Connecting People and Information: How an African special library is building bridges

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The right people, information and decisions.

Behind every good business decision is an information professional.
“Between a rock and a hard place”
But, there’s potential!
CSIR
(Council for Scientific and Industrial Research)

- Leading scientific research organisation in Africa
- Established in by Act of Parliament in 1945
- Multidisciplinary research: Biosciences, Natural Resources and Environment, ICT, Materials and Manufacturing, Built Environment and Defence.
- Approximately 700 research staff
CSIR, Pretoria, South Africa
CSIR Information Services

- Twenty-seven staff members plus interns
- Centralised library services with information specialists placed in Operating Units
- Small information centres at remote sites
- At one time the top S&T library in the country
- Collection Budget: Operating Units pay for all books, journals and other published material.
First Steps on CSIRIS’ Digital Journey:

- Early 2000s: faced an information “chasm”
- Journal subscriptions had dwindled from over 6000 in the early 80s to less than a thousand titles.
- First step: Electronic Table of Contents service to compensate for cancelled subscriptions (one Unit cancelled all their subscriptions)
- Difficulties:
  - TOC arrived up to 6 weeks before copies were available in the country – no ILL
  - Copyright – too many articles from one issue
- Very slender connection but a start……!
The first cable of our bridge connecting researchers and electronic information is strung!
Early access

- 2003: Started subscribing to 3 e-journal platforms through SASLI deals: ScienceDirect, EbscoHost and ACS
- Researchers embraced the digital age enthusiastically
- 35103 downloads during the first year
- Embargoes still a problem
- Access to only a limited number of publishers

But, our bridge was starting to look distinctly better ….
Still a bit wobbly, but we’re getting there!
Beyond 60 Initiative

• 2005 – CSIR 60 years old.

• Mandate: “multidisciplinary research….to improve the quality of life of the people of South Africa”

• CSIRIS - pivotal role in enabling our scientists to do innovative and groundbreaking research

• Information audit July 2005 – 300 researchers
  • Questionnaires, interviews, discussions

• Support from top scientists (Fellows)
  • Document: “User needs for information access, data analysis, knowledge management and reporting”.
Lobbying CSIR Executive

CSIRIS Task Team:

- Appointed by CSIR Executive
- Report: “Meeting the needs of the future CSIR as leading multidisciplinary research and technology innovation organisation”
- Pointed out urgent need for more e-resources
- Outlined a Virtual Research Environment (VRE) for the CSIR which would support the complete e-research process
- List of recommended resources and costs
e- Resources Evaluation Process

- Information mapping exercise results
- Emerging Research Areas (ERAs)
- Additional recommendations/requests
- SASLI deals
- Value for money, not necessarily cheapest!
Some Serious Civil Engineering!

- E-journal platforms grew from 3 to 11 in a matter of months.
- Several A&I databases and other e-resources added as well.
- Carefully selected Open Access resources.
- Federated search – Google Scholar SFX (free to developing countries).
- A-Z title list.
- 2008: Linking to 28 e-journal platforms, 12 A&I databases and many other e-resources.
Measuring value

CSIR Fellows’ requirements:

“… researchers need access to 90% of their information requirements within minutes, 95% within days, and 100% within 2 weeks. The most appropriate mechanisms to satisfy these needs vary according to information type”.
How are we doing against the standard?

- Downloads (Instant access) 97%
- Paper document delivery within 1 week: 3%
- Book deliveries still a problem – e-books?
- Information needs not met?
CSIR
Full text Downloads 2003-2007

E-jnl article downloads 2003-2007

2003 2004 2005 2006 2007
Connecting the World to the CSIR
An Institutional Repository (IR) has been defined as a set of services for storing and making available digital research materials created by an institution and its community.

Source: Library Consortium of New Zealand (LCoNZ)
CSIR Institutional Repository

- CSIR Research Space launched August 2007
- Open access
- Aims to preserve and disseminate intellectual output of CSIR researchers
- First non academic IR to exist in SA
- Runs on D-Space software
- Access via internet
- Registered with major repository harvesters
CSIR Research Space Structure

- **General science, engineering & technology**
  - General science, engineering & technology
    - General science, engineering & technology

- **Information & communication technology**
  - Accessibility research
  - Citizen information services
  - Digital doorway
  - First mile first inch
  - High performance computing
  - Human language technologies
  - ICT for earth observation
  - ICT in education, youth, gender
  - Intelligent environment for independent living
  - Knowledge systems group
  - Open source
  - Remote Sensing
  - Wireless technologies

- **Laser technology**
  - Laser materials processing
  - Laser physics and technology

- **Materials science & manufacturing**
CSIR Research Space Content

• Available in full text digital format (.pdf)
• Free downloads
• Copyright clearance for articles (via SHERPA RoMEO or publisher)
• Types of items published:
  • Previously published articles
  • Publicly funded research reports
  • Data sets
  • Multimedia files
  • CSIR research papers
• Withdrawal of items on the database should any copyright violations come to light
Access to CSIR Research Space

Access to Research Space

- Individual Robot/Spider
- Search Engine
- Referring Sites: Non-CSIR

- Aug
- Sep
- Oct
- Nov
- Dec
- Jan
- Feb
- Mar
Connecting CSIR Scientists with other Scientists

CSIR Knowledge Commons

Purpose

• Facilitate knowledge exchange
• Scientific interaction
• Networking
Knowledge Spaces

- Individual or Space – individual time for learning, concentration and reflection
- Team Space – collaborative learning
- Social Space – casual interaction in a non-threatening environment

Source: Doyle and Nathan (2002)
What the CSIR Knowledge Commons will offer:

- Carrels
- Work stations
- Reading area
- Coffee shop
- Project display area
- Auditorium
- Training room
- Discussion rooms
- Help desk
Tips on Building Bridges

• Align your goals with that of the organisation
• Know your allies in high places & draw on their influence
• Use every opportunity to demonstrate the value of information services – get on the agenda of executive meetings
• Negotiate!
• Build good relationships with publishers
• Make use of special offers for developing countries
• Link to relevant Open Access (OA) resources – keep up to date on what’s available
• Use Open Source Library Software (OSS)
• Make access to information easy for your users
“Moving from Collections to Connections”

Linda Stoddart, Dag Hammarskjöld Library, United Nations
Questions?

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Full Paper: