

Have We Followed the Right Way Up Till Now?

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In the last couple of years enormous changes have taken place in the field of medical libraries information services. Lots of experts have already summarized these facts at lot of times but something remained out of their focusing. If we are going to characterize the changes shortly we can say these ten years were the decade of changing manual (manpowered) services into automatic (machine driven) one. These circumstances have dramatically influenced the library directors' everyday. Instead of transforming the methods of manual services to the requirements of electronic age we should work out an absolutely new concept of doing precise content services at the libraries. Translating this into librarians' language; we should make steps towards content orientation instead of documents orientation. It is high time to supervise our point of view on the functionality of web pages and portals than dealing with its design and number of links. This presentation introduces the main principals of this new approach of library services

Great numbers of various analyses were carried out during the last few years related to the effect of electronic information on almost all aspects of our life. If we reflect on the last 15 years, we can say, that the scientific information content service has dramatically transformed. This transformation has taken place beyond measure by these days, so it is high time we thought about finding out if we are on the right track in the world of electronic library information services.

The computer technology development has entirely changed the library technology work giving a sound base of spreading internet connection and web, and these circumstances have lead to the extension of the information retrieval scope. While the technical development is unstoppable - due to the individual habits and personal treats- the scientific information retrieval and process is significantly slower. Information providers come up with more and more up-to date solution in order to meet users' demand for simple usage, utility, and value, which implicitly means market competitiveness.

In my opinion, right in the expression "meeting users' demand" hides the real contradiction between providers' and users' real interest. Therefore, it is quite obvious for me, how it is important to reinterpret the difference of interest needs and keep it as an item on the agenda. In other words, I would say, that taking information retrieval and process habits into account is getting more and more important.

When I claim this, a fair number of people would say, that a library –let it be small, big, Hungarian, Czech, Polish, or European or American institutes can be serve as samples – has great difficulties in influencing developments. They argument is based on consultations between developers and users. According to this, agreements which are signed by both parties were worded by the information providers. These kinds of meetings take places in the last stage of developments or in the first stage of launching the new products. I wouldn't say that developers do not involve librarians and specialists in the early stage of program and content development, but I do say that users' demand is not significantly represented by them. Beyond these –since we do not have strong influence on processes mentioned above – I would like to draw the attention to the fact that libraries are information providers too.

Some years ago I said somewhere else on a different forum, that the library service planning is a minimum two levelled procedure, in which not only the relation between information providers and the library is represented, but – and I would put the main emphasis on this – the library and library users' relation is also significantly taken into consideration. That time, my statements were welcomed and had a good response, which encouraged me to reconsider the role of the library under my leadership. Semmelweis University Central Library is the biggest, oldest medical library with the most expanded electronic services, and its resources are popular among our researchers and medical students.

To maintain this state, mainly those service organising tasks need to be carried out, which meet our readers' demand even better. This is why the question has emerged: Are we really on the right track, when we yield to the data-owners' and aggregators' dictate. Not only in Hungary has this dictate emerged, but all over the world, and has been simply materialized in increasing subscription prices. This problem is known, and has been discussed so many times, that I would not like to dwell on it. All libraries do their best in utilising available financial sources, there is no

doubt about it, but all aspects are examined through properly during the decision making process?
We can not be sure.

From my point of view, the source of this problem is, that librarians have a document and retailer approach to information sources' acquisition and subscription management. I am convinced that it is high time we had a content-centred approach. This shift sounds simple, yet I would like to highlight some arguments.

In my opinion, all types of documents – let them be electronic or traditional – need to be purchased, and there are arguments for doing so, yet, documents are still treated as items and not as content.

Talking about our example, I must say, that the pressure from content-providers, and the increase in price along with financial restriction deformed all previously logic-based decisions related to stock augmentation. Sound examples are those situations, when one database or journal needs to be subscribed or unsubscribed. This is the time, when the library management has to come to a decision.

