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Getting information to the public & our users: the OECD experience

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Abstract:

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has opened a web site called SourceOECD that allows the purchase of its publications over the Internet. SourceOECD has the facility to allow clients to purchase parts of a publication, for instance a statistical table or even parts of a database. This allows much better precision for the customers than if they have to purchase the complete printed or PDF publication, the principle of SourceOECD being that our customers can buy online as little or as much as they need. It also allows them to download their purchases in advance of receiving a paper copy. This paper will demonstrate the practical aspects of using SourceOECD.

The Centre for Documentation and Information (CDI) at the OECD embarked on a radical change of its Internet site in 1999 and since then has offered to its clients a desktop catalogue in HTML with thousands of links to electronic periodicals and relevant Internet sites. A brief demonstration of the CDI's Intranet site and explanation of its evolution will be of interest to other librarians who are at either at this stage of development or are considering mounting their catalogue onto an Intranet/Internet site.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is a research organisation that groups 30 member countries sharing a commitment to democratic government and the market economy. It was founded in 1961 when it took over from its predecessor the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation which was established in 1948 to administer the Marshall European Recovery Plan. The organisation does research into and advises governments and policy makers on a wide range of economic and social issues.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how the OECD delivers information to its external clients and then how the OECD's Centre for Documentation and Information (CDI) delivers information to OECD agents.

PART A. Delivery to the Public

Delivery of information

Like any organisation that publishes and disseminates information, the OECD is always seeking ways of improving delivery of that information to the public. In addition to the sales points in bookshops at the Paris headquarters and in the offices in Berlin, Bonn, Mexico City, Tokyo and Washington the OECD has maintained for some years a web site¹ and an electronic bookshop where customers can buy publications online.²

On the web site, researchers can download the free material of which there is a considerable range, including working papers, statistical tables - such as the Standard Unemployment Rates for member countries, newsletters, information on conferences and other documents. For priced publications, up till the year 2000, it was necessary to go to the online bookshop and buy the printed publication.

SourceOECD³

For years, libraries and other customers have been able to take subscriptions to all or a designated area of printed OECD publications. With the availability of all OECD publications in both printed and PDF format, it seemed logical to offer customers the possibility of downloading instantly the priced material. In addition, with an electronic format it is possible to allow customers to obtain a whole publication or just a section of it, even down to the level of just one table or graph. This facility is important with publications like the OECD's which often contain lots of statistical tables and graphs. A customer may only wish to obtain a table for a particular country or index and may not wish to purchase a 200 page publication just for that one table.

So in 2000, the OECD inaugurated an online consultation and ordering system called SourceOECD, the OECD's online library of books, periodicals and statistics. The service is not primarily concerned with making a profit - although it is not free - the first principle for SourceOECD being the easy and user-friendly dissemination of OECD information. The portal was designed by OECD staff and built by Ingenta. SourceOECD feeds off the Ingenta database but was specifically designed as a tool for searching across all formats of OECD publications.

The SourceOECD Internet site

At the Home Page, users will find a quick search and an advanced search facility, or they can enter SourceOECD by using the links to books, periodicals or statistics. Alternatively, they can select from the drop down lists covering subject areas, countries, journals etc. If a user selects, for instance, from journals the latest edition of the *OECD Economic Outlook*, the resulting list allows the downloading of the whole

item or individual chapters. The principle is to give the searcher as much flexibility in searching and access as possible.

The “smiley” icon by the bibliographic reference indicates if searchers have the right to instantly download the publication or whether they should click on the link to the OECD’s online bookshop where they can purchase the it.

As well as books and journals in PDF format, customers can subscribe to databases. If one clicks on “globalisation” in the statistics drop down menu on the Home Page, the following page gives a brief description of the data and then allows the researcher to select one of the options from the 4 available for *Inward Investment from Industry*. Clicking on “expand” gives more detailed information on that particular database and clicking on “data availability” indicates the title and extent of the database and allows the delivery of the data. The customer is then guided through some optional variables and the table requested then appears on the screen for viewing and printing.

