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The EBIB Electronic Library: from LIS e-journal to e-service. A bottom up initiative for a networked library service in Poland; a four-year perspective.

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Abstract

The EBIB Electronic Library (<http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl>) is an initiative involving 3 main areas of activity:

- ◆ *A regularly updated e-service providing useful links to library and information resources (focused on but not limited to detailed information on Polish resources),*
- ◆ *A monthly peer-reviewed journal,*
- ◆ *The organisation of national and international LIS conferences (2001, 2003) and projects (INFOBIBNET, BIBWEB), as well as moderation of open discussion forums.*

EBIB was established in 1997 by seven information specialists with different background (LIS lecturers, librarians and IT specialists from national, academic and special libraries). Within four years it has become a nationally recognised entity, acting as the Commission for Electronic Publishing within the Polish Library Association (PLA). Thanks to financial support from The Stefan Batory Foundation, selected papers and most of the services have been translated into English.

This paper presents the structure and procedures incurred in selected areas of the publisher's activities, the process of acquiring, maintaining and distributing information and data, some technical and human aspects of e-work. Special attention has been paid to changing patterns of information management and dissemination in our diversified library environment.

Introduction

The EBIB Electronic Library¹ is an e-service published by the Commission for Electronic Publishing² of the Polish Librarians Association. It consists of three main parts: a monthly journal, an information service and a portal to library resources, based on a set of databases and reference materials. EBIB also publishes conference proceedings, initiates and is involved in library projects³, moderates thematic discussion forums⁴, organises national and international conferences⁵ and workshops; many library conferences have also been organised under EBIB's media auspices⁶. At the moment EBIB is the most popular and comprehensive library e-service in Poland⁷. It consists of over 1.000 documents in Polish and over 200 in English. Links to its English version are also cited in many foreign library and information resources⁸.

Background

The EBIB Bulletin was created in 1999. In 2001 its name was changed to the EBIB Electronic Library in order to reflect the expanded contents of the service.

The idea of EBIB was introduced to the Polish librarians and information specialists' discussion list⁹ in 1998. The original meeting of those interested in the project took place in Warsaw at the National Library on 29 January 1999. Ten librarians¹⁰ from diverse professional backgrounds attended the meeting: information specialists from academic libraries, lecturers from LIS institutes, and a National Library specialist experienced in generating electronic information resources. As they were from different parts of Poland, they decided to co-operate within EBIB as a virtual team.

The very first idea was to create a monthly e-bulletin for Polish librarians and information specialists. Its mission was to integrate library and information professionals by delivering up-to-date and accurate professional information about Polish initiatives and current trends in library developments and achievements world-wide, as well as through an open-access discussion forum.

Development

¹ <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl> [read on 15 May 03]

² Commission for Electronic Publishing of the Polish Librarians Association was established on 24 Jan. 2001

³ INFOBIBNET: <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/net/index.html>, BIBWEB: <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/index.php> [read on 15 May 03]

⁴ Forums: <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/forum/index.php> [read on 15 May 03]

⁵ 1st National Conference "Internet w bibliotekach - próba bilansu" [Internet in Libraries - Present Situation] http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/2001/29/ebib_konf.html [report from the conference in Polish]; 2nd International Conference "Internet in Libraries - connectivity, cooperation, digitalisation" <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/konferencje/iwb2/indexe.php> [read on 15 May 03]

⁶ e.g. BOBCATSSS 2003, QUELLE Quality in Librarianship 2002, Marketing and Services Quality at Academic Libraries 2002; see also: <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/patronat.php> [read on 15 May 03]

⁷ over 150 000 visits from Jan to April 2003

⁸ Links to EBIB: <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/english/quot.php> [read on 15 May 03]

⁹ INFOBIB-l@man.torun.pl

¹⁰ A. Filipowicz, A. Komperda, M. Marcinek, S. Matuszewski, B. Michalska, A. Osiewalska, U. Puzkiewicz, A. Radwański, S. Skórka, Z. Zakrzewski