Life dictates us to

- -analyse which professional –in our case medical – arguments need to be considered,
- -prudently investigate the scientific value of information resource,
- -analyse if it can be subsidised by other –maybe cheaper- version,
- -analyse how it can fit into our service structure (media, language, interface, service-uniting possibility etc.)
- -estimate the expected reader and user circle and last, but not the least,
- -estimate the expected cost.

I would like to emphasise, that the order in my list does not define the significance of the mentioned aspects and the list does not aspire to complexity. I would rather like to draw your attention to those fields needs to be revised and why so.

Let us ask questions like:

- Are the professional arguments individual, specific, or reflects group-interest.
- Is it sure, that the item we would like to purchase has the highest scientific value?
- Shall we chose the cheapest version all the time?
- Do we surely need to tend to unite and integrate services?
- Which users' and information retrieval's practice can benefit from the new resource.

Is the users' statistic increasing, should it need to increase in all cases, in other words: Does integrity bring usage increase or it provides its latent reflection?

There is another important aspect at the universities, which also need to be taken into consideration: How can new acquisitions comply with the united requirements system of research, education and medicine.

The statements above reflect some of those aspects, which can serve as a guideline when we talk about the content part of services. Apart from these, it would be advisable to reconsider the structure of the portal service interface.

Needless to say, that all decisions which fit the best, need to be turned into reality. In other words, the problem orientated approach needs to be reflected on the library homepage.

If we analyse the great numbers of high standard library homepages, we notice, that, apart from some exception, services are not grouped by functionality. Document and resource centred approach is significant in almost all cases. This is why there are sharp borders between the individual services. That is to say, for example, there is no gateway between pharmaceutical databases and therapy or diagnosis modules. Homepages are arranged by the institute profile and information providers' sources. Sometimes faculty information sources, sometimes service providers (Ovid, Whiley, Ebsco, National Consortia) are grouped on the homepages. In Hungary, Science Direct and Web of Science run in the framework of a national licence, but there is no possibility to link them together, and add them to other library services.

Some years ago our library subscribed for many OVID databases. Due this circumstance, these resources were displayed on a common platform placing them at the readers' disposal. That time, Ovid's special linking software enabled users to utilise the effective connection between databases and full text resource, but the system did not prove to be entirely superior to service enterprises. More and more content providers have been looking for the solution ever since, but with no success so far.

As far as I am concerned, the reason for this is that the competitive economic environment makes them chose individual ways. Their unity of interest is pressed down by profit interest. A solution that helps the operation of problem-solving centred services can not be expected in the near future, only diversification. Apart from the almost untraceable fusions, the separation is obvious getting more pronounced.

Due to this condition, we are made to watch out and adapt all the time, which means, that setting up a problem solving oriented services becomes a time consuming project. I would like to give you an example from the world of telecommunication, just to show, how this question can be simplified. Please, think about the phone number portability among immerse number of telephone services. I know, it is not general, but the possibility is given and anyone can resort to it. That is to say, if we dial a number we can not really know the service provider of the called party. As long as there is a significant difference between the fares of different service providers, there will be always a preferred network for us. The difference would only cease if there was a standard unit-price. There is an intention to solve this problem in European Union, but the realisation is not likely to happen tomorrow.

The best solution for libraries could be that the information unit price was the same at least, since no one is interested in the information provider. Users with information demand do not care where the information is coming from. They only want to get fast, reliable and validated results, without knowing which service providers are behind the scene. Only the tangible immediately freely usable information, that counts. At the same time, it is important to know, how to inspire scientific reasoning. There are a lot of things to do within this area.

I would like to draw your attention to Medical homepages which can be divided into three types according to their maintainers. The first type is generated by IT people, the second one is run by librarians, and the third one is created by experts with medical background.

Most library homepages were built up by IT people. It means that at the beginning IT people had a great influence on the whole project, but the librarians' competence grew, and new possibilities resulted in homepages becoming service-portals. We believe, that it is high time libraries served users, so those ones need to be involved in building portals, who support the necessity of changes with medical-professional reasons.

In our opinion, a good portal needs to operate according to their users' way of thinking.

It needs to be built up in the way that saves users from hesitation which starting point they should chose. At the same time, we need to make sure, that users do not get lost during the information "mining". It is only possible, if interfaces provided by service enterprises are functionally integrated while users' demand is in focus. One aspect is the portal users' digital literacy level, which can be different according to ages, etc.

Defining their digital literacy level can be a base of various divisions, except ones based on information providers such as Ebsco, Elsevier, Ovid or ProQuest, since their name means nothing to users. Our experience shows, that the users' statistic got significantly better, when we broke up with the routine of listing databases under a CD-ROM application supporting software fantasy name.

Almost all users' information retrievals are based on professional profile instead of service providers' name.

A medical library of considerably high standard –let it be situated anywhere in the world –provides almost the same services. Yet the service structures of their homepages are significantly different. At the same time, the motivations of information retrieval, the processing and searching protocol are far less various. This difference deserves attention and has encouraging power. If we wish to create a portal, which the possible most significantly enables their users in retrieving scientific information, we can not ignore this difference.

The head of Florida State University Medical College Library, Nancy Clark, who is also a doctor, has given a lecture in which she drew up a service matrix based on electronic information resources. We wish to modify this clear and logic classification in the way, that we simplified the two-dimensional service matrix at the same time we turned it into a three-dimensional one. It needs to be remarked, that in our opinion, only by having HON (Health on Net) requirements in

sight can remodelling be carried out. This professional protocol can be considered as a guarantee from the point of scientific content of high standard.

At the moment we are working on the new portal's platform, which takes those editorial principles into consideration, which can be suitable for meeting information demand. We do not ignore seemingly not significant aspects either. For example, web pages have more valuable parts, (this is the top left hand corner, where our eyes set on the longest time.), and less valuable ones. This is what we call psychological factors.

Based on their features, Nancy Clark has divided sources are into two dimensions, while our principle is a three-dimensional traversable model, which visualize the first steps of problem solving, by applying hyperlinks to the direction, which is identical with the mental process related to the substantive problem-exploration.

Therefore our altered source and service matrix consist of four groups on the highest level, while we enlist at least six document types in the other direction.

The following groups are enlisted in the vertical column:

1. Diagnostic and Experience Based Medicine-related documents
2. Therapeutic and clinical knowledge - Pharmaceutical information
3. Alternative therapy, nursing, rehabilitation, patient information related sources
4. Theoretical and interdisciplinary sources

The horizontal classification is the following:

1. All Emergency care / Emergency Room care related sources
2. Indexes, databases, databanks,
3. Journals and periodicals
4. Specialized textbooks, compendiums, guides,
5. Internet sources
6. Mobile (PDA) services

Layers -situated in the third dimension below the opening page- represent the biggest medical area of speciality, which can follow the university organisation structure (faculties, departments, institutes) or the general division principles. The most important thing is to edit the hyperlink system by utilising the IT provided possibilities, which equally provides speciality professional and permeability.

Great number of owners', service providers', or aggregators' current user interface are not suitable for these tasks in every aspect, but we can get their help by persistent negotiations. It is necessary, as the possibilities hidden in interfaces can only be utilised with their help. The growth of resource usage is our common interest, since this can maintain business relations.

We firmly believe that the present graphics and design solutions can serve the edition of spectacular portals, which can attract and maintain attention. At the same time the situation is not so univocal from the point of their functionality and usage efficiency. Our most important task has been to draw the attention to the importance of the library service efficiency enhancement, and turning service reflective portals and university homepages into new, content oriented resources.

In our opinion all homepage owners need to realise by themselves, that the test of functionality is always the users, and our success can be only measured by their satisfaction. In order to achieve this, work of high standard is required from all participants in every reference level.

To sum up:

- Efficiency of information retrieval largely depends on the portals' structure.
- Users with scientific demands appreciate functionality rather than design.
- Integrated solutions can not be expected from service providers
- Turning document centred services into problem-oriented ones need to be carried out by the librarians on their own.
- This project demands a drastic change in the librarians' approach.

Thank you so much for your kind attention!