as CAVAL, Plains, Unilinc), other libraries (such as the CAVAL LIDDAS Consortium, Kinetica) and document suppliers (such as Ingenta, Infotrieve).

As an example I would just like to describe the successful CAVAL LIDDAS Consortium. Firstly CAVAL itself is a consortium – of the nine universities here in Victoria and the State Library of Victoria. It began as “Cooperative Action by Victorian Academic Libraries” in 1978, but since last year operates under the trading name “CAVAL Collaborative Solutions”. This signifies a distinct move from “cooperation”, where traditionally larger libraries cooperate but recognise that small libraries will be able to contribute to the same extent, to “collaboration”, where all libraries contribute to the solution in different but ultimately useful ways for the benefit of all.

Secondly LIDDAS (Local Interlending and Document Delivery Administration System) is a comprehensive automated ILL (Inter Library Loans) and document delivery management system, which is an Australian implementation of Fretwell-Downing Informatics (FDI) VDX (Virtual Document eXchange) software, enhanced for the AVCC (Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee). This software now forms the core of a suite of products developed by FDI which facilitate resource sharing between libraries and delivery direct to users, especially in the digital library environment.

Thirdly, the CAVAL LIDDAS Consortium, consists of eight libraries who are using LIDDAS, but who have chosen to implement the software together. CAVAL, as Consortium Manager, has worked with each library on defining their policies and workflows, and then configured the VDX software to reflect this. CAVAL has also been appointed by FDI to provide support and training for the Australasian market, and in this capacity has run the staff training sessions and is providing ongoing support to all LIDDAS users. The CAVAL LIDDAS Consortium uses a Hosted Hardware Service which provides the hardware and network infrastructure and technical support for the software. A Service Level Agreement (SLA) defines the level of service provided, in terms of guaranteed uptime, with enforcement or penalty provisions for services not provided, a guaranteed level of system performance, a specified level of customer support and the fees charged for the specified hardware and software. Each library has joined the Consortium in order to save costs, share expertise and to enable library staff to concentrate on providing service to their customers rather than on configuring software.

To come back to the river. We have now come to a delta area, with tributaries branching off in many directions. Some seem to go in quite the opposite direction to the one in which we are travelling, whilst others seem to go straight towards the sea. How do we know whether to explore a small stream or to forge straight ahead? Perhaps it is time to tie the boat up at the island over there and contemplate the choices. What range of resources do you want to offer your clients – print, electronic or both? Do you want to provide digital and print delivery? What sort of service models will allow you to do this? It is unlikely that any collection today will be self-sufficient. How will you supplement it? What about considering consortial purchases of digital collections, which can then accessed by electronic requests? Have you considered offering your clients an un-mediated electronic service, accessible anytime from anywhere? I would like to suggest that as long as the delivery of the information is seamless from the client perspective that it doesn't matter where it has come from. The service can be “badged” so that as far as the user is concerned it is “your service”. For example, each member of the CAVAL LIDDAS Consortium will have a web interface which is “badged” with their own library “look”.

This sort of collaboration can be cross sectoral. Service Agreements are a powerful economic and political tool. Enough resting – untie your boat and move on again. You can paddle quietly in the shallow waters by yourself, or you can join the other boats similar to yours and share the navigation, or you can move into the wake of that big ship over there.

The big ship could be a specialised partnership such as an Application Service Provider (ASP), which manages and distributes software-based solutions to customers across a wide

area network (for example, the Internet), from a central data server. It may include providing seamless service and support to end users, for example an information portal

It will need courage to move out of the stream you are used to. Courage to embrace innovation and creativity, to put your hand up to take part in research and development projects, to explore how systems can interoperate and lay the foundation for cost effective infrastructure. Open systems and standards are the keys. Work towards ensuring that your traditional systems, which probably use proprietary standards, can interoperate with other systems, including those of commercial service providers. Software and systems capable of providing this interoperability are now available in the market place. Have you got the political will to change structures and service models? Have you got the courage to take some risks in order to achieve the changes? Can you paddle through the waves behind the big ship in order to travel forward together? There are many ways to go, but it is your choice.

There are, ofcourse, many factors to be considered. These include negotiation of supply service levels in terms of quality delivery and price, authorisation and access management issues, payment management, subscriptions to electronic services, copyright and licensing issues.

There are systems and service delivery models being developed to support the vision of providing client access wherever and whenever it is required. There are many possible ways of developing useful partnerships, which may be internal, external or a combination, to deliver service. The location of a service is irrelevant to a user – the service may be provided in-house, in the organisation, by an external supplier or by a combination – utilising the most appropriate partner for each part of the service

There are many challenges facing librarians in responding to continuing change in the library environment. It is essential to develop systems and service models which support these changes and which meet client expectations of accessing information wherever and whenever. There are new players in the library market place who realise that the location of electronic services is irrelevant to users.

Developing and using formal and informal partnerships and incorporating resource sharing strategies will help your library to move forward and to deliver the widest range of services. You will have made it up the river, out to the open sea, and can offer the widest vision. Your users know that you will not allow them to be constrained by the river banks, but will help them to navigate much further than they had ever imagined.

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