

CONSORTIA CANADA

Background

While library consortia are not new phenomena, it would not be inaccurate to say that over the last few years the interest in, and development of, library consortia in Canada has been increasing remarkably. Whether formally or informally constituted, single or multi-type, library consortia in Canada today are numerous. They can be local, regional within a province or territory, province/territory-wide, and/or inter-provincial/territorial in nature. Other than some small examples of libraries operating collaboratively through national associations, consortia at the national level have not been in evidence to date.

However, a few years ago, a number of the established consortia in Canada began in an informal way to share information on current activities, and promote library consortia beyond their respective regions through such means as taking a booth at the Canadian Library Association annual conference ("Library Consortia in Canada"). Then in 1998, a larger group of consortia representatives were able to attend the Denver meeting of the International Consortium of Library Consortia (ICOLC), and the possibilities of acting collaboratively at the national level were spurred on by examples from the United States and other countries.

Why a 'Made in Canada' Approach?

Certainly, there are many opportunities for Canadian library consortia—particularly academic ones—to 'piggyback' on US initiatives. However, the representatives attending the Denver meeting, felt that working within Canada had a definite appeal, as well as some sound reasons for doing so:

- A geo-political structure that makes Canada unique, and doesn't readily lend itself to US modes of operation;
- Individual consortia are relatively small (vis a vis US ones, for example), and often do not have the aggregate numbers ('critical mass') to obtain the maximum benefits in any consortial deal. Operating Canada-wide would afford us that opportunity;
- Collectively, we could argue for specific requirements not available in the US (e.g. some consideration with respect to the Canadian dollar; or, copyright provisions specific to Canadian legislation);
- Collectively, we would provide a larger market share for any one vendor, which potentially could give us the opportunity to influence the pricing structure used;
- The timing is opportune, as there is more pressure on vendors to work with consortia, and there is a push from other areas in Canada, e.g., Social Science federations, the Canada Foundation for Innovation;
- Vendors are willing to beta-test in Canada because it is smaller and easier to deal with. The smaller market allows room for error without as much impact;
- Finally, working Canada-wide provides libraries with an opportunity to create something new, and in a Canadian way.

The potential projects on which Canadian consortia might work together, are many. However, it was felt that the initial project should be a national site license for an electronic database. This type of project would help to define the relationship between library consortia in Canada, and set the groundwork for future national site licenses or other cooperative activities of benefit to libraries in Canada.

Proposal: A Multi-Consortia Initiative for National Site Licensing

Using existing Canadian library consortia as infrastructure, pilot a national site license for the Canadian public that provides electronic journals and related databases of relevance to Canada.

Rationale

1. The delivery of information in all subject areas is being revolutionized by the emerging digital communications technologies. All types of libraries in Canada are actively working to collect, preserve, and make accessible to their clientele, information in digital form. By working collaboratively, Canada's libraries can effect real cost savings, both in the time of personnel across the country involved in individual licensing initiatives, and in the actual costs of the licenses (est. 20-40% savings).
2. The transformation of Canada's libraries to the digital library model will, of necessity, be a lengthy process. However, the nature of the model is one that Canadians find persuasive. It is:
 - Collaborative;
 - Broad-based: in subject matter; and, in the types of consortia involved;
 - Indifferent to geography, providing access to content and service regardless of physical location; and,
 - Highly accessible and user-friendly, providing transparent electronic linkages between the user and the information they seek.
3. Valuable experience with regional site licensing in Canada has laid the foundation to move to national site licensing. In fact, the trend is increasingly toward national site licensing, with notable examples in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Europe. The recent proposal to the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) by university libraries in Canada, is another example; and this proposal is seen to be complementary to that submitted to CFI.
4. The initial focus on materials of importance to Canada and her citizens, will provide opportunities for libraries:
 - To develop new partnerships in this country;
 - Work collaboratively with national institutions; and,
 - To explore other sources of funding and support.

5. By working through established consortia, all types of libraries will help to create the context for future national site licenses, and will have the opportunity to participate in the development of national digital library services.

Guidelines and Operating Principles

Goals

1. To contribute to the systematic development of the means to collect, organize, and archive information and knowledge in digital form for the benefit of Canadian citizens.
2. To provide affordable, universally accessible digital information through network infrastructures.
3. To promote the economical and efficient provision of information to all participating Canadian libraries and their clientele.
4. To increase the return on public investment in libraries, by increasing the availability and use of digital content through inter-institutional cooperative licensing.
5. To encourage the development of new forms of information delivery, dissemination, and communication through library consortia expertise, as well as experimentation in the development of digital library services.

Content

For the pilot national site license:

1. Priority for acquisition/access will be given to:
 - Canadian content
 - Databases/electronic resources outside of those considered by the Canada Foundation for Innovation
 - English and French-language materials
 - Full-text databases
 - Broad-based information resources

Access and Delivery Mechanisms

1. Initially, priority will be given to resources where the mode of access and delivery of the electronic content does not require a local hosting/service infrastructure.

Vendor Relations

1. The pilot national site license will adopt a negotiations strategy and process that retains flexibility, so as best to position Canadian libraries in the information marketplace.
2. Implementation of the national site license will be based on open, sound and ethical procurement practices.
3. Negotiations and implementation of the national site license will adhere to emerging international standards and principles for licensing and accessing digital information resources, wherever possible.
4. Once the national site license product(s) are identified, participating library consortia agree to suspend any individual negotiations with vendors until the end of the process. It is not a requirement, however, that all members of any one consortium participate in the licensing initiative.

Governance and Management

1. Initially, participation in the national site licensing broad-based initiative will be conducted through existing library consortia (formal or informal).
2. The project will adopt legal and technical systems of delivery that are cost effective, accountable, and sustainable. It is anticipated that for the pilot project, one library consortium in Canada will broker on behalf of the other participants. For future acquisitions, each Canadian library consortia may take a turn at this role.
3. The governance and management structure will ensure accountable decision-making at the individual consortium level, and build on the communications infrastructure that exists in current library consortia. In addition, inter-consortia communication will be facilitated through existing consortia staff and the use of a "Consortia Canada" listserv.

Funding

1. The project funding model will:
 - Help libraries to aggregate their buying power and influence, providing a "level playing field" for all types of libraries and all regions in Canada;
 - Achieve greater stability of access in a very volatile area of electronic publishing; and,
 - Mitigate financial risks associated with the large-scale transformation to the digital library model of communication.

2. There will be an equitable sharing of costs between participating libraries, including cost-recovery for work performed by any library consortium on behalf of the national site license pilot.

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