Scope

The first volume of the EBIB Bulletin¹¹ was published in April 1999. The initiative proved to be timely. Moreover, the editors of EBIB soon realised, that the expectations of library professionals towards EBIB went far beyond its assumed mission. That is why the monthly thematic bulletin was gradually supplemented with current information about professional events and on-going initiatives. In the first stage the editors decided to create and maintain permanent services, providing links to catalogues and home pages of Polish libraries, Polish library journals, library schools and courses of various types¹², Polish and foreign library organisations, library and information conferences and events in Poland and abroad¹³. Gradually further new services have been added, e.g. foundations and potential sources of funds for libraries¹⁴, services for librarians¹⁵ including Polish and foreign library portals, lists of libraries, library consortia, newsgroups, information resources, job vacancies, news etc., virtual libraries¹⁶ including. e-cataloguing guides, standards, collections of data on metadata etc.

Another challenge was, and still is, the frequent questions concerning legal aspects of library work. One of the editors created a service presenting all the Polish legal documents about the library environment¹⁷. Despite the fact that it is a unique and comprehensive source of such information, the service has proved insufficient, as many questions from the users of EBIB address specific issues, which require professional interpretation by a lawyer. Frequent efforts are being undertaken to ensure that the PLA can offer permanent assistance in legal cases for library professionals.

Organisation of work

In the beginning the team of editors consisted of ten persons sharing responsibility for the work, namely: the collection and editing of materials, contacts with authors, proof reading, IT, etc. Elected at the first meeting of the team, the editor-in-chief had some additional tasks, which involved supervising the whole process of editing and representing EBIB in the library environment. The editorial board worked very much like a typical group of friends, without clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Everybody used to do everything that was necessary at the moment. All the decisions were made collectively on the discussion list.

With the development of EBIB services, the introduction of defined procedures for on-line co-operation proved essential to avoid misunderstandings and duplication of work. Newly introduced services required much effort to be maintained, therefore the editors had to redefine their roles. Each member of the virtual editorial office took responsibility for one or two issues of the Bulletin a year. Their tasks involved first of all the selection of the main topic from those discussed by the team and preparing topics to be considered in the following year. Then posting a call for adequate papers on the INFOBIBL discussion list, personal invitation of authors (not only from the library sector), keeping in touch with authors within

¹¹ <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/arc/st1999.html#st01> [only in Polish], [read on 15 May 03]

¹² Education: <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/edukacja/index.php> [read on 15 May 03]

¹³ Conferences: <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/konferencje/index.php> [read on 15 May 03]

¹⁴ Grants for libraries: <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/english/grants.php> [read on 15 May 03]

¹⁵ <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/english/service.php> [read on 15 May 03]

¹⁶ <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/linki/wirtua.php> [read on 15 May 03]

¹⁷ <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/prawo/index.php> [in Polish only] [read on 15 May 03]

the editorial process, collection of materials to be published in the issue, including news, reports and finally co-ordination of the overall process. Apart from that each editor took responsibility for the creation and updating of at least one service. This meant that each member of the editorial staff had at least two functions in EBIB. All the essential decisions were still made collectively. However, due to the pace of work each editor was becoming more autonomous in their specific tasks. At that time the role of the chief editor was gradually increasing, though it was still mainly of a consultative character.

The ideas of how to improve and develop the service appeared frequently, often prompted by the ever growing range of its users. Realisation of their expectation, however, required the increasing effort and engagement of volunteer editors. Further development of EBIB depended on gaining new enthusiasts for the work. Luckily, the service was popular enough to attract many professionals ready to co-operate and thus the team was able to incorporate new members. Some of them, usually recommended by the editors, supported the service in their everyday work. Others were invited to strengthen the professional potential of EBIB. They took the roles of scientific advisors or peer reviewers. No one could join the EBIB team without having worked for EBIB which showed their skills, relevance and commitment. The same rule applies today.

