

**Assessing the Impact of Electronic Journals on Technical Services**

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**Submitted by**

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# Assessing the Impact of Electronic Journals on Technical Services

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## Research Project:

Discussion of the electronic distribution of scholarly journal publishing is increasing both on BITNET/Internet and in paper journals. A growth in electronic journals resulting in “bibliographic confusion and chaos for utilities and libraries” was predicted by Ann Okerson at the Feb. 1991 OCLC Users Council Meeting.

This study, funded by an AMIGOS fellowship, was undertaken to determine which AMIGOS member academic libraries have begun handling electronic journals and how these journals are processed. A survey questionnaire was mailed to 202 library directors. Complete questionnaires were received from 131, a 65% response rate.

Electronic journals were defined as ones that are issued in electronic format only and are typically made available over the major networks such as BITNET or Internet. They generally originate in academic institutions, are usually free of charge to subscribers, and attempt to imitate the basic features of print serials: table of contents, numerically defined issues, articles, reviews, ISSN#. “Online journals,” which maintain an electronic existence parallel to a print counterpart and tend to be commercially produced, were excluded.

## Results:

Of the 131 respondents, only 5% (seven) reported currently receiving electronic journals. Of the 124 not currently receiving electronic journals, 43 (35%) had discussed the possibility while 81 (65%) had not. Major deciding factors in rejecting or delaying the acquisition of electronic journals included a lack of Internet/BITNET access (51 %) , lack of hardware (42%), lack of personnel to handle additional work (35%), and a lack of experience (30%) .

In the seven libraries currently receiving electronic journals, the decision as to which electronic journals are added is made by the same person/group who decides on paper journals. Four of these libraries have collection development policies and one has guidelines which address factors to be considered in selecting paper and electronic journals. Only one of these specifically addressed selection criteria for electronic journals. Faculty request for a subscription was the major factor considered in selecting electronic journals (five of the seven libraries). Other factors were: subject, covers an area where speed of publication is important, technical compatibility or incompatibility, interactive or online format is important, long-term archival access may not be critical, and price. None had a line item in the materials budget specifically for electronic journals.

Generally, electronic journals are ordered in the same fashion by the same level of personnel as paper journals, with mail being the favored method of sending purchase orders (5) and receiving invoices (6).

Two of the libraries had not yet determined how to catalog their electronic journals, one does not catalog them, and the remaining four (57%) use OCLC records utilizing the same level of cataloging as for paper journals including standard subject headings (LCSH, NLM). Two send the issues of the electronic journal to Cataloging on diskette, one sends a paper copy of the entire issue, and one sends a paper copy of

the title page, publication information, etc. Electronic journals are identified by three libraries by adding the GMD field [computer file], two add 500 notes and one adds a 265 note. Two include in the cataloging record the instructions for accessing electronic journals, while three do not.

Two libraries have established a BITNET/Internet account specifically for receiving electronic journals while the other five have not. Two libraries check daily for new issues, two check weekly, and three receive only the Online Journal of Current Clinical Trials. Three check in the issues on their automated serials control systems. Five depend on the publisher for back issues, one creates a master copy on diskette, and one does a regular backup.

The personnel responsible for handling the electronic journals varied considerably from the serials department to acquisitions to interlibrary loan. The method of training also showed a wide variation. While two used group instruction and five used individual instruction, the source of the instruction varied widely: Head of Serials (I), Head of Acquisitions (I), Head of Technical Services (I), Systems Librarian (3), In-house computer specialist (I), Reference Librarian (I), self-training (I). Obviously some had more than one source of instruction. The methods employed ranged from structured classes (I) to one-to-one verbal instruction (5) and included in-house manuals (I) and brown bag lunches (I).

Once the electronic journals are processed, they are made available to users in a variety of ways: two libraries download the issues to diskettes which are available in the library, one provides only paper copy, two make them available only to those with Internet/BITNET accounts, one has them on the library's OPAC, one has telnet access available for remote users, one has them available through Interlibrary Loan, one through OCLC dialup, one through online searching, and one library has not yet determined how the journals will be available to users. In those cases where the journals are available only in the library, two make them available at the reference desk, one in the online search office, one in the microforms area, and one from library staff.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations:**

AMIGOS academic libraries are just beginning to incorporate electronic journals into their collections. As more academic institutions obtain access to the Internet, libraries will need to address how they should make electronic journals and similar publications available to their users. Issues that must be considered include: equipment, staffing, training, collection development policies, and user-awareness.

Recent developments with Gopher services on the Internet indicate that some libraries are providing access to electronic journals at Gopher sites. This phenomenon raises the issue of local ownership versus cooperative or remote access. Some electronic journals are published as a collection of articles while others consist of individual articles which must be retrieved by ftp. Scholarly electronic journals are evolving along with other forms of computer-mediated communication.

Further studies are needed to monitor the progress that libraries are making in providing access to electronic journals. The researchers plan to replicate this study by distributing the survey instrument to academic libraries in other OCLC regional networks.