

REINVENTING A SCI-TECH LIBRARY
ETH LIBRARIES AS FOCUS POINT FOR SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL
INFORMATION IN SWITZERLAND

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ABSTRACT

University libraries are traditionally important support and service organizations for all members of university life. In the special situation of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, the university library has a second important role to play.

ETH Libraries also act as National Center for Scientific and Technical Information, which is generally not part of the service portfolio of other university libraries.

The reactions to a dramatically changing information world, but also the special situation of science, research and teaching in a real small country like Switzerland are focused in a new strategy to reorganize the professional work of ETH Libraries. The main issue in this process was the definition of customer groups, on which all running and possible future services had to be concentrated.

The groups with first priority are researchers on all levels within the institution, academic researchers on all levels within Switzerland and R&D-oriented companies within Switzerland. Groups with second priority are graduate students and that part of the public, which is interested in sci-tech information.

After the definition of the library's major clients we defined a range of services on different levels, depending upon the interests and special needs of the patrons.

The library's management team is convinced, that this strategy gives us a good chance to get new customers and also gives us the opportunity to improve our support role on all levels of science, research and teaching.

INTRODUCTION

ETH Libraries or "ETH-Bibliothek" is the main library of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, ETH) Zurich. It is primarily dedicated to provide relevant information to all areas of science and technology as covered in teaching and research at the ETH. Furthermore, it has a key role as Swiss national centre for sci-tech information.

With collections comprising over 5,6 million items, 6'500 current print journals and 3'500 e-journals, the ETH Libraries belong to the largest sci-tech libraries of Europe.

As for every university library, the collections and services are designed to support learning and research at the ETH. As both learning and research change throughout the years, all libraries need to reassess their user requirements, re-evaluate their services and make sure their priorities are in line with the overall aims of the university.

On the other hand ETH Libraries have the function of a National Center of Scientific and Technical Information for Switzerland. This means that the nationwide scientific community is very interested in the libraries' activities and the performance of its services.

To support both major roles, the management team of the library started a few projects, which should lead to a better understanding, who the major user groups are, which services every user group wants to get with which priority, how much they would or could pay, etc.

STARTING POINT FOR NEW ACTIVITIES

Besides the fact, that the work of ETH Libraries is deeply influenced by its two major tasks, there are some more general developments, which play also an important role for the work of every library or information center.

Many libraries all over the world are in a deep change and try to find new ways to support their patrons. Besides many other issues the most important reasons for this change are as follows:

- Dramatic changes in the process of research and development
- Changes in the way, teaching is provided
- “Commercialization” of science and also of information work
- Rapid technological developments
- Budget cuttings for many academic libraries (e.g. serials crisis)
- Lack of change activities within libraries

These points, together with the general tasks of ETH Libraries, defined the conditions under which we could reorganize the professional focus of our services.

DEFINITION OF USER GROUPS

In general, university libraries know who their users are, or better, they think that they know who their users are.

This means for us, that as a first step we had to find out, who are our users.

We did this with the help of a small number of user surveys. As a result we got a bundle of answers, which leads us to the following definition:

User groups with first priority:

- Researchers on all science levels within the university (especially postgraduate students, postdocs, senior scientists)
- Academics on all levels within Switzerland
- R&D-focussed companies within Switzerland

Not very surprising, these groups are mainly interested in a fast and very easy access to journal articles. “Easy access” in this context means, that these patrons are able and prefer to have access electronically. Many of them do not want to get printed articles, if document delivery is necessary.

Monographic literature has still its importance, especially for those subjects, which are strongly based on theoretical aspects.

The surveys clearly demonstrated, that there is another user group, we should have a look at. First these users are graduate students of the own institution and secondly we have users from those parts of the public, who are interested in scientific and technical information. For these groups, time and electronic access are not the most important issues.

THE SERVICE PORTFOLIO OF ETH LIBRARIES

The management generally defined two dimensions in which the library wants to develop its services in order to offer maximum support for all defined user groups.

These two dimensions are *new services* and *virtual space* (fig. 1). During this process of defining new, future-oriented fields of activity, it was important to keep in mind that all innovations need to be built on the firm basis of traditional library collections and services. These core competences, such as good print collections, adherence to international standards, long term stability, reliable user services and professional staff are important prerequisites for the development of new services and spaces.

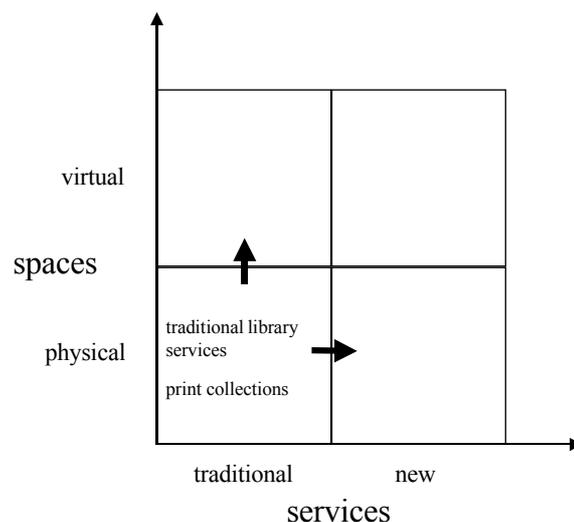


Fig. 1: New dimensions for library development

TRADITIONAL SERVICES IN A VIRTUAL SPACE

Building on its long tradition the library is expanding rapidly into the virtual space, for the surveys demonstrated that this could be an excellent chance to enhance existing and well-

accepted traditional services. The core competences that are now being stretched to cover a new dimension include the library catalogue (OPAC), the collections and the procedures, how to deliver documents.