With the establishment of the EBIB Electronic Library in 2001 further formalisation and a clearer division of duties could be agreed. On 31 Jan 2001 the management of the EBIB Electronic Library was elected in an on-line vote. It consists of seven people: a president and vice president, a secretary, a treasurer and three members. Besides everyday managerial issues, connected with running the service, the management's tasks include strategic planning, shaping the policy of EBIB, involvement in national projects concerning libraries and information issues, consultation on national and branch programmes, expression of opinions, organisation of conferences, scientific session, professional courses etc, inspiring co-operation with Polish and foreign libraries and IT institutions.

The fact, that some new people joined the editorial team, made further specialisation possible. The teams of proof-readers and IT specialists defined procedures for their work. At that stage the procedures and the flow of documents within the whole EBIB was also worked out.

In 2001 the decision was also made to establish the virtual Programme Board¹⁸. It is responsible for shaping the policy of scientific development for the EBIB Electronic Library; in particular for identifying topics to be presented in the EBIB Bulletin, peer-reviewing and acceptance of papers for publication, and recommendation for papers to be incorporated into the English version of the service.

The group of librarians involved in EBIB has worked out methods for the smooth operation of the virtual editorial office. At present the editorial staff consists of 26 members residing in different parts of the country¹⁹. They exchange information on the closed discussion list and have direct access to the EBIB resources (with the rights to modify selected files). There also exists a separate list for the management of the Commission for Electronic Publications²⁰.

¹⁸ Programme Board (present members): Dr E. Głowacka, Prof. J. Kołodziejaska, Prof. M. Pidlypczak-Majerowicz, Prof. A. Sitarska

¹⁹ Białystok, Kraków, Łódź, Toruń, Warszawa, Wrocław

²⁰ According to the status of the Commission, The Management is elected for four years. It is allowed that the vote is conducted on-line.

Regulations

Bearing in mind that it might prove impossible to ensure the high quality of the service in the long term without substantial investment, the team considered the possibility of commercialisation through the inclusion of EBIB in a commercial portals. Many of these appeared in the late 1990s on the Polish market. The editors planned to develop a comprehensive, professional thematic portal, based on commercial software and equipment. However, partly due to the fact, that most of the editors had a non-commercial approach to their activities in EBIB, treating it rather as a mission to assist professionals in the field, and partly because they were occupied with their permanent jobs, time could not be found to realise the plans. This soon turned out to be an advantage. The independent, non-profit and self-supporting EBIB service avoided

the global crisis of the so called dot.coms, which affected many e-business enterprises in Poland in 2000, leading to the collapse of major e-portals, However, with the further development of EBIB, some legal regulation was becoming more important. After a further two years of activity it was clear that the ever growing EBIB would not be able to fulfil its mission without a legal status.

The editors decided to apply to the PLA for inclusion. In 2001 the PLA established the Commission for Electronic Publications as an inspiring, advisory and consultant body in the field of modern IT and e-publishing. Its objectives have been determined as follows:

- to create electronic services for all library professionals in Poland;
- to publish an e-journal for Polish librarians and IT specialists
- to create and maintain a PLA e-service²¹
- to edit e-publications of the PLA
- to co-operate with the whole library sector in the field of the development of e-services

The objectives of the Commission shall be realised through:

- working out programmes, expertise and guidelines for projects on library e-publishing;
- organising conferences, sessions, specialised courses and training for librarians and IT specialists;
- assessing and presentation of opinions about normative acts and standards;
- managing library e-services and e-journals

With the creation of the Commission in 2001, EBIB changed its name to EBIB Electronic Library and opened a new chapter as an official nation-wide e-publication issued by a legal entity.

