Here's Looking At-ADONIS Electronic Journal Subscriptions (EJS) service

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ADONIS

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Readers are probably familiar with the ADONIS Document Delivery Service (DDS), our transactional article delivery service, so I won't bore you by repeating old news. Suffice it to say, that this service was (and is) based on scanned page images (in TIFF format) of the journals included. No journal price or subscription is charged for the provision of access to those titles, as users pay a Publisher Copyright Charge (PCC) each time an article is printed, or, if a customer runs DDS on the network, viewed. An annual service fee of US$ 22,000 has to be paid to ADONIS for the provision of the CD-ROMs containing the page images and the indexes and software which enables users to identify and view/print the articles of interest. Since its launch in 1991, this service has proven to be quite attractive to two groups of libraries: corporate special libraries in the pharmaceutical industry, for whom the flexibility of access proved useful and large central resource libraries such as the British Library Document Supply Center which found the automated reproduction of articles from the ADONIS system much more efficient than the process of photocopying from shelved journal issues.

The principle of transaction based payments for document delivery use of the service proved to have less attraction in the academic community, although ADONIS has been installed in a number of universities. In general, librarians in this sector found the thought of allowing campus wide access to a system which charged by use to be anathema, as they felt there would be no way in which both expenditure could be controlled and, at the same time, allow the system to be used effectively (ADONIS, when used, makes identifying and printing articles extremely easy, which often leads to huge numbers of copies and subsequent billing!). We recognized this fact, and therefore did not actively market DDS to the general academic community. Recent developments in the ADONIS security and management software will grant librarians total control over access to the system, which may prove to be more attractive. Expenditure limits for individual passwords and prevention of printing without reference to a "print supervisor" greatly enhances the controllability and will thus increase the attractiveness of the service to the academic community.

In order to provide more controllable and (annually) predetermined costs, the publishers participating in ADONIS proposed the development of a new service, which would allow libraries to take out subscriptions per title. In this, the subscribing institution could select only those titles to which it wished to subscribe, pay fixed annual subscription/usage charges for those titles, a fixed service charge to ADONIS, and receive a service which provided access only to the titles to which the institution has subscribed. This emulates the way in which academic institutions currently purchase journals.

It had always been the intention of ADONIS that this form of service should be developed. A number of technical developments had to come about before it was possible to put such a service in place. It was determined that if ADONIS was to be delivering an electronic journal, then delivery would have to be at least concurrent with the dispatch of the printed journal. Access to pre-print electronic files of journal content was therefore a condition sine qua non. In 1991 when ADONIS first started its commercial services, the majority of scientific, technical and medical (STM) publishers were unable to routinely deliver such files. Since then, the development of the use of SGML and the availability of encapsulated page make-up files such as Adobe's portable document format (PDF) files has made it possible to capture the exact content of the finished journal issue just before (or just after) it went to press, in electronic form. It was also imperative that these files truly represented the printed form of the journal so that the electronic version would be usable as an archival version. This meant that traditional publishing practices such as manually stripping in corrections on the galleys could not be allowed. Changing the tried and trusted, but slightly archaic, means of publishing could not be achieved overnight, but was essential if electronic versions were to be accepted as a real equivalent to the paper product. A second development was that of client/server networked software, and in particular some of the innovations which have been driven by the World Wide Web (WWW) on the Internet. VT100 terminals (i.e. ASCII terminals) could not display graphics, and were therefore not suitable for a full content journal system. ASCII text alone could not replace the rich content of the printed page. The growth of the WWW with its essentially graphic character led to the availability of graphic content on in-house networks of intelligent graphic terminals (PCs). This provided the potential for the full content of journals to be represented at the terminal. A related development was that of the "universal client." If system administrators were required to load client software onto each workstation on a network for each of the services to be made available, it is probable that very few would ever get off the ground. Mosaic and its successors Netscape and Microsoft Explorer together with the corresponding HTML have provided a universal client. At ADONIS we felt that a great deal of the functionality available via the proprietary client is lost with an HTML interface, as we are in the process of building search and display utilities to put back the functionality that would otherwise be lost.

Another near universal standard for a networked system is that they should be TCP/IP protocol. The ADONIS network system has been developed to meet that standard of operation. Although the ADONIS software is completely WWW compliant, ADONIS will not be made available on the Web. This decision, when so many publisher and other services are being made available on the Web requires further explanation. ADONIS is designed specifically for intranet operation. This provides subscribing institutions with some very useful advantages. A major consideration of many of ADONIS's existing clients is security.

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This is particularly true in the commercial research area. For such clients, shutting off in-house networks from any possibility of infiltration from outside is a requirement. Therefore most of the intended users of scientific information cannot reach the WWW through the company’s firewall. Having ADONIS in-house guarantees that ADONIS cannot contribute to any security breach. It also answers questions about the integrity of the purchased archive.