By clicking on “advanced options” it is possible to specify a format for downloading the data for later manipulation or inclusion in one’s own personal databases. The options are Excel, the ASCII comma delimited csv format capable of being imported into most spreadsheet formats, and Beyond 20/20’s ivt format. This latter software is the standard browsing format for the OECD’s databases available on the web or on CD-ROM and was chosen for its ease of use for non-specialist users.

Subscriptions to Source OECD

An annual subscription to all OECD publications both print and access to all the PDF files and databases in SourceOECD costs €17,590 for profit-making organisations. There are various discounts and pricing structures for non-profit organisations, government bodies, institutions in developing countries and consortia. More information can be obtained from the OECD sales team⁴.

Libraries and SourceOECD

A library can subscribe to SourceOECD providing access for the whole of its parent institution. This avoids the need to assign individual passwords for patrons as access can be controlled using ranges of IP addresses. Patrons only need a password if accessing SourceOECD’s data from a PC which falls outside the institution’s IP range, for instance when accessing from home or whilst travelling.

As is usual with the case of electronic formats of printed items, the PDF files of OECD publications are generally available some time in advance of the printed version. Another important facility for libraries is that periodical issues are archived from January 1998 onwards.

Amongst the future developments planned for SourceOECD of interest to librarians are:

- the provision of URL’s for individual publications which can be easily incorporated into library OPACs which will allow patrons to go directly from the library catalogue to the relevant page in SourceOECD;
- MARC records for OECD publications which can be downloaded directly into a library’s OPAC;
- OECD in figures, which will allow the downloading of individual graphs and tables from publications.

More information on SourceOECD and libraries can be found by clicking on “Librarians” on the Home Page.

PART B The OECD Centre for Documentation Information

To produce these publications and databases offered to the public, the economists, statisticians and researchers working at the OECD need to consult a wide range of material produced by researchers and experts from all over the world. This is where my own section the Centre for Documentation & Information (CDI) has an important role to play.

The CDI houses a collection of about 60,000 monographs with 150 of those online, and about 2,500 subscriptions to periodicals of which 1800 are available online. For a small library serving a client base of around two thousand agents, this is a strong concentration on periodicals. In addition, we have 700 monographic series available online. The economists and statisticians who form the backbone of the professionals working at the OECD need as up to date information as possible. There is therefore a heavy emphasis on periodical articles and academic working papers. In addition to our subscriptions to periodicals and to working papers, each year we also buy in from commercial services like the British Library and Ingenta some 2500 periodical articles and borrow some 1000 monographs from other libraries.

For the past few years, it has been our policy to provide as much information on our clients' desk tops as possible – to be as virtual as we can. The CDI seeks, where possible, to provide an electronic version of publications, which can be consulted by our clients in their own offices. The reasons for this are speed of delivery, convenience of use, space-saving and the fact that parts of the OECD are housed in annexes around Western Paris and it is not always possible for our clients to come to our reference room. We receive about 400 requests for material and information a month and the majority of these arrive by e-mail. Where we have the material available in electronic format, we can instantly provide an article or a piece of information, or clients can download the information themselves. Reference staff have access to a number of tools and databases to assist them in answering our clients' queries. It is not unusual that we are under tight time constraints to come up with an answer to a query as OECD staff do a lot of their work under strict deadlines. Amongst our most important reference resources is, of course, our own in-house catalogue.

The catalogue is run on Multilis software and since 1999 is housed on a Unix server with a Z39.50 server and the Web interface on an NT server allowing access to our catalogue across the OECD's Intranet. From the feedback we have had, most of our clients find the catalogue easy to use and appreciate being able to sit in front of their PCs and search for material without having to come to the CDI.

The principle of the first page of our catalogue is to offer links to all search options from page 1. Although this may sometimes give a cluttered appearance, I feel personally that it is better than clients having to click several times to arrive at the search page they are seeking or getting lost in a labyrinth.

