Technical Services and Open Access: A Few Challenges

Andrew Waller

I am in favour of Open Access and have been a longtime supporter of and participant in the movement. However, like any "big thing", OA bring issues for libraries, many of which relate to technical services. As a university serials librarian, working in a collections department that is closely-linked with acquisitions and cataloguing units, I can see a number of interesting OA-related challenges and scenarios. A few are presented here.

Open Access is probably best defined by the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI), which says:

> By "open access" to this [scholarly] literature, we mean its free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. The only constraint on reproduction and distribution, and the only role for copyright in this domain, should be to give authors control over the integrity of their work and the right to be properly acknowledged and cited[1].

Generally-speaking, the OA movement has two "arms": self-archiving and open access publishing. The former involves making content openly available through institutional repositories[2] and/or subject repositories[3] while the latter involves reforming scholarly publishing to permit OA.   Much of the focus has been on making academic journal articles freely accessible, though there is talk that other material could also become OA.

Licensing and OA

Normally, licensing is a standard element in the purchase of electronic products by libraries. Licensing establishes the relationship between the licensor (publisher or vendor) and the licensee. Licensing can also allow for uses beyond what is granted via copyright law; for instance, a license can be negotiated to permit the inclusion of licensed content in electronic course packs and reserve systems.

With a purchased product, if there is no license, the default is to follow the uses given under copyright. Usually, no license is signed when OA material is made accessible via a library. What is the situation with the use of OA content, then? On one hand, it could be said that OA material is free to employ in more ways than more restrictive copyright law would allow; this seems logical, considering the philosophy behind Open Access. On the other hand, this may

not be the case; with no license, there is nothing to firmly define the uses of the content. I suspect that this is something that will be worked out in practice as OA becomes more established in the library and publishing worlds.

Purchasing Gives Libraries (Some) Power

When a product is bought and sold, a relationship of sorts is created between buyer and seller and some expectations emerge – for example, that the product will be delivered on time; it will function; the buyer will be able to get the product repaired if it is not working or be refunded the purchase amount; etc. This applies as well to the "toll-access" world of library acquisitions. Libraries purchase a product and, accordingly, have the ability to call upon the publisher or vendor when there is a problem. Even with electronic products, where a purchased item is often not held locally but accessed at a distance, the responsibilities of the seller (as well as the buyer) are often entrenched in a signed license.

How does this apply to OA publications?   If there is no subscription and no license, what sort of leverage does a library have when the OA content has become difficult to access or has disappeared altogether? I am sure that most OA publishers are just as responsive to user's concerns as their non-OA counterparts are but this could be a concern from time to time.   Perhaps there is a role in libraries funding Open Access. OA has to be paid for in some way; there are always some costs to making material available and this is one of the main issues facing the OA movement. While money to fund OA initiatives and programs does not come from subscription fees, it can come from a myriad of other sources, such as advertising, sponsorship, grants, and submission fees, among many others. If libraries are making these payments, as some models suggest they should be, maybe the conditions of payment could include guarantees of access and the solving of problems, as exists with payment -based products.

Making OA Content Accessible

In many ways, OA material is easy to find. OA articles can be located through searches in broad search engines such as Google, Google Scholar, and Elsevier's Scopus. The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) does a great job of bringing together and listing OA titles[4]. OA journals are listed in ISI's Web of Science citation service and are increasingly appearing in journal indexing and abstracting tools. Many libraries have included records for OA titles in their catalogues and A to Z lists, often employing MARC record and open URL services. Still, there is likely more that can be done. I regularly come across OA journals that are "unconnected"; they aren't in the DOAJ (yet) and they appear in no indexes. It seems to me that it is critical for OA publishers, the administrators of repositories, and libraries to push to make sure that OA material is properly "covered" in as complete way as possible. This is especially important

considering that most OA titles are new and that it can take a number of years for material to appear in indexes, citation services, catalogues, and such.

Non-Journal OA Material

As noted, the bulk of the presently-available OA content is made up of journal articles; much of what is in repositories are articles and the OA publishing world is almost solely concentrated on scholarly journals. In the future, it is quite possible that the focus of the OA movement will remain on journals and not include other formats. On the other hand, what if Open Access is spreads from the e-journal world to e-books, for example? How will this affect libraries?

Libraries are well-suited to deal with e-journals; though mostly a creature of the World Wide Web and, thus, relatively new, they are also well-established; for all intents and purposes, in the academic world, the word "journal" means "e-journal". Though they have been around for almost as long, e-books are much less established than e-journals are; in some ways, they are five or more years behind e-journals. At the same time, however, e-books are coming along strong. Most large commercial publishers are now offering annual suites of titles numbering in the hundreds and thousands and the platforms on which e-books reside finally appear to be getting some traction with users, something that has long eluded e-books. As a result of this recent surge, libraries and their technical services units are now struggling with serious acquisition and cataloguing questions (e.g. getting suitable MARC records for big e-book collections). If we are having some trouble getting a handle on toll-access e-books, what will happen if OA e-books appear? I have a feeling that solutions will be found but there may be some growing pains.

Early Days

Open Access is a new and, at times, a controversial development for libraries and others involved in scholarly communication. This article presents some challenges and scenarios emerging from the OA movement that libraries - in particular technical services - have to deal with already or may have to deal with in the future. We are still in the early days of OA so there are no firm answers here; many responses still have to be developed. However, the issues described here are not at all alien from what libraries normally face; accordingly, problems will be solved and effective solutions will be implemented.

Andrew Waller (waller@ucalgary.ca) is Serials Librarian at the University of Calgary. He is a member of the CLA Open Access Task Force, the CLA Technical Services Interest Group, and is the convener of the CLA Collection Development and Management Interest Group.

Notes

1. Budapest Open Access Initiative, http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml.

2. Many universities and some other institutions have institutional repositories. A list of the Canadian university repositories can be found at http://www.carl-abrc.ca/projects/institutional_repositories/canadian_projects-e.html.

3. Subject repositories for library and information science include E-LIS (http://eprints.rclis.org/) and DLIST (http://dlist.sir.arizona.edu/). The author is one of the Canadian editors for E-LIS.

4. As of Tuesday, August 21, 2007, there were 2804 journals listed in the DOAJ. The URL for the DOAJ is www.doaj.org.