

Consortium approach to e-resource sharing – a case study

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Abstract:

During last three decades, there has been dramatic price increases in journals subscriptions. Several studies carried out during 1990 and 1995 indicated that subscription rates have increased over 80%. As a result of increase in journals costs, depleting library budgets and drastic cuts in journals subscription, there is a big challenge before the Indian Library professionals to cope with the journals crises. As a result, library professionals are coming together for active resource sharing. In Indian context, there have been consistent efforts in forming consortia at different levels. The types of consortia identified are generally based on various models evolved in India in a variety of forms depending upon participant's affiliations and funding sources. Each model is premised upon different values, objectives and source of funding is discussed. The different models identified are: Open Consortia; Closed Group Consortia; Institute Headquarters funded model; Centrally Funded Models; Shared Budgets Models; and National Consortia.

In the Open Consortium model, we have discussed formation of consortia under FORSA wherein participants are affiliated to different government departments and who have astronomy as the main focus in their library collection. As such, FORSA has realized four consortium deals which are discussed briefly. What we learnt from these exercises is that many institutions are willingly coming forward to join consortia so as to access more information and publishers are also offering very lucrative offers so as to have more assured sales.

Introduction:

The challenge today is as to how to tackle the problem of ever proliferating electronic resources with rapidly changing ICTs. Since early 1960s, there have been tremendous changes in the area of library cooperation. Resource sharing has been the hallmark of libraries for cooperation, coordination and collaboration between groups of libraries at different levels (Nfila, R.B.,2002; Alexander, A. W., 2002; Xenidou-Dervou,2002). In India, there are networks established between special libraries at different levels, which function effectively towards sharing the resources among many specialized libraries (Vagiswari, 2001). As a matter of fact, these changes have necessitated librarians to change their role of keeper of library documents to that of navigator of information and come closer willingly for actively sharing information resources.

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Due to journals crises, the recent trend is that group of libraries are willingly coming together and negotiating to buy e – resources. This new scenario coupled with new forms of selling and purchasing information has led to new pricing models. Publishers and vendors/aggregators find it convenient to address consortia matter collectively rather than dealing with individually (Patil, Y.M., 2002).

There have been several studies to reveal that cost of journals has been increasing more than that of inflation rate or increase in library budgets thereby drastic cuts in journals subscriptions. The trend is that print editions are converted into e – editions and new ones are emerging in e – format only. Due to exorbitant costs of e – journals, we are compelled to form consortia that negotiates bulk discount with publishers (White, M., 2001).

Indian Consortia Initiatives:

Due to shift of print editions to e-forms and their proliferation, we have felt the need of going into resource sharing through consortial purchasing due to escalating costs of journals; pricing and licensing models. In the Indian context, consortia deals are more acutely felt and initiatives started much later compared to many developed countries. To begin with, a small group of like minded library professionals started coming together and made headways for negotiating consortia terms and conditions so as to access large amount of information with optimum payment. As of now, we have a few consortia formed and each one is model of its own as far as funding/affiliations are concerned.

As of now, there are about a dozen consortia are formed in India. Consortia like INDEST and UGC – Infonet function more professionally and are fully supported by Government funds. UGC – Infonet has followed e – only model whereas INDEST has followed print – based e – model. Consortia efforts are being very much appreciated campus wide by users as they are facilitating to access large number of e-resources.

Types of Consortia Models:

The number of consortia that have emerged in India in the recent past are generally based on participants affiliations and funding sources.(Satyanarayana, N.V., et al, 2004; Patil,Y.M., 2004; Patil,Y.M. et al,2006;Arora, J. 2005; Goudar, 2002). Consortia can also evolve from one model to another as their members become more comfortable with each other and develop collective agenda for sharing resources (Nfila R.B. and Darko-Ampem K, 2002).The following models represent a small sample of the range of the library consortia within the academic library community in India:

- Open Consortia:
 - FORSA; SNDT's LISA and INDEST;
- Closed Group Consortia:
 - CSIR; DAE and IIMs;

- Inst.Hqrs Funded Consortia:
 - TIFR; and its branch libraries;
- Centrally Funded Consortia:
 - CSIR; INDEST; UGC – Infonet; ICMR;
- Shared Budget Models:
 - FORSA; IIMs and HELINET;
- National Level Consortia:
 - INDEST; UGC – Infonet and ICARNET (being developed).

Keeping in view FORSA as a case study, let us look into parameters of an “Open Consortium”, in which FORSA is typical example.

