5 Quick Questions

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1. What steps is your library taking to meet the needs of today’s diverse users?

At CSIC we manage a large library network belonging to the Spanish National Research Council. Ninety specialized libraries are located in research centers across the country. Research centers focus on specific scientific disciplines and deliver information services to a community of around 5,000 scientists.

Meeting the needs of our diverse user community is a challenge. The number of information resources available is huge, as is the demand of our users, but our budget is not. However, we try to offer as much as we can and follow some general criteria in the selection of collections, such as: existing demand within the institution; general interest in the product for as many users as possible; building basic collections first and then focusing on the more specific; and of course, prices and conditions.

We started our digital collection in 2001, and began by purchasing the largest commercial publishers’ platforms. In 2003 we focused our energies on Scientific Institutions (IOP, AIP, APS, etc).

2. Is there any user population that you are specifically focusing on in terms of information access?

No, we try to be as democratic as possible and offer our different populations at least a basic collection for their needs. One area with less content in our digital collections is the humanities and social sciences. This is due to market availability and user demand — few digital collections are available in these areas, almost none in Spanish. Perhaps this is due to a lack of digital culture in the field.

3. Are you taking any particular steps to make the library appealing as physical place?

We manage a library network in which each library has its own director with whom this responsibility lies. Physical space is still very important to us because the library continues to be a meeting place, a point where the user can be guided by their librarian to the data he or she is searching for. In the end libraries are “knowledge containers” plus services to manage that knowledge. Our libraries still hold important scientific print collections but we do have to keep in mind that in the digital scenario the notion of a library as a physical place is changing. Space is a strange concept for libraries today.

Making libraries more appealing as physical spaces is not part of our current strategic plan, but it’s important to make the point here that we believe that if we offer good services then our libraries will gain appeal as physical spaces.

4. Do you have any special projects underway to build a virtual community for your remote users?

We have recently undertaken a small experiment in distance eLearning with one of our vendors and we plan to follow this by starting up a professional librarians training program, based on an eLearning system. This could then be offered as one service in a future virtual community around our library portal, where users could connect to gain access to a diverse world of services. The idea is to eventually implement more services and offer added value to our users.

5. What plans do you have in place to prepare for the next generation?

Our plans in this direction are to build a new library portal for the network. Our digital resources will expand in the next two to three years, and we need to consolidate and disseminate information more efficiently in order to maximize usage. To do that we have to unify the way users access our collections. Currently there are too many gateways to resources and that doesn’t facilitate use of all the information available. The OPAC, database servers, e-journal platforms, etc. all use different interfaces in different systems with different connection demands. Navigation between resources needs to be improved to increase usability — we know some of our patrons get lost performing searches.

In choosing the right product for our needs in this area we look to the example of other important libraries that have faced this issue before us and hope to find a solution in the coming months.