

"Tyranny of Distance: The Challenges of Coordinating a Multinational Consortium"
13th IFLA Interlending and Document Supply Conference
Beijing, China
October 16-18, 2013

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Introduction

Among the many challenges for consortia today, one of the most difficult to overcome is distance. As we look at ArticleReach Direct as a model of a multinational consortium and the demands generated by distance, we need to understand the dynamics of this type of organization, as either a formal or informal creation. To begin it is important to define consortia in general and then more specifically ArticleReach Direct as an example of a consortium on an international scale.

Consortia: Definition

The Merriam Webster website, defines it as "an agreement, combination, or group (as of companies) formed to undertake the enterprise beyond the resources of any one member."ⁱ Most definitions include the idea of a mutual benefit to be obtained by all because one member cannot successfully achieve project goals alone. As stated by Marshall Breeding in his "Introduction to Resource Sharing", "By banding together in consortia, libraries are able to pool their resources to gain various benefits."ⁱⁱ

In her paper, "Consortia Building: A Handshake and a Smile, Island Style", Patricia Cutright, states "The term 'consortia' conjures up impressions that span the spectrum from highly organized, membership-driven groups to loosely knit cadres focusing on improving services to their patrons however they can make it happen."ⁱⁱⁱ

Consortia: Some Characteristics

So what are some of the main characteristics of a consortium? First, there must be an established goal or benefit for the group. For collection management, it may be a need to cut costs by purchasing as a group. For resource sharing, it may be using a system to exchange materials in an easier, more efficient and timely way.

Another identifying attribute is whether there is a formal or informal grouping of the libraries. The organization may develop in order to achieve a particular goal, as some of the larger consortial powers have done, or may be established informally around an opportunity to improve services to patrons without incurring exorbitant costs.

No matter what type of governance is used, libraries may gather around a particular system or network that allows a cleaner collaboration and yet provides a reasonable price for the derived benefits. As we will see, ArticleReach Direct fits neatly into this camp.

Consortia may be funded by membership fees in more highly organized group. A consortium may be membership driven with a central budget. Conversely, consortia may consist of members that individually pay for a system without a presiding body to manage finances.

Finally, administrative functions of the consortia may be controlled centrally or shared among the partners of the consortia.

ArticleReach

ArticleReach (AR) is Innovative Interfaces, Incorporated's (III) consortial borrowing system based on a physical union catalog that enables and enhances the exchange of articles between libraries. The system compiles holdings through a central catalog and delivers article requests to the appropriate lenders. Patrons initiate requests through databases using OpenURL, searching the central catalog or going directly to the request form.

Before 2006, ILL decided to create a patron initiated/unmediated system for article requests. Named ArticleReach, the system was similar in nature to their popular INNReach product. Although the features of the systems are comparable, ArticleReach focuses on serials holdings and document delivery while INNReach's purpose is the requesting of loans. The two systems can be integrated so all aspects of resource sharing can be covered.

In April of 2006, the first system of libraries to use ArticleReach was NExpress, a collection of academic institutions in the Northeast section of the United States. This consortium consisted of six ILL libraries already participating in reciprocal resource sharing. Although, NExpress used ArticleReach for a number of years, they no longer use the system.

ArticleReach Direct

ArticleReach Direct (ARD) was created to serve as a consortium of Innovative libraries using the