- Members willingly come with open mind to form consortia with the spirit of true cooperation and trust;
- In an open consortia, one can join and leave subject to approval of the set committee which oversees such activities;
- A small homogeneous group, who have dire need to cross e – access the resources in a specific subject area;
- The model is self funded as each member has to pay his share;
- Publishers have a clause where it is necessary to go into number of years contract and no one could drop any titles during the period;
- The experience reflects that the consortium should begin with a charter of set guidelines in the form of MOU from participating members and another set of MOU recording specific commitment for each resource for which consortia deals are entered into.

Forum for Resource Sharing in Astronomy and Astrophysics (FORSA):

During 1980s, there was tremendous growth of scientific and technical literature. Due to proliferation of information, librarians working in astronomical institutes felt the need of coming together and join hands in sharing information held in each library. As a result, FORSA was informally launched on July 29, 1981 during Astronomy Librarians meeting held at Raman Research Institute, Bangalore, with a mission and vision to share and exchange information and make best use of available library resources (Bawdekar, N, 2003; Patil, Y.M., 2004a and 2004b). At present, there are twelve institutes as members of FORSA, viz. ARIES, BI, HRI, IIAP, IUCAA, NCRA, OU, PRL, RRI, SBNCBS, SINP, and TIFR. In the present day context, the objectives of FORSA are redefined in order to cope with changing information handling scenario (Patil, Y. M., et al, 2006).

FORSA Consortium:

This is an open model having participant institutes affiliated to different government departments. This is a model where professionals willingly come forward and support consortia formation. FORSA has realized in forming four consortium deals, viz. Indian Astrophysics Consortium (Springer-Kluwer); Nature Online; Scientific American Archive Online (EBSCO) and Lecture Notes in Physics (Springer).

We have a “sunset” clause, i.e. to review all consortia formed after contract period is over for a renewal, keeping in view each participant’s concern and experiences of the past years.

Indian Astrophysics Consortium:

(For Springer-Kluwer Physics/Astronomy Journals deal)

Vendor: M/S. Informatics (India) Limited, Bangalore, India

Participants: 2002 – 2004: ARIES, IIA, IUCAA, RRI and HRI;

2005 – 2007: ARIES, IIA, PRL, RRI and SNBNCBS;

2007 – 2008: ARIES, IIA, PRL, RRI and SNBNCBS;

This is a consortium with homogeneity of subject group – Astronomy and Astrophysics. During 2002, FORSA group entered subscription to astronomy journals of Kluwer through a vendor, as the publisher did not want direct subscription. The terms and conditions negotiated were for the period of three years.

Kluwer was merged with Springer during 2005 and few of FORSA members were also subscribing to Springer Physics journals. The renewal of the consortium was taken up with titles from both Kluwer and Springer with fresh negotiations for another term of three years, i.e. 2005 – 2007. There are again five members who have joined this consortium for the said period.

While forming consortium for Springer journals, we took an MOU from each participant to the effect that all would abide by the agreed terms and conditions and continue to be in the consortium for the period of three years and will not cancel any titles during the period. The general terms and conditions laid down during the negotiations are as follows:

- Perpetual access is provided to all members for the subscribed content for the subscribed period;
- The back file access is from 1997+;
- The online access is through IP authentication. The total subscription base decided in 2005 will be base figure for three years contract;
- If there are any deletion of titles, the total print spend in terms of value has to be maintained. In the event of any cancellation which may reduce the print spend, the publisher will explore the possibility of increasing the cross access fees or remove the price cap agreed;
- Springer titles under consortium will be COUNTER compliant providing

- individual journal usage statistics;
- To provide additional PW/ID if required by any of the participant without any additional cost.
- We negotiated for cross e-access fee and cap price for three years period.

Problems encountered:

- It was a maiden venture for the FORSA. To begin with, we did not have established guidelines to go into consortia formation;
- We have to believe in the middleman, who is expected to work on our behalf;
- The agent added one more member into the consortium without group's consent, whose titles were outside the interest of the Group thereby diluting the objectives of the consortium;
- This could have been avoided if members were aware of consortium guidelines and a formal committee to decide the membership of the consortium or FORSA.

Nature Publications Online deal:

(Nature Publishing Group).

Vendor: Direct with the Publisher's Representative in India.

1. Nature online

Participants:

2002 – 2003: IIA, IUCAA, NCRA, PRL, RRI and JNCASR*;

2003 – 2004: Bose Inst., IIA, IUCAA, NCRA, PRL, RRI, TIFR and JNCASR*;

2004 – 2005: ARIES, Bose Inst., IIA, IUCAA, NCRA, PRL, RRI, TIFR and JNCASR*

2005 – 2006: ARIES, Bose Inst., IIA, IUCAA, PRL, RRI, TIFR and JNCASR*.

2006 –2007: ARIES, Bose Inst., IIA, IUCAA, PRL, RRI, TIFR and JNCASR*.

(*Non-FORSA member wished to join the consortium).

2. Nature Physics Online

2007: RRI, JNCASR, Bose Inst., PRL and IIAP;

3. Nature Materials

2007: RRI, Bose Inst., JNCASR, IACS,

4. Nature Photonics

2007: RRI, Bose Inst., JNCASR,

5. Nature Nanotechnology

2007: JNCASR, Bose Inst.

This consortium is formed direct with the publishers. This is a case for multiple titles, which is common to all libraries and all journals having high impact factors. Although, the titles were available online earlier, but these were kept out of subscription as the cost was exorbitant!

For these titles, online is not clubbed with print editions and both are to be subscribed separately. Due to exorbitant cost of online editions, majority of FORSA members were subscribing prints edition by airmail.

FORSA could negotiate with the publisher and share the affordable cost and few members are participating in this consortium since 2002. Negotiations are done on year-to-year basis and the current renewal, i.e. 2006 – 2007 is the fourth year of subscription. Normal terms and conditions are negotiated for subscription renewal each year is as given below:

- Separate invoice for each participant and the Coordinator of the FORSA will sign the License Agreement Form on behalf of all participants;
- Perpetual access is provided for the period subscribed in the event of discontinuing subscription under the consortium and annual maintenance fee was also fixed; and CDs also can be supplied as per needs;
- Access to back files is from 1996+;
- It is COUNTER compliant and monthly usage statistics is provided;
- In addition to access against IP authentication, PW/ID is to be given without additional cost on request;
- There is cap price and negotiation is done based on current prices fixed by the Publisher.
- FORSA can have only Government sponsored or private research institutes as participants.

Problems encountered:

- FORSA is an informal group and there was no formal understanding, as one of the members has to take the responsibility of signing the License Agreement Form on behalf of all members;
- Publishers expected all members to join the consortium at the same time irrespective of their subscription to print or online, where there is likelihood of some period of duplication during the first year. As a result, it is being continued with mid-year renewal.
- While negotiating for the year 2006-2007, we encountered another problem. The publishers have checked downloads of each participant and it was noticed that one of the participant had maximum down loads, with a result Publisher was reluctant to charge same price as others. They had kept in mind the number of FTEs of each participant while checking number of downloads.
- As a result of which, they informed that the one who had maximum downloads had more number of FTEs than other participants having FTEs between 1-99 and considered for next slot of 100 – 999 and charged at next higher rate. Here, it would be given multiple site licensing. This is the case for dual pricing within the consortium.

Negotiations are done on year-to-year basis direct with publishers and no intermediary was involved. It was a win-win situation for all. Perhaps this was the **first Indian consortium**.

Consortium for Scientific American Online Archive:

(Scientific American)

Vendor/Aggregator: EBSCO Research Databases

Participants: IIA, IUCAA, NCRA, NCBS*, PRL, RRI, and JNCASR*

(*Non-FORSA members wished to join the consortium).

During 2005, we entered into consortium subscription to Scientific American Archive Online through EBSCO, an aggregator. There are seven participants in this consortium. The terms and conditions lay down for its consortium subscriptions are:

- It is available via Internet for a period of one year: Aug.2006 – July 2007;
- EBSCO Publishing is a publisher in itself having their own retrieval interface;
- The price negotiated should hold good for three years, i.e. 2005 – 2006 and 2006 – 2007 and 2007-2008;
- Access to current issue and archive back to 1993;
- No perpetual access is provided if the subscription is discontinued;
- Online access is provided to all participants through IP authentication;
- Usage statistics to each participant could be provided on demand;
- Payments have to be made by each participant and license agreement to be signed by every one.

As far print edition is concerned, it is not clubbed with online edition and if required, to be subscribed directly with the Publisher. As such, many have also opted for print edition, which is available as Indian Edition from mid of 2005.

Subscription to Lecture Notes in Physics (LNP):

(Springer)

Vendor: Informatics (India) Limited, Banaglore, India.

Participants: IIA, PRL, RRI, TIFR, SNBNCBS....

After successfully implementing Indian Astrophysics Consortium for Springer Physics and Astronomy journals for 2005, Springer proposed Open Consortium subscription to Lecture Notes in Physics at reduced rate to all participants with the following terms and conditions:

- It is open for subscription to all participants of Indian Astrophysics Consortium;
- Back file access promised from 1997 (but in effect it is from 1999+);
- Online access is through IP authentication to each participant;
- Additional PW/ID is provided and changed at regular intervals of every three months for technical safety measures;
- It is COUNTER compliant;
- Limited perpetual access to “bought or subscribed” content is allowed for two years after which a small maintenance fee is applied. As such, maintenance fee is yet to be decided.

