

Bridging the Gap: Electronic Document Delivery and Networked Information Services

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Before Roger Jacobs assumed the directorship of the Kresge Law Library in 1985, we functioned basically as a self-contained library. Rarely did we share resources with other libraries. If we didn't own a title that a faculty member requested, we bought it — budget permitting, of course.

Over the past 13 years, however, economic and technological factors have caused libraries — ours included — to seek more creative ways to meet a variety of new research needs. No library has the resources to purchase all of the books its patrons demand, and in the last 15 years, the unit price of serials has increased by 138 percent and the unit price of monographs by 58 percent. Increased familiarity with the Internet and other on-line research services such as LEXIS and Westlaw has opened up research vistas previously unavailable when confined to a card catalog in a single library; faculty and students now expect us to be able to access in hard copy anything they can find on line. And they want it fast.

In response to these increased demands and pressures, libraries today work together to support the growth of networking, resource sharing and reliance upon commercial document delivery vendors as means of satisfying information needs. Through new "networked information" sources, libraries such as ours now have access to a collection far exceeding our hard-copy volume count. Just five years ago, the network of on-line library catalogs in North America alone numbered 450; today that network contains over 1,600 on-line catalogs. Clearly, joining these networks has provided us access to a great deal more information than we had when we were limited to research within the confines of our building.

In 1985, the Kresge Law Library joined the best-known library network, OCLC, a national and international network linking more than 15,000 libraries in 47 countries and territories to more than 35 million bibliographic records. OCLC has become our primary tool for the electronic transmission of interlibrary loan requests, helping deliver speedy and affordable electronic access to documents and titles we cannot own. Since joining the network, we have processed more than 24,000 requests in support of student and faculty research, providing access to books, articles, films, computer software and

other types of material. Some of OCLC's tailored products and services enhance the basic interlibrary loan request features of the network: FirstSearch gives library users access to over 60 on-line databases and more than 1.5 million full-text articles; Epic helps information professionals meet research demands efficiently and affordably by tapping into nearly 60 databases, many of which contain the full text of desired documents.

In addition to networking resources, we have employed some simpler means of receiving documents — for example, the fax machine we installed in 1987. And we are investigating the implementation of ARIEL, a document delivery system that permits rapid transmission of documents and images over the Internet. The images are higher quality and delivery is less expensive than fax transmission.

In 1993, we started using the new UnCover and UMI Article Clearinghouse document delivery systems for the delivery of single articles. UnCover, created by the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries, links document delivery to an integrated library system database of journals that are scanned and stored electronically. UMI Article Clearinghouse offers quick service for copies of articles from a huge range of titles. We use UnCover and UMI as backups when costs from other document holders are high and when rapid response to requests is important.

Document delivery and interlibrary loan processes have evolved over the past 15 years, but at the Kresge Law Library, with our improved technology base and with increased interaction among our library faculty/staff and the faculty/staffs of other law libraries, we have been well poised to take advantage of these new methods for obtaining information. As our patrons seek out more and more information to satisfy their research needs, we

will continue to use these networked methods, and we will continue to support the development of enhanced methods of document delivery.

How the Kresge Law Library bridges the gap between the vision of the "virtual library" and our patrons' actual and immediate needs is a challenge that, based upon the history of service in the library, will not go unanswered.



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