As with the printed journals, electronic journal issues are delivered to the purchasing institution, and placed on the [electronic] shelves. Once these are received control is within the hands of the librarian. The ADONIS license specifically states that the journal material may be kept in perpetuity by the subscribing institution, provided that the terms and conditions of use agreed in the license are not breached. This somewhat reflects a subscription to a printed title in which a subscriber may keep the title for ever, but the use of the journal is limited by the laws of copyright. As copyright law for electronic materials (other than sound recordings and videotapes), seems to be so imprecise, the participating publishers in ADONIS determined that site licensing must govern the terms and conditions of use of the electronic journals. A third advantage is that of access speed. Anybody who has tried to transfer any fairly large file over the Internet at any time other than 02:00 AM will know that, due to bandwidth restrictions, it can take a very long time. The electronic files containing graphic pages of typical STM journal pages are large. The increasing use of color images, which are fully supported by ADONIS, make these even larger. This would almost certainly lead to unacceptable slowdowns in the transmission and subsequent display or printing of individual pages (sic!), never mind whole articles. Having the journal content on an in-house or local server gives greater control over performance. The downside of this policy is that resources, particularly human resources must be made available to set-up and maintain the server. This may be a problem for some customers and ADONIS is assessing possible solutions, within an Intranet framework, for the outsourced provision of a server.

ADONIS is building a core collection in biomedical titles. Over 800 titles from some 90 publishers are represented in the transaction service. Over 400 of these titles are now available in the new EJS service, and more will be added as more publishers become able to provide the necessary electronic files. A lot of publishers have indicated that they are willing to participate in a subscription-based service, so we expect additional titles to become available as and when these publishers sign rights agreements with ADONIS. The result of this is that an institution can negotiate a single “all embracing” license to use the titles selected. In addition, a single consolidated invoice will be provided. To further enhance service, ADONIS is discussing with existing subscription agents how the billing for the subscriptions can be made via the channels already used by the subscribing institution. While not (yet) providing a single license for all of the titles to which a library would want to subscribe, this goes a long way towards meeting the demand from librarians that access should be via a minimum number of licenses.

In recent years, one has heard and read a great deal of argument about access versus ownership. ADONIS can in many ways provide the best of both worlds. Institutions can subscribe and have virtually unlimited access within the subscribing institution(s) to the titles that are most used, and, via the transaction service, have

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Obtaining electronic access via a system such as ADONIS provides another, important benefit. Access is very much improved compared with printed journals, or access via a multitude of Web sites. ADONIS, initially, indexes the bibliographic information about each of the distinct items within the collection, together with the author keywords provided by many publishers, and the text of the abstracts. The ADONIS client design provides for multiple access routes to suit different types of approach. At the simplest level, access via table of contents, emulating the way many readers make use of the printed collection, is provided. Access is via a journal holdings list which successively leads the reader to volume, issue, table of contents of issue, abstract and finally fulltext. This form of access will be very useful for browsing. Users may mark articles of interest and "bookmark" them by storing them in a personal electronic filing cabinet. Individual profiles of interest such as a list of titles can be stored. Each time a user logs on, the system checks which new issues of the titles of interest have been added since the last session, and displays the tables of contents of those issues so that the reader can easily browse them. A second level of access is provided by the "bibliographic" search screen. In this, the reader may have been alerted from some secondary service that a particular article might be of interest, the bibliographic search dialog provides an efficient means of entering the minimum of bibliographic data to obtain fast retrieval of the article of interest. In the third level, complex searches can be constructed, assisted by built-in synonym management and use of authority lists, which will allow the searcher to more effectively describe the articles of interest.

Such complex searches can also be stored in a personal profile of interest. Simple browse and click searching for such fields as authors is provided, which will prove useful for both frequent and infrequent users. The fact that a single interface can be used for such a large homogenous collection meets another frequently heard request that a minimum of search interfaces be used.

As alluded to earlier, the ADONIS system offers a range of management tools to enable the librarian to have a high degree of control over access and use of the system. The security password allows multiple levels of access privilege to be offered to different types of readers. The transaction system supports multiple cost centers and additionally allows transactions to be charged to projects, regardless of the cost center to which the reader belongs. Use is monitored and stored at the article level, which can help in collection management decisions. Serials holdings lists are an integral feature of ADONIS, so serials management tasks are reduced considerably for the titles in ADONIS.

There are many structures and forms within which electronic access to serial literature is being made available. Many leave much to be desired in respect of security, performance and complexity. ADONIS provides a secure, simple solution for at least part of the problem.