Searches can be performed using:

- Keywords from the title
- Personal or corporate author
- Subject
- Series
- ISBN or ISSN
- Keywords from across all of the above.

"Predefined Searches"

Using subject terms and document type definitions in the CDI's catalogue records, it was possible when the Intranet catalogue was inaugurated to offer "predefined" searches. By this I mean using a definition such as "dictionaries" and "Czech language" in the subject fields, the client only has to click on a chosen language or languages and the record will display without any terms having to be typed in by the searcher. Similarly by combining a country and "universities" from the subject fields, it is possible to bring up all the records of the web sites of a particular country's universities. This facility of "predefined" searches proved popular with our clients and so the principle was extended to give further special searches:

- *Planisearch*

This is a geographic search, which permits the searcher to select a country and a particular area of interest such as statistics, central banks, parliament etc. The method again is by a post co-ordination of terms from the subject field, combining a country name with a definition of the type of information. Thus, a searcher may find all the records for Estonian TV channels that have been catalogued by CDI staff.

- *ThémaSearch*

The mechanics of ThémaSearch are slightly different from those of PlaniSearch above. Instead of using Subject terms, the document type has been given a specific theme code and this combined with the Document type "PER" or "SER" – for periodical or monographic series – allows the retrieval of the relevant records. For the searcher, however the mechanics behind the post co-ordinated searches may operate, the method is just to make a couple of choices by clicking on an item in a list or on an icon.

- *Database search*

In the catalogue are records for databases, whether on the Internet or on CD-ROM. By indexing each record as "data base" in the type of document field and combining this with subject terms, it is possible to offer pre-defined searches.

WWW sites

In our catalogue we have links to some 5000 Internet sites many of which have working papers, articles or research reports readily available in electronic format, usually PDF. By incorporating the URL Internet address in the MARC 856 field, it is possible to offer a direct link to the site from the notice in the catalogue. The records for Internet sites are delineated by the WWW icon. The catalogue uses several icons to inform searchers whether records are for printed sources, CD-ROMs, Online items or Internet sites.

PART C Conclusions

The European Commission's recent Digicult study comments in the introduction:

In the emerging knowledge society, there will be an increasing demand for high quality, enriched digital content as life-long learning is no longer a buzz word and continuous education has already become a must⁵

Librarians, archivists and museum professionals must therefore manage and exploit digital collections as efficiently as possible. The demand is there and has been there for some years now. Indeed, one of the Digicult study's conclusions is:

Anchored in national digitisation programmes, cultural heritage institutions should formulate organisational digitisation policies that transparently state selection criteria based on:

- 1) user demands,
- 2) the quality of the source material, and
- 3) future management of digitised material.⁶

It was in this spirit of attempting to meet user demands and to deliver quality digital material that SourceOECD was conceived. The quality of OECD publications has been recognised by governments, policy makers, academics and experts for many years now. The challenge for the organisation is to exploit the advantages offered by new technology in delivering information whilst maintaining the high quality of that information.

Likewise, we who work in the OECD's Centre for Documentation & Information must strive to continue to deliver timely and relevant information to the OECD researchers who are our client base. One of our tasks as I see it, is to relieve the “information overload” of our clients. With so much information now available on researchers’ desktops, the emphasis must now be on quality rather than quantity. By using our Intranet catalogue to filter, index and point to useful digital information we are playing our part in contributing to the quality of work done by OECD staff, and therefore to the quality of the information that they deliver to the world at large.

¹ <http://www.oecd.org>

² <http://oecdpublications.gfi-nb.com/cgi-bin/oecdbookshop.storefront>

³ <http://www.sourceoecd.org>

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⁵ European Commission. *Technological Landscapes for Tomorrow's Cultural Economy*. DigiCult Study. Brussels : EC, 2002. <http://www.salzburgresearch.at/fbi/digicult/index.html>. Introduction

⁶ ibid. Overview of Recommendations.