

Open access: a new paradigm for libraries and a new role for librarians

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Introduction

This address is more of a challenge to all to revisit current information provision practices, to explore virgin ground in developing truly innovative models that make access available to all who seek to improve their lives. Irrespective from where we come from, that is, from a library environment or from a commercial environment – how can we as information providers find commonality on this virgin ground so that the people of the world can have access to the most crucial resource to improve their lives. The most significant question is, do we have the will to find that common ground? The solution to the dilemma are in the hands of those that are here at this session and those that are in libraries and allied environments. We make information accessible so that the citizens of the world can enjoy a better life – be it a better life in developed countries or in developing countries: ambition to improve underpins the quest for information. As information providers, we are fulfilling ambitions and in the process stimulate growth and development.

This presentation is not to inform you on the pros and cons of open access but rather to present broad strokes on the issue to stimulate debate so that we can find simple but effective solutions to the catastrophic issue of removing barriers to access to information. These broad strokes will provide us with the context to ask the difficult questions in search of solutions.

The most significant question is how libraries can open access to information for the growth and development of communities within the developing and the developed worlds: one option is the support for the open access movement.

Contextualising open access

Peter Lor (2007) advances reasons as to why open access is a significant option. He indicates that the rise of the open access movement results from the convergence of an economic crisis, a moral crisis, and an enabling technology. The economic problem is one of spiralling prices. The cancellation of journal subscriptions year after year is becoming the norm, and so to are drastic cut backs on monograph purchases in order to maintain what is seen as essential journal titles. In developing countries, as pointed out by Lor (2007), the

situation is catastrophic with many large universities in sub-Saharan Africa holding just a few hundred serial titles, many of them they receive free of charge.

The second factor is a twofold moral crisis. The first issue is the inability of researchers in developing countries to gain access to the world's science and scholarship. The continued reference to the "digital divide" is not restricted to the technology divide, but also a content or knowledge divide. The second issue is a growing sense that the relationship between authors, journal publishers and users is out of balance and unfair. There is a willingness by authors to submit their research free of charge and the willingness of editors and referees to peer-review the research also without a fee attached. Scholars publish their research in peer-reviewed journals for professional gain. The costs borne by the subscribers are generated through the publication and distribution processes. The third factor is the advent of the Internet. This digital technology is used both to control and to enhance access. Digital technology seems at first sight to offer significant cost savings by reducing set-up costs as well as marginal costs.

IFLA's commitment to open access

Given the potential of open access to drive access to knowledge, the IFLA Governing Board adopted the The Hague *IFLA Statement on Open Access to scholarly literature and research documentation* in 2004 which states that it is committed to ensuring the widest possible access to information for all peoples and acknowledges that the discovery, contention, elaboration and application of research in all fields will enhance progress, sustainability and human well being.

Welcoming the IFLA statement, **President-elect Alex Byrne** noted IFLA's long commitment to open access to information, especially its concern for access to scholarly literature in the developing world.

He said: "*IFLA recognises that achieving affordable, global access to scholarly information and research documentation will require a great deal of commitment and a variety of strategies. IFLA strongly supports the Open Access movement and welcomes the launch of many OA compliant publications. IFLA also acknowledges the need to address the challenge on a number of fronts and in partnership with many stakeholders.*"

One of the principal concerns identified by Alex Byrne was to support and defend the moral rights of creators, while simultaneously seeking balance in copyright legislation to protect and extend the public domain and public interest in access to information. *"This is fundamental to many areas including health, education, development and culture"*, he added.

IFLA acknowledges that the discovery, contention, elaboration and application of research in all fields will enhance progress, sustainability and human well-being. Peer reviewed scholarly literature is a vital element in the processes of research and scholarship. It is supported by a range of research documentation, which includes pre-prints, technical reports and records of research data.

IFLA declares that the world-wide network of library and information services provides access to past, present and future scholarly literature and research documentation; ensures its preservation; assists users in discovery and use; and offers educational programs to enable users to develop lifelong literacies.

IFLA affirms that comprehensive open access to scholarly literature and research documentation is vital to the understanding of our world and to the identification of solutions to global challenges and particularly the reduction of information inequality.

Open access guarantees the integrity of the system of scholarly communication by ensuring that all research and scholarship will be available in perpetuity for unrestricted examination and, where relevant, elaboration or refutation.

IFLA recognises the important roles played by all involved in the recording and dissemination of research, including authors, editors, publishers, libraries and institutions, and advocates the adoption of the following open access principles in order to ensure the widest possible availability of scholarly literature and research documentation:

1. **Acknowledgment** and defence of the moral rights of authors, especially the rights of attribution and integrity.
2. **Adoption** of effective peer review processes to assure the quality of scholarly literature irrespective of mode of publication.
3. **Resolute opposition** to governmental, commercial or institutional censorship of the publications deriving from research and scholarship.

