# Document Supply to Industry

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## 1. Introduction

In Denmark there has been an increasing awareness, with few exceptions, that libraries are not organized, as a rule, to enable them to satisfy the demands for information and document supply to industry. Recognizing this, there has been a tendency to establish, both in university and public libraries, on an experimental basis, special sections or departments designed to satisfy the demands of information services to industry. However sensible this may be, I argue here that the problems relating to document supply are of a different nature and should be dealt with independently from the problems relating to information services. The reason for this distinction is that the question of establishing special information services to industry is primarily a question of expertise and manpower, whereas the question of document supply relates to the whole supply system of the library. Consequently, it is not only a question of manpower resources but also a question of technology and organization.

## 2. Characteristics of the demands of industry

If we compare users from industry with university researchers or those from research institutions, we note some important differences, as follows.

(1) Users coming from industry are spread geographically and might actually work at considerable distances from the library.

(2) Competition and usually narrow time schedules for research, development, and production make fast delivery important in general, and vital in special circumstances.

(3) Because users from industry have to earn their wages in a more direct sense by selling something, there is a more explicit cost/benefit consciousness concerning use of time and therefore a willingness to pay for extra services.

(4) Contrary to this, the typical university researcher is working reasonably close to the library.

(5) Although universities and researchers may compete, there has, until now, been no direct link between the university's appropriation and productive capability in terms of research results, and, consequently, researchers have been reasonably secure in their jobs.

As a consequence of these last two factors, there has not been such an explicit cost/benefit consciousness. There is neither the same possibility to pay for extra services nor is there the same need for urgent delivery. It should be noted, however, that this is changing. In Denmark an increasing proportion of grants to universities and research institutions are given to specific projects with fixed time limits. However, the expenses for information searching are still not often foreseen in the budgets of research programmes.

Focusing on document delivery alone, the special needs of industry imply that the library should be able to deliver 'remote service', that is it should not be necessary for the borrower to come to the library site to order or to get documents; the library should be able to utilize communication technology that makes fast delivery possible, preferably channelling documents to the borrower directly from the supply centre, and, finally, the library may charge the borrower the expenses incurred by the special services, e.g. fast delivery, because these expenses will be only marginal to the operating costs of the firm.

## 3.  Conflict of interest between user groups

The question now is, can the library provide this special service and does it make any difference that the user is able to pay for it? In an elementary sense, of course, the library is able to provide this service. It is a question of priorities. However, beyond that, it is not so obvious what the library can do. The service profile of the library has to be adjusted according to the needs and interests of different categories of user. A decisive factor will often be the size and proximity of user groups: for example, whether they manifest themselves by their physical presence in the library or in the governing bodies. Students and teachers of a university make different demands on the library, and they will probably see it as being in their best interest to have resources allocated to collection development rather than fast delivery services to industry. That the user from industry is able and willing to pay for whatever special services might be required is of less importance. To the library, demand for these services will usually be marginal and at irregular intervals unless it is one of the really large supply centres. It will, therefore, seldom be possible to hire personnel especially assigned to this task. Consequently, the meeting of the special demands for fast delivery by industry will usually be at the expense of the immediate needs of other users of the library. This clash of immediate interests is not diminished by the fact that the library might utilize revenue earned in other areas.

## 4.  Two possible solutions

There are two possible solutions to this problem. Either one establishes a separate section or department especially assigned to handle requests from industry, or one reorganizes the whole library so that the level of service for industry becomes a normal feature of the general service.

### 4.1 *The special service*

The establishment of a special department for industry has the obvious advantage of avoiding the clashes of interests and conflict of priorities between different users. The problem of priorities is solved in advance inasmuch as a certain resource is assigned for the job. There is established a different, 'normal' level of service for different categories of user. The problems of priorities, however, only appear at another level. The allocation of extra resources for handling requests from industry is likely to create dissatisfaction both among primary users of the library, these being university teachers and students, and among the library staff. It will probably be felt as going against the egalitarian principles held by a large proportion of librarians, both in public and university libraries. It may not be wise to introduce procedures and allocate resources in a way that is felt to violate the professional ethics of the staff even though there are strong arguments in favour of treating these different categories of users differently.

### 4.2 *The alternative*

To avoid these political problems, both regarding staff, and the primary users of the library, the more attractive solution seems to be to reorganize procedures for document supply. The point in searching for this solution is to recognize the fact that rush orders will always occur. Therefore, the special procedures for dealing with rush orders, such as electronic ordering and electronic document delivery, should be used as models for normal procedures. Only by using the same technology in both cases will one be able to deal with rush orders expeditiously without endangering the general level of service. If it is only a question of executing one order first, the effect in terms of delay for the others will be negligible — a matter of minutes perhaps. But if the execution of a rush order requires that the staff adopt a completely different working routine, the effects on other loans are marked. You do not need many rush orders a day for this to represent a serious problem. My main point is, therefore, that one should use the same technology and do so consistently.

## 5. Conclusion

This is, of course, not a new and original insight. The Finnish practice for years now has been to use telex only when ordering. The Swedish Docline system, initiated by Chalmers University of Technology Library, and the Danish National Technical Library's initiative to provide online ordering facilities via the ALIS System for technical literature in Nordic libraries, are each attempts to provide technical and organizational means for improving the interlending process. But when it comes to the problems of document delivery, it seems to me that the discussion on how to use means for electronic document transfer is restricted to rush orders with the corresponding price tariffs. This is understandable since, for example, the group 3 telefax machines are still not

fast enough to be integrated in normal working routines. I think it is time now to start planning how to use group 4 machines and do it with the perspective that they, and eventually other types of electronic document transfer equipment, should become the normal means of transferring documents. This will raise the question of organizational problems and pricing policy that might not be solved easily. But, in my view, it is not a question of whether libraries will start using this type of equipment for normal routines but when. Within a few years there will be a major change in document transfer technology. The technology exists. There remains the refining of the equipment and the solving of the organizational and economic problems. It will be a serious mistake if the library community only sees this as a possible special service to industry and a possible source of revenue. The libraries will not really benefit from its being used that way. Only by integrating this technology into the normal routines of the interlending process will it be possible to obtain the full positive effects. The result will be an optimal service to both industry and to the average borrower. That many librarians would feel it to be more in accordance with their professional ethics as well, does not harm either.

## The Author

Harald v. Hielmcrone was born in 1944 and was awarded a Master of Arts degree in Philosophy in 1972. He taught at the Universities of Odense and Aarhus during the years 1972–78. He was appointed research librarian at Aalborg University Library in 1978 and has been Head of the Public Department since 1981. In September 1987, he was appointed Head of the Acquisition Departments of the State and University Library in Aarhus.