- The OPAC now includes all print and online holdings, and will in future contain abstracts and indexes. Abstracts and indexes (A&I) give users a better idea about the contents of a book and help all users select the relevant literature.
- Journals, a document type formerly only available in print format, are now accessible electronically and represent a very useful and well-accepted service in the digital space.
- The library is exploring the usage of other new media such as e-books, e-textbooks and digital reference works.
- Document delivery, traditionally performed by photocopying, is now only being done electronically using pdf-files and e-mail. A very popular service within the campus for journals not yet available online.
- Digitization of ETH doctoral dissertations gives easy access to theses written at the ETH since 1999.

All these activities are not new services or collections in the sense that they were hitherto unknown or inexistent. However, transferring them from the physical or print environment to the virtual space has given them a new potential.

NEW SERVICES IN A PHYSICAL SPACE

Within this context, new services are built on traditional activities and are manifested in a physical space. They are designed to support mainly students or the public.

At the ETH Libraries these initiatives include planning larger departmental libraries in place of smaller more subject-specific libraries. These new libraries encourage interdisciplinary research and offer more professional assistance in order to train students in their information and knowledge skills. The extension of the current picture and photograph collection to form an up-to-date image database is another important activity in this area. This was done in line with the fact that the library has also a role in archiving pictures and photographs as part of the national heritage.

NEW SERVICES IN A VIRTUAL SPACE

The most challenging and exciting dimension to be explored is the definition of new services in the virtual space (fig. 2). As with the other new fields of activity described above, it is important that the library builds on experience and expertise available within the organization. Furthermore, initiatives in this area have far-reaching implications for all areas of library work. Projects of this kind are typically strongly IT-based and absorb considerable amount of both financial and human resources.

ETH Libraries have defined three major projects in this area: the E-Collection, EPICS and MyLibrary. Two of these projects are realized within the framework of ETH World, which is the university's major strategic initiative to prepare the ETH Zurich for the information age. Its objective is to create a universal virtual communication and co-operation platform, supporting in particular the activities of scientists.

- The E-Collection offers members of the ETH Zurich an alternative publication platform. Grey literature is centrally recorded and stored on long term basis according to international standards.
- EPICS (Interactive Picture Information System for Teaching and Research) is a picture information system which forms part of the ETH World infostructure. The interactive online picture database can be used as part of teaching and research within coursework at the ETH Zurich.
- MyLibrary stands for the personalization of the library's digital collection. Users have the possibility to design their own web-based access to library services and collections. Personalized access can be defined for individuals, groups or courses.

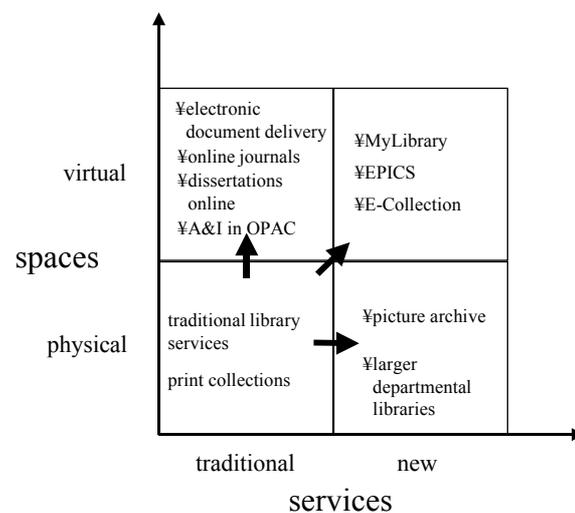


Fig. 2: Initiatives for new services and virtual spaces

CONCLUSION

In order to support the challenges of the new information world and the changing requests of university scientists, libraries are developing new activities in various directions.

The ETH Libraries developed new activities in two dimensions and focused these services on user groups which are important in the specific situation. All these initiatives add value to existing services and collections.

Services for patrons with first priority are:

- A selection of 3.500 electronic journal titles (for the university's science community)
- Electronic document delivery (within 24 hours) for all articles (within the university/outside the university)
- “My Library”-service for single scientists, research groups etc.
- Abstracts for all book records within the online catalog

Services for patrons with second priority are:

- Restructuring of the university's library system
- Opening of the picture archive
- Relaunch of the reading rooms

The management of ETH libraries is convinced, that the strategic approach mentioned above, gives the library a good chance to define an important role within the university community.