

Organising National Consortia for Licensing Bibliographic, Citation and Fulltext Databases

by SIGRID TOLLEFSEN & MIMMI GULLIKSEN

INTRODUCTION

RBT has been invited to present the status for consortia agreements for access to bibliographic databases, citation indexes and full-text resources in Norway.

The English name of RBT is „The National Office for Research Documentation, Academic and Special Libraries”. We are the State’s highest authority in the field of research documentation and the academic and special library sector in Norway. RBT has an overall responsibility for securing access to, and the effective use of documentation in higher education and research. The team working with consortium agreements consists of Mimmi Gulliksen, Sigrid Tollefsen and RBT’s Director General Kirsten Engelstad who has the main responsibility.

Norway is a small country with only 4,5 million inhabitants and a relatively small academic landscape. This gives publishers and agents a unique possibility to test and evaluate new services. For scientific libraries and for RBT it is an advantage being small but it can also be a drawback because we sometimes are presented with unrealistic prices and expectations.

RBT’s first license agreements were established in 1995/1996. Today, almost every institution within higher education in Norway and also several Norwegian research institutes participate in one or more of our agreements.

Through the work with license agreements, RBT has gained considerable experience about the importance of preparatory work when it comes to negotiations, implementation of services, marketing and training, user support, technical matters (etc.).

There has only been marginal governmental funding of the services and the institutions have paid for the subscriptions through their ordinary budgets.

Organising National Consortia for Licensing Bibliographic, Citation and Fulltext Databases

From an economical point of view, the costs of new services must be justified through heavy use and by adding value to already existing services. Therefore we have to ensure that new services are based on documented needs, and that they are closely integrated with other services the end users already know.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC AND CITATION DATABASES

RBT has gone from coordinating agreements for bibliographic and citation databases in 1996 to working with definitions as to how implementation of full-text services should be in Norway. And we are now preparing the first consortium agreements for full-text journals for Norway from January 2000. During the work with consortium agreements, RBT has worked closely with BIBSYS, which is the integrated system for Norwegian academic and special libraries, as well as for the National Library. The BIBSYS system handles both the BIBSYS union catalogue and local system services. BIBSYS has a strong tradition for system integration and cooperation, and has been a partner in several Nordic and European projects focused on such goals. RBT and BIBSYS have cooperated on implementing the RBT consortium agreements, based on common interests in giving easy access to qualified information resources for the users. While RBT has dealt with all administrative and negotiating parts, BIBSYS has worked on technical issues.

Today, RBT administrates 3 larger consortium agreements with OCLC, ISI and Ovid. From January 1996, institutions within higher education and research in Norway were able to offer their students and staff free use of databases in the OCLC FirstSearch service via Telnet, and from March 1996, via web. This agreement now consists of 41 member institutions and many of those also subscribe to additional databases through OCLC or Ovid. As a part of their special Digital Library project (BDB), BIBSYS is now working with OCLC's WebZ to implement a Z39.50 based common user interface (gateway) to several bibliographic databases, and with the intention to integrate this with holdings in the BIBSYS union catalogue.

From 1996, RBT's agreement with ISI has given the academic community in Norway access to 3 citation databases through a web interface made by BIBSYS. BIBSYS is hosting data from the ISI-databases and the interface was developed by BIBSYS at a time when ISI had still not developed their own Web of Science interface.

The ISI interface presents article records together with local journal holdings information from the BIBSYS union catalogue, and also with links to the copy ordering service of BIBSYS. These functional additions offer the end users a possibility to come one step further from a relevant hit in a search process to actually access the primary document. The linking also contributes to better cost-effective exploitation of Norwegian library resources and is one of the most important reasons for the popularity and heavy use of the ISI databases. Enthusiastic users market the service by talking to colleagues in their own institutions as well as in other institutions.

The first three-year agreement with ISI has been renewed for a new three-years period and now gives access to the three citation databases back to 1987. The consortium started with only 35 member institutions, but has now grown to 62, representing both higher education and research institutions.

After a pilot project where a set of medical databases delivered through 3 different hosts (OCLC, Silverplatter and Ovid) were tested by end users, librarians and super users at several test institutions, RBT signed an agreement with Ovid running from January 1999. The agreement gives access to a core package consisting of MEDLINE, CINAHL and EBMR. This agreement will be expanded to other health institutions (e.g. hospitals) from year 2000. A premise during the negotiations with Ovid was that the linking to holdings and copy ordering functionality through the BIBSYS system should be implemented in the Ovid search interface.

When coordinating agreements, RBT focuses on marketing and training. Marketing of the services to the head of the institutions and the employees is essential. Training resources and end user support should be directed to end users within different disciplines. Data technical support at the member institutions is also important to ease the access to the services and to ensure that the institutions get „value for money”.

TOWARDS FULL-TEXT RESOURCES

Today, end users are able to do information search and retrieval activities themselves.

A consequence of this is new demands as to how functionality of the services and integration of different services have to be implemented. Once end users can seek and find relevant literature, data and information directly from their computers and send loan requests online to their library, the next

logical step is to give them access to the entire text right from their own PC when possible. End users with access to the entire text will be able to locate the articles they need when they need them, provided that the services have good technical conditions and informative instructions. But still many users want a printed copy of a journal to leaf through.

RBT appointed in March 1998 a „Working Group for the Planning of Consortium Agreements for Access to Full-text Resources for institutions in Higher Education and Research”. The Working Group concluded its work in December 1998, and the Working Group’s report is also available in English on URL: <http://www.rbt.no/fellesavtaler/fulltekst/welcome_eng.htm>.

To survey the availability of relevant full-text resources, the Working Group started in Spring 1998 by gathering information on the journals offered by some of the most central providers. BIBSYS then compiled a database of around 6200 journals based on the received material. The report details the different providers’ coverage of these journals in terms of both quantity and per cent. The degree of overlap between the various providers is also noted. To gain a measure of the academic breadth represented by these journals, the titles were roughly classified into disciplines. The providers’ coverage of full-text journals is also stated relative to disciplines.

We know that some journals are more central and relevant to specific disciplines than others. Therefore, it was necessary to define certain criteria to help identify which scientific journals were considered to be the most central in various disciplines as viewed by Norwegian institutions. We therefore asked the institutions to specify preference reports of the most relevant journals in different disciplines, irrespective of their availability in full-text versions.

In addition to this, to ensure that central journals were not overlooked, a number of other indicators denoting relevance were also used:

- number of registered subscriptions of journals in the BIBSYS union catalogue, including duplicate subscriptions;
- number of copy orders registered online in the BIBSYS electronic copy order facility;
- journals in the ISI database in which Norwegian scientists and researchers publish most often;
- journals in the ISI database most often cited by Norwegian scientists and researchers.

An analytical selection of journals was put together on the basis of these criteria together with the preference reports. We then looked at the different providers coverage of the analytical selection. This selection of journals is an analytical tool to help compare providers' coverage individually and in various combinations. A list of the journals included in the analytic selection based on several criteria of relevance can be accessed on URL: <<http://www.rbt.no/fellesavtaler/fulltekst/rapport/tidsskrifter/analutvalg.htm>>.

The Working Group also defined a number of requirements regarding technical functionalities which full-text consortium agreements should incorporate. The possibility of integration of services is important because no single provider can provide the necessary breadth. Paying for access to full-text must therefore give the right to access the documents from different bibliographic search interfaces the end user is already familiar with. It is also important to facilitate access to these services regardless of where the users are by offering access to a set of services on the basis of a single username and password as a supplement to access control based on domain names or IP addresses.

Direct access to full-text articles should have to be supplemented by copy ordering and ILL as the number of journal titles in electronic format and the available issues are still rather low. It is important to avoid that end users restrict their searches to full-text documents unless they are determined to do so. Ideally, end users should use different bibliographic and citation databases for the optimal searching and then access the most relevant hits through tight integration with full-text services and ILL-functionalities.

When it comes to further development and renewal of consortium agreements for full-text, market surveying will represent a significant factor. Logging of the use of articles through full-text services and ILL over a period of time will contribute to identify the most heavily used and relevant journals and resources.

RBT thinks that instead of focusing on ready-made packages with a high number of journals, it is necessary to focus on

- journals that are used for research and studying,
- journals that are used for knowledge updating and problem solving,
- journals in which scientists and researchers publish most often,
- journals that are frequently cited by scientists and researchers.

The relevance of the available journals in full-text is an important factor for the institutions' willingness to pay for the full-text services.

Organising National Consortia for Licensing Bibliographic, Citation and Fulltext Databases

There are different types of statements concerning consortia agreements. RBT is member of ICOLC (the International Coalition of Library Consortia) and we also especially welcome the increased focus on technical features and statistics.

While today's electronic journals in most cases are plain electronic versions of the print version, we see that the future will give us journals with far more functionality by adding 3-dimensional graphic and video display etc. This gives the end user the possibility to interact with tables and graphic display etc when accessing the document. We have said that we consider it important that libraries collaborate with providers to create seamless access to the relevant journals for end users. But – and this is just as important – we would also like to work closely with publishers on developing new services and testing electronic versions of journals and other full-text resources with enhanced functionality.

As we are proceeding towards consortium agreements for full-text resources, RBT and BIBSYS are in the middle of a trial period including all institutions in higher education in Norway. During the trial, students and staff will be able to test several services. At the same time, RBT is preparing the first full-text consortium agreements that will be running from January 2000. Our intention is to offer value-adding services to the end users from the start of the agreements.

When we look at initiators of new consortium agreements, we find different players. Initiatives come from users within different disciplines. We see old and new organisations wanting to sell their products (databases, journals, software) and they create new alliances and take new roles. We also meet consortia needing more partners to reduce prices and cross-country initiatives. This brings up an important issue as already well-established consortia can threaten each other because of the total costs. We therefore think that it is important that new agreements build on documented needs and realistic expectations. And that the agreements are targeted towards different disciplines in the scholarly community.

Sigrid Tollefsen & Mimmi Gulliksen
National Office for Research Documentation, Academic and Special Libraries
POB 8046 Dep
0030 Oslo, Norway
Tel: +47 23 11 89 00
Fax: +47 23 11 89 01
rbt@rbt.no