4. **Succession** to the public domain of all scholarly literature and research documentation at the expiration of the limited period of copyright protection provided by law, which period should be limited to a reasonable time, and the exercise of fair use provisions, unhindered by technological or other constraints, to ensure ready access by researchers and the general public during the period of protection.
5. **Implementation** of measures to overcome information inequality by enabling both publication of quality assured scholarly literature and research documentation by researchers and scholars who may be disadvantaged, and also ensuring effective and affordable access for the peoples of developing nations and all who experience disadvantage including the disabled.
6. **Support** for collaborative initiatives to develop sustainable open access* publishing models and facilities including encouragement, such as the removal of contractual obstacles, for authors to make scholarly literature and research documentation available without charge.
7. **Implementation** of legal, contractual and technical mechanisms to ensure the preservation and perpetual availability, usability and authenticity of all scholarly literature and research documentation

(IFLA 2004).

New role for libraries

An old tradition, a new technology and a new role have converged to make possible an unprecedented public good (Lor 2007). The old tradition is the willingness of scientists and scholars to publish their research in scholarly journals without payment, for the sake of inquiry and knowledge. The new technology is the internet. And, the new role is that of the librarian as the publisher of the scholarly information for public good. Serving the new role of publisher removes the subscription barriers to literature which will accelerate research, enrich education, share the learning of the rich with the poor and the poor with the rich, make this literature as useful as it can be, and lay the foundation for uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation and quest for knowledge.

At the core of the open access movement is the distribution of scholarly information. Librarians are strongly advocating that authors publish their

research material, for philanthropic reasons, in open access forums that allow for it to become accessible to those that cannot afford subscription fees.

Libraries as publishers

As indicated by Xia (2009), research conducted by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) revealed that there are member libraries that provide publishing services. There are 371 published peer-reviewed journals by large research libraries. Smaller libraries at institutions not affiliated with ARL have also participated in publishing ventures. These libraries use a combination of publication tools such as Open Journal System (OJS) and the Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).

Xia (2009) goes on to say that although there are currently no figures on exactly how many academic libraries have been involved in this publishing business, it is safe to say that the number is by no means a small one.

Discussions of library publishing have concentrated on the applicability, sustainability, and scalability of providing such services by libraries. Advocates and librarians are confident about the applicability. The research has found that scholars have a positive attitude towards cooperating with librarians and are willing to take the responsibility of organizing an editorial process for the quality control of publications. Peer review is considered a necessary procedure for assessment of articles, as has traditionally been the case for scholarly journals. An easy and guaranteed way for any library to manage a journal seems to be to transfer an existing publication from a commercial publishing operation to joint faculty–librarian management. Such transfers have been undertaken in a federally funded project in Canada. The library’s responsibility is to provide hosting services; coordinate a supporting process; and provide additional services such as permanent URLs, workflow streamlining, mark-up, file generation, and print on demand (Xia 2009).

Xia (2009) expands on the Canadian experience. She indicates that the publishing systems adopted by the libraries with regard to academic journal publishing seem to satisfy all of their constituents. When comparing this form of publishing to lodging materials on institutional repositories, it would seem that the idea of library publishing academic content seems to have been more readily accepted by researchers than lodging with repositories. There is buy-in

from those who have served as editors of journals published by traditional presses. From the faculty editors' point of view, the new model of scholarly communication is able to provide many more benefits than the traditional model of publishing: free access for readers (through libraries' Web sites), inexpensive hosting (even though libraries have to pay the hosting costs), and convenient management (through collaboration with other libraries). The ordinary scholar as reader is attracted to this model by its open-access component. It may also be that institutional administrators are pleased with library publishing because it increases the visibility of their institutions.

Collection development paradigm shifts

Creaser (2010) describes research undertaken in higher education libraries in the UK, to investigate academic institutions' policies with regard to open access to research outputs and to assess the impact of open access publications on the library. A significant but alarming finding is that there is still considerable ignorance among researchers concerning open access publication of research outputs. However, for those that were aware of the possibility of publishing in open access forums, there was agreement that the library will pay the authors' submission fees. These payments are made to foster goodwill for the continued interest in publishing in open access forums.