English version

The original idea to consolidate the Polish library environment assumed that the service would operate only in Polish. However, it soon emerged that an English version was also needed for two reasons. Firstly, the lack of a comprehensive source of information on Polish libraries on the Internet resulted in many people and companies from abroad approaching us for such information. The range of queries varied from simple questions about addresses or links to specific institutions, to requests for complex reports on specific issues concerning the state of libraries in Poland. In response to the needs expressed by users, members of the

²¹ Official e-service of PLA [so far only in Polish]: <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/sbp/>

editorial board prepared some reports²² and decided to translate selected parts of the service into English. This was possible thanks to the grant²³, which EBIB received from The Stefan Batory Foundation²⁴.

The aim of the grant was to create a bilingual e-service for librarians. Thanks to the funds received it was possible to introduce the PHP technology in the whole service, which improved both the accessibility and the usage of information provided as well as the technical efficiency. Moreover, all the staff were trained to professionally edit a scientific journal and the e-service. This in turn allowed the introduction of new services, for example an edition of the library home pages and the publication of conference proceedings on request.

Hardware and software

When describing the development of EBIB one cannot forget to mention the IT equipment. Both software and hardware have been continuously developed. In the beginning The National Ossoliński Institute (Museum and Library)²⁵ agreed to provide its server for the use of EBIB. In 2001 a Polish library systems provider, MOL²⁶, founded a server for EBIB. The server is now included in the Ossoliński Institute's infrastructure. Members of the virtual editorial board also use the IT networks of their parent institutions: academic libraries, National Library and LIS schools. Software used in EBIB is totally free. All server applications are included in Linux RedHat distribution. EBIB's own PHP and Perl scripts as well as freely available packages (like phpBB) are in use. On local stations only Windows freeware tools have been used.

Present state

Currently EBIB is published on-line by a group of volunteer librarians associated with the Commission for Electronic Publishing of the Polish Librarians Association. The editorial board consists of: the editor-in-chief, the art director, a group of editors, translators proof-readers and IT specialists (26 people in total)²⁷. The EBIB Bulletin is recognised as a professional journal by the State Committee for Scientific Research²⁸. The service is linked to most Polish libraries and institutions.

Within four years EBIB has become a portal for the Polish library world, as well as a contact-point for librarians interested in different initiatives and those involved in various projects. Due to the high quality of the service provided and the range of actions it undertakes, EBIB is perceived as an institution rather than a publisher. Many members of the editorial board are

²² Reports, projects: <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/raporty/index.php> [read on 15 May 03]

²³ POLISH ELECTRONIC LIBRARY, service for librarians and information specialists, The Stefan Batory Foundation grant no. 31272/2001/KS

²⁴ The Stefan Batory Foundation: <http://www.batory.org.pl/english/>

²⁵ The National Ossoliński Institute <http://www.oss.wroc.pl>

²⁶ MOL <http://www.mol.com.pl/>

²⁷ <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/onas.php> [in Polish only] [read on 15 May 03]

²⁸ The State Committee for Scientific Research is a governmental body within the Ministry of Scientific Research and Information Technology. It was set up by the Polish Parliament in 1991. The Act has established the Committee as the supreme authority on State policy in the area of science and technology. According to the Act, the Committee is the major central governmental source of funds for research.

<http://www.kbn.gov.pl/en>

invited to take part in various events, give lectures, work on the reports, consult e-programmes²⁹ etc. The President of EBIB represents the PLA in the Information Society Forum³⁰ – an advisory body to the State Committee for Scientific Research at the Ministry of Scientific Research and Information Technology. This year a study on EBIB has been undertaken at the Silesian University as the main topic of a master's thesis. Information on EBIB was presented at the IFLA conference in 2002 as part of the paper on a new role for reference librarians in Polish academic libraries³¹ and also at several other library conferences³².