Lessons learnt:

The present trend has given library professionals a bigger challenge resulting in many institutions willingly coming together in forming consortia in their subject fields. But these are all sporadic efforts running parallel to each other without any proper coordination, collaboration and cooperation. There are no set guidelines, standards and procedures, and every aspect has to be looked into thoroughly by the group concerned in negotiations.

It is true that in the scenario like the above models that were evolved during last five years in the country, there are some uncertainties at different levels, viz. professional, government and publishers/vendors levels, which need urgent remedies while negotiating for consortia deals (Birdie, Christina, 2002).

FORSA is in consortia business since last five years. Every participant monitors usage and statistics is obtained from each Publisher for each title, which are COUNTER compliant. Renewals are taken based on review at each Institute and any addition/deletion is done before confirming to participate in the consortium.

Consortia development activities are five years old in India. As of today, there are half a dozen consortia formed at different levels and new ones are still emerging. The experience gained with these new initiatives can serve as an important indicator to critically assess present scenario and evolve plausible national level consortium. Some of the lessons learnt from these efforts are mentioned below (Satyanarayana, N.V., et al, 2004).

- Ever increasing costs of journals, cuts in library subscriptions, more emphasis on resource sharing, evolving new technologies have been main driving forces to look into combined efforts for consortia formation at national level embracing entire field of science and technology;
- The approach is not professional for the reason of not having predefined set guidelines and basic documentation;
- Selection of e – resources is vendor or publisher driven and lacks specialist groups looking into resources and appropriate technology platforms;
- The continuity of consortia is in dilemma for the reason that funding strategy is not well defined;
- A formal commitment from each participant in the consortium with well defined procedures/guidelines, MOU among the members and well documented selection policies is a prime requirement for proper governance and management;

- In the context of larger consortia, training needs and implementation at various sites is not done effectively. Proper awareness among users through campus wide publicity about availability of various e – resources has to be given maximum attention;
- Smaller consortia are handled by individuals and bigger ones by a committee or group/s. There is no separate office or support by other staff and above all absence of leadership with executive powers. As such consortia are being stabilized and to continue on sustainable basis, there is an urgent need to allot adequate funds separately for their smooth operation and continuance;
- There is absence of proper monitoring, evaluation of various consortia and there should be some one responsible at each institution for handling consortia activities on regular basis;
- The two bigger consortia, viz. INDEST and UGC – Infonet, of which one can take a lead for establishing a National Site Licensing (NSL) with various publishers. NSL could be the best solution for India as majority of R & D organizations are directly or indirectly governed by Central Government agencies.

Urgent Need for Establishing PAM Group in India:

The INDEST and UGC - Infonet consortia are established with specific target group and at the present juncture, it may not be possible to join any of them. So many of the government research organizations are left behind and such organizations need to come together to survive in the present conditions.

Also the FORSA experiences have very clearly demonstrated that except a few members, others have different fields of studies covering areas like physics, mathematics and computer science. This diversity of areas is hindering physics/mathematics related institutes to form consortium in their fields of interest.

Besides members of FORSA, who have direct interest in physics and mathematics and computer sciences; can rope in other physics/mathematics related institutes in the country to coordinate and cooperate in resource sharing, and consortium deals. Thus, FORSA's activities could be expanded and its name may be rechristened like: Physics, Astronomy and Mathematics Group: PAM Group – India (Louis, 1999).

In addition to the different consortia initiatives taken by FORSA, some participants are joining other consortia like RRI joining INDEST consortium for IEEE/IEE Electronic Library (IEL) and IUCAA joining UGC – Infonet consortium keeping in view their immediate requirements.

Conclusions:

The resurgence of consortia initiatives in India is transforming information landscape. With the recent technological developments, changing scenario in information handling activities with thrust on resource sharing, willingness to meet the challenges and working together, consortia hold a big promise.

- What could be our real needs and challenges? They are to provide - expected service to our readers; to build internal consensus among the group; demonstrate integrity and good will with publishers, and every endeavor should be for high cost effective negotiations;
- We live in a very turbulent period - if we can not make expected progress towards instant access to electronic resources - then the key decision makers will shop elsewhere to meet their information requirements;
- The trend is that e - resources have come to stay and *ipso facto* library consortia;
- Indian efforts are moving slowly in forming consortia, but the sporadic efforts are not yielding desired results. We need a government funded national consortium with National Site Licensing covering all R & D institutions working under various government departments;
- It is suggested that consortia with the same goals and e-resources should merge while other consortia with different resources may collaborate for similar products and services to avoid duplication of efforts and enhance purchasing power;
- At least larger groups can be formed like PAM areas so as to establish consortia in the domain of physics, astronomy and mathematics at national level, as most of the institutes are coming under various central government departments;
- The present endeavors are no doubt a step forward for future national level needs and expectations.

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