There is a silver lining and that is the increasing availability of research output on open access forums which has impacted positively on academic libraries in terms of their resource provision and on journal subscriptions. However, there were institutions who indicated that the availability of trusted researcher material available on open access platforms had positively affected their expenditure on journal subscriptions. Although the effect had not been to reduce expenditure overall, it had caused them to re-direct it: “. . . we've not deliberately spent less on journal subscriptions, but it has probably helped us make more material available than we would otherwise have been able to afford” (Creaser 2010: 15).

The admittance to redirecting funds does very little to change the traditional paradigm. Librarians need to become creative and use funds saved in a *quid pro quo* manner, that is, the money saved should be invested in open access forums which will have a snow ball effect. The more information is made available in free and open forums the less pressure there is on the journals subscription budget. There should be a growing budget for open access costs and

development. Budgets need to be developed for page fees, for publication processes and staffing to support open access. Funds should be allocated to marketing and educating researchers and users of open access content.

The librarian as an educator

As indicated by Creaser (2010), a significant reason for the lack of support for open access is ignorance on the part of the researchers. This ignorance is exacerbated by misconceptions such as open access journals being of lower quality, with little or no peer review. Further, the results of the research indicated that there was a perception that the impact factor was higher in traditional publications.

Librarians need to dispel these misconceptions and reinforce the argument that the quality of research can only improve with greater access to critical, trusted and relevant information. If access to research is going to influence the impact factor then it would stand to reason that the larger the reading audience, the greater the possibility of improving the impact factor.

The propagation and/or advocacy of open access are not claimed by any constituency as belonging to their domain. Libraries need to take the lead and assume that open access is their obligation because its focus is on making information available to those that need information to change their lives or add to their innovations. If librarians accept open access as their domain, then they must also engage in activities that will encourage researchers to continue to grow and develop open access – the tipping-point must come sooner rather than later.

One of the contributing factors to the tipping-point is exponential usage of the content, especially open access content to justify publishing in such a forum. Therefore, there has to be concomitant education of users of information available in digital format.

Martell (2008) remind us that the access paradigm has supplanted the ownership paradigm since the late 1970s and held sway through the remaining years of the 20th century. However, in the interim the availability of serials electronically has increased to such a degree that while ownership, as traditionally conceived,

is not practical, immediate access is. And, more recently the exponential growth of institutional repositories and open access publishing models has swung wide open the access paradigm. The *crème de la crème* of these accomplishments is the issue of immediacy - opening the door for an iAccess (immediate access) paradigm. The familiarization with new gadgets and methodology of locating information for vast majority of population requires guides and librarians can easily fit into this role with training – e-skilling of the user population will become core areas of responsibility of the ‘cyber librarian’.

Access to well organized and trusted information, enhanced e-skills imparted by highly qualified cyber librarians and iAccess are all contributory factors for unprecedented growth of open access.

Librarians delivering open access in Africa

Nwagwu and Ahmed (2009) point out that there is overwhelming evidence to demonstrate the disparity in scientific output between the developing and developed countries. Sub-Saharan Africa has not made any significant contribution and has supplied only 0.7% (a large percentage of that coming from South Africa), far less than India (1.9%) and China (2%). Although this statistic may well be a true reflection of scientific activities in Africa, there is sufficient basis to suggest that part of the reasons for the low profile of scientists in Africa is the poor access to scientific publications from the developed countries.

However, the growth of open access in Africa will be stunted as there is serious concern that electronic resources are inaccessible as they simply do not have the technological infrastructure to receive and distribute rich content. The continued acceptance of the fact that Africa is doomed to remain at the bottom of the information chain because of poor bandwidth must be challenged – and challenged as vigorously as possible. There are certain realities in Africa: one, Africa is one of the highest users of cellphone devices, and two, that television technology via satellite reception has grown in leaps and bounds over the last few years.

Have librarians explored the utilization of these technologies to deliver rich content?

IT specialists at Stellenbosch University believe that these technologies aggregated have the capacity to, at the least, deliver rich content. Commercial

enterprises have found solutions and markets to distribute their products (Gibson 2010). Multi-grouping collaboration, that is, commercial enterprises, governments and the library should become prominent to deliver rich scientific content. As indicated by Nwagwu and Ahmed (2009), government (including African governments) spend vast amounts on scientific research. However, the results of this critical research are locked in archives because of in-affordable subscription costs. This research is denied even to the very governments that have funded that research.

Conclusion

There isn't a shadow of a doubt that open access is a significant contributor to innovation and, growth and development. It has the potential to deliver critical information to change the lives of people. Open access provides a new paradigm for libraries and librarians. It provides unprecedented opportunities for librarians to deliver rich content in the quest to ensure that there is growth and development. It has the potential to deliver opportunities to loosen the noose of those communities that are strangled because of the lack of critical information.

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