Structure of the Service

01 Main Page

- about EBIB
- INFOBIBNET
- Forums
- News
- Advertisements
- Prices

02 EBIB Bulletin³³

A monthly on-line journal, that includes: essays, reports, research/theories/visions, announcements, letters, discussions/polemics, agenda (upcoming conferences, other events). Each issue has its separate theme. However, regardless of the main subject, some important and current information is published as well. Each month the EBIB bulletin is sent to over 350 subscribers.

- Current Issue
- Archives
- Authors Index
- Editorial Plan for 2003
- Guidelines for Authors
- Subscription
- Scientific Board
- Editorial Board

²⁹ e.g. "ePoland - The Action Plan for the Information Society Development in Poland for the years 2001-2006"; <http://www.kbn.gov.pl/cele/epolska/epoland.html>

³⁰ Information Society Forum [text in Polish]: <http://www.kbn.gov.pl/cele/index.html>

³¹ Wróbel, Jolanta / A new role for reference librarians in Polish academic libraries in the new age of democracy// In: Libraries for life: democracy, diversity, delivery. 68th IFLA Council and General Conference [electronic document]. International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. Glasgow, Scotland, August 18-24 2002

³² D.Buzdygan, M.Marcinek / EBIB - Polish service for librarians and information specialists// poster session at 22 IATUL Conference, Delft 2001; Komperda, Anna, Wróbel, Jolanta / EBIB. Electronic Information Bulletin for Librarians. A journal and an information service [conf. proc.].: In: Internet Librarian International 2001. London, 26- 28 March 2001. Medford, NJ: Information Today 200, pp., 109- 121; M. Marcinek / EBIB as a Potential Partner in Cooperation between Eastern and Central-European Countries and European Union // OPI Int. Symp., Zakopane 2002

³³ISSN: 1507-7187 [Full version with an archive - in Polish only: <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/biuletyn.php>; English version incl. abstracts and selected papers: <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/english/bulletin.php>]

03 Library Services

- a database of Polish libraries' home pages and OPAC catalogues on the Internet³⁴;
- library environment: publishers, bookshops, library systems, software and equipment;
- journals (a list of Polish journals for librarians, tables of contents, links to selected foreign e-journals)³⁵;
- digitisation in Polish libraries (service operated since October 2002)
- education (education centres and courses at various levels for librarians and information specialists);
- conferences (information on Polish and foreign conferences and other events for librarians, proceedings³⁶ and reviews from selected conferences);
- library organisations³⁷;
- national libraries world-wide
- virtual libraries
- links to foreign OPAC catalogues;
- foundations and grants (supporting organisations, that librarians can address);
- law (legislative issues regarding library business in Poland);
- reports and projects³⁸;
- standards (norms and specifications including the Dublin Core translation)³⁹;
- international library services, portals, catalogues, data bases.

04 Resources

- Conference proceedings
- Freeware
- News,
- Archives of earlier issues,
- Next year's agenda,
- Conference proceedings
- Subscription (users are given the possibility of following current events, receiving communications on various issues and updates of changes in the service),
- Advertisements

05 English version

- News
- EBIB Bulletin (abstracts, selected full texts, a special issue⁴⁰)

³⁴ <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/serwisy.php> [Polish], <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/english/linkseng.php> [English][read on 15 May 03]

³⁵ <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/english/period.php> [read on 15 May 03]

³⁶ Conference proceedings: <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/matkonf/index.php>[read on 15 May 03]

³⁷ <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/english/org.php> [read on 15 May 03]

³⁸ <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/raporty/index.php> [Polish version includes 9 reports and links to 13 library projects]; 3 reports prepared by EBIB editors are accessible in English at <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/english/reports.php>

³⁹ <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/standard/index.php>

- Services / Links
- Links to EBIB

All the services are regularly updated.

