Current Awareness Services for Electronic Journal Literature

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Introduction

Current awareness services are the services that provide information about the latest books, articles, events and news in a field. Nowadays, there are many sources of information and the volume of new research is so huge that keeping oneself up to date is a big task. Current awareness services help us to match current awareness news and information to our needs. They can save the effort of scanning and browsing journals, bulletins, newsletters and web sites.

Before we start detailed description of different aspects of current awareness services, it looks quite logical that we first have a look at the concept, importance and special features of electronic journals for better understanding the need of current awareness services for them.

Electronic Journals

Although "electronic journal" is a common term but editors and librarians have not reached consensus in defining or classifying electronic periodicals. An early definition presented by McMillan in 1991 described electronic journals as "any serials produced, published, and distributed . . . via electronic networks such as Bitnet and the Internet" [1]. Later descriptions distinguished between electronic journals available only in

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electronic form, and electronic editions of journals available both in print and electronic forms and among types of electronic journals, such as online, CD-ROM, and networked journals.

According to the *Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors*, electronic journals are "periodicals, usually topical and moderated, that are published and disseminated (sometimes on an irregular schedule) in the form of electronic text or hypertext on computer networks (such as the Internet) or other computerized media (e.g., CD-ROM)" [2].

Dictionary of Library and Information Science describes electronic journal as "a digital version of a print journal, or a journal-like electronic publication with no print counterpart (*example*: *EJournal*), made available via the Web, e-mail, or other means of Internet access" [3].

Features of Electronic Journals

Presentation in Multiple Formats

Articles in electronic journals are presented in several formats, most commonly in HTML (HyperText Markup Language) and PDF (Portable Document Format). HTML is the typical format for Web pages. It is good for on-screen reading and for making use of hyperlinks. PDF presents a graphical image of a page. It is often used to provide a Web version of the pages of an article that was previously published in print. Thus, it more closely resembles a print publication and is more likely to be found in the electronic edition of a journal that also has a print edition. Some readers find a printout of a PDF page to be more aesthetically pleasing than an HTML printout. Others find the text less legible than the text on an HTML page. To view a PDF file on a Web site, special software is needed. This software, Adobe Acrobat, is available free from Adobe Systems. Mostly, when you arrive at a Web page that provides PDF files, that page will also provide a link to the Adobe Acrobat download site. The software can be easily installed and

your Web browser automatically accesses set up when it needs to read a PDF file.

Some journals use both HTML and PDF formats. An example of such journals is the Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, an education journal published by Vanderbilt University. See:

http://www.aln.org/publications/jaln/v2n2/index.asp

Full Text Searching

Full text searching is another significant advantage of electronic over print publications. There are, of course, search aids in print publications (tables of contents, abstracts, in-text headings, end-of-issue indexes, multiple-issue indexes), and some of these features may also be presented in electronic journals. However, the type of searching available in a Web-based journal with a good search engine that allows multiple keyword searching with Boolean logic (i.e., combining terms with AND, OR, and NOT) has a great advantage over print-based access.

The Journal of Statistics Education (JSE), for example, has a facility with which readers can search all the issues of the journal. The articles are available in full text. See:

http://www.amstat.org/publications/jse/

The Scholarly Communications Project at Virginia Tech maintains a collection of education-related electronic journals on its Web site. Readers can perform a keyword search of the entire collection or of individual titles. See:

http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ej-search.html

A multiple-issue index can be presented for some print publications. An example of this feature, an author index covering all issues of an electronic journal, is available at the Web site for the journal, *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship.* A difference between a multiple-issue index in a print form and a

Web-based index can be seen on the Web. Readers can jump immediately to the desired article. See:

> http://www.library.ucsb.edu/istl

Electronic Notification of Publication

Since issues of electronic journals do not arrive in the daily mail, potential readers need to either check the journal's Web site around the expected time of the next issue, or have another method of being informed of the issue's publication. One such method is a journal-related Listserv or discussion list. The publisher posts a notice to the list, or simply have their e-mail address added to a notification whenever new issues of the journal are uploaded, or when other new features are added to the journal Web site. For example, on the Web site for the journal *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship,* a box is provided in which readers can fill in their e-mail addresses if they want to be informed when future issues of the journal are available. See:

> http://www.library.ucsb.edu/istl

Provision of Related Resources

For Web-based journals, the publisher can provide resources and information related to the topic of the journal or of individual issues. These resources may be presented as sections of the Web site separate from the actual issues of the journal. These resources resemble the types of resources one finds on Web sites rather than in traditional journals, including Internet links, topical bibliographies, related publications, etc.

Constant Access

A major benefit of electronic journals is that they are always available. Readers need not be concerned about getting to their library before closing time, nor about the occasional disconcerting discovery that the journal issue they want is missing or damaged due to theft or vandalism.

Electronic Journals in Pakistani Libraries

Electronic journals can also be accessed through special and as well as university libraries in Pakistan. The libraries are taking advantage of both the open access as well commercial information resources available through Internet. With the launching of National Digital Library Program by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), it has become possible for almost all the higher education institutions in Pakistan to get access to various electronic databases having more than 17000 quality research journals across a wide range of disciplines. At the moment, following databases are available through HEC Digital Library:

- American Association of Physics Teachers
- American Chemical Society
- American Institute of Physics
- American Mathematical Society
- American Physical Society
- American Society of Microbiology
- American Society of Agricultural Engineers
- American Society of Civil Engineering
- American Society of Mechanical Engineering
- Association of Computing Machinery
- Blackwell Synergy
- Bentham Science
- Ebscohost
- Elsevier (Science Direct)
- Isi Web of Knowledge
- Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers
- Jstor
- Mary Ann Liebert
- Optical Society of America
- Oxford University Press
- Palgrave Macmillan
- Royal Society of Chemistry

- Springerlink

Current Awareness Services

"A service or publication designed to alert scholars, researchers, readers, customers, or employees to recently published literature in their field(s) of specialization, usually available in special libraries serving companies, organizations, and institutions in which access to current information is essential. Such services can be tailored to fit the interest profile of a specific individual or group. Some online catalogs and bibliographic databases include a "preferred searches" option that allows the library user to archive search statements and re-execute them as needed" [4].

Types of Current Awareness Services

Harris [1] has pointed out the following general types of current awareness services:

1. Alerts for the table of contents of journals or news articles on a topic.
2. E-Newsletters and Weblogs. E-Newsletters might be an article from a specialist, a news digest, or an alert to content at a website. Weblogs may offer an alternative view or a running diary.
3. RSS Feeds from web sites, usually news. Use a web newsreader.
4. Current news filtered by topic. Users select from topics pre-defined by the service and may also create their own. There is a huge range in level of sophistication, style of delivery, number of sources used, and price.
5. News syndicators stream news to an Intranet or corporate portal. Select topics and/or construct special trackers.
6. Notifiers or web page monitors report on changes at a web page.

There are many other types of current awareness services but they are out of the scope of this paper. Here we would discuss

only the services that are related to the electronic journal literature. Galter Library Education Team [2] and Mary Harrison [3] of Manchester Metropolitan University have suggested three types of current awareness services for the journal literature. These are:

- Table of Contents (TOC) Alerts
- Saved Keyword Search Alerts
- Cited Reference Alerts

Table of Contents (TOC) Alerts

Table of Contents (TOC) Alerts are used to identify journal titles of interest and to receive an e-mail copy of the table of contents as new issues become available - often in advance of the publication of the print edition of the journal. TOC Alerts are good for acquiring an overall awareness of trends and developments and for occasionally spotting relevant articles.

TOC Alerts are provided by most electronic journal publishers and are available without cost to non-subscribers as well as subscribers. Subscribers, however, will have the added advantage of generally being able to link from the e-mail message to the full-text of the articles.

Individual publishers use different terms to describe their TOC Alert services, but usually these are found under such links as "Alerts," "Register" or "My" on the publisher's website. Setting up an alert rarely involves more than selecting journal titles from a list and supplying e-mail address - but online instructions are always provided on the publisher's website.

Among many publishers providing Table of Contents Alerts some are:

- American Chemical Society *<http://pubs.acs.org/>*
- Bentham Science Publishers *<http://www.bentham.org/>*
- Blackwell Synergy *<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/>*
- British Library Inside <www.bl.uk/online/inside/>
- CISTI Source <www.cisti.nrc.ca>

- Emerald <*http://www.emeraldinsight.com/*>
- Information Quest <www.eiq.com>
- Infotrieve- "the article store" (www.infotrieve.com)
- Ingenta <www.ingenta.com>
- Mary Ann Liebert <*http://www.liebertonline.com/*>
- Oxford University Press <*http://www.oupjournals.org/*>
- Palgrave MacMillan <*http://www.palgrave-journals.com/pal/*>
- Royal Society of Chemistry <*http://www.rsc.org/is/journals/peri.htm*>
- ScienceDirect <*www.sciencedirect.com/*>
- Springerlink <*http://www.springerlink.com/*>
- Wiley Interscience *www.interscience.wiley.com/*

Saved Keyword Search Alerts

If someone wants to be notified whenever a new article is published on a particular topic, then Saved Keyword Search Alerts will be more useful than TOC Alerts. A person can create a keyword search and then save it. This search will be run automatically on user's behalf at scheduled intervals and the results will be e-mailed to him/her.

Saved Keyword Search Alerts are provided by electronic journal services such as *Blackwell Synergy*, *Cambridge Journals Online*, *Emerald*, and *ScienceDirect* as well as by many of the other subscription-based abstracting and indexing services, including:

- ABC-CLIO databases: *America: History and Life* and *Historical Abstracts <http://www.abc-clio.com/>*
- BIOSIS <*www.biosis.org/*>
- Cambridge Scientific Abstracts databases, including *ArtBibliographies Modern*, *British Humanities Index*, *Environmental Sciences & Pollution Abstracts*, *LISA*, and *Sociological Abstracts < www.csa.com/>*

- Ebscohost, Including Academic Search Premier and Business Source Premier < *http://search.epnet.com/>*
- OVID databases, including *British Nursing Index*, *CINAHL*, *Food Science & Technology Abstracts*, *MEDLINE*, *PsycINFO*, *SPORTDiscus* < *gateway.ovid.com/>*
- SilverPlatter databases, including *Bibliography of the History of Art*, *MLA International Bibliography Database*, and *Philosophers Index Database <http://www.ovid.com/>*

In addition, the British Library's Zetoc service is recommended as the most comprehensive of the current electronic awareness services. Zetoc indexes the contents of approximately 20,000 current journals and 16,000 conferences, both UK and international and in virtually every subject area. Both Table of Contents and Saved Search Alerts are offered. To set up your account, simply login to Zetoc Alert and follow the onscreen instructions.

Cited Reference Alerts

Less common but very useful are Cited Reference Alerts which allow identifying individual journal articles and then receive notification whenever these articles are cited by a new journal article. This can be useful if someone wants to keep track of how the research community receives a particular article and study how other researchers are making use of its content.

Cited Reference Alerts are provided by:

- *Highwire Press <www.highwire.org>*
- *ScienceDirect <<www.sciencedirect.com/>*

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