Assets and barriers

The Commission for Electronic Publications of PLA publishes the EBIB electronic Library without any permanent financial support, either from PLA or from any other entity. The only funds for EBIB developments come from grants acquired and from advertisements. An advantage is that all team members are involved in EBIB mainly because of their passion and enthusiasm as well as the satisfaction of doing a worthy job. It is also a sort of nobility to be involved in EBIB's activities. For all these reasons the team of editors is growing despite the lack of any remuneration. However, lack of adequate funds is also an obstacle to further development of the service. It makes it impossible to ensure efficient technical operation and maintenance. Many databases, discussion forums, links, archives, indexes etc. require everyday maintenance and supervision. It has already become a full-time job and acquiring funds for it is the highest priority.

The pace of work as well as a range of activities and initiatives of the EBIB editors are possible thanks to virtual methods of co-operation. High flexibility of the team lies in the fact, that the same people often play two or more roles: for example, editors proof-read the texts, IT specialists edit thematic issues, proof-readers maintain selected services etc. On the other hand, in the busiest periods some conflicts of priorities occur which causes a nervous atmosphere, not to mention the blurred boundaries of subordination, when two persons are subordinates to each other in different parts of the service.

The blurring boundaries

Merged professions

Boundaries are blurred in various aspects of e-publishing. For example, in EBIB, librarians and information specialists have gradually become publishers. These amateurish professionals or professional amateurs involved in the publishing process ensure, in fact, a high level of the service and are one of the signs of the IT era.

e-bulletin or a peer reviewed e-journal?

After years of trials to reshape the EBIB Bulletin into a professional, electronic, scientific, peer reviewed e-journal, the editors have finally made the decision to continue with the EBIB Bulletin and establish a completely new e-journal, EBIB Reviews, run according to the same principles as traditional publications. The efforts to combine quick publication of up-to-date information together with valuable peer-reviewed papers did not bring satisfactory results. Despite the possibilities created by e-technology, the still relatively long process of

⁴⁰ A promotional CD version of EBIB Electronic Library was prepared for the purpose of the introduction of EBIB and Polish libraries to a wide foreign audience. The CD was distributed at the International Library Fair in Frankfurt in 2000 and during the INTERNET LIBRARIAN INTERNATIONAL, London 2001, both of which events were attended by some members of EBIB.

reviewing and editing of high quality scientific papers has proved a barrier that the editors have not been able to overcome. The question of the balance between quality and topicality in popular publication is still open, although the answer at the first sight seemed to be obvious.

E-publication or a thematic portal?

The boundaries between a comprehensive up-to-date e-publication and a thematic portal blur rapidly, which can be observed while browsing the Internet in search of specialised publications in different disciplines. EBIB is one such example. The more comprehensive and up-to-date information with links to other sources a journal presents, the more blurred for an average Internet user are the boundaries between an e-journal and e-service (although formally they are still quite clear)

E-portal or a contact point?

E-portals tend to serve as virtual contact points, not only for professionals in the fields but also for inter-sector co-operation. Quick and easy access to comprehensive and well-organised information and its providers encourages activity and makes co-operation easier. EBIB as a thematic e-portal run exclusively by specialists in the field presents an overview of all aspects of library work and its environment. Special attention is paid to being unbiased and to present general issues concerning all or most of the libraries as well as those for specific groups of public, non-public, academic, school, special and other libraries.

E-publication or an institution?

The EBIB Electronic Library is perceived by its users as an institution rather than a service. The philosophy of the editors is to create platforms for co-operation between different sectors of the library environment, to promote good practice in libraries and to create a positive atmosphere around libraries, to present unbiased opinions and to foster co-operation

The teamwork within the EBIB Electronic Library, the organisation of special events and day-to-day operations, completely voluntary and non-profit search for new possibilities, sheer enthusiasm and satisfaction from creating a useful tool and adding value to library work is what drives EBIB's team. Thanks to the new people at different stages of their professional career development eager to join EBIB, we believe the idea of EBIB will survive. We hope that the EBIB Electronic Library will be a valuable access point to Polish library resources and that for Polish librarians and IT specialists it will remain a basic e-source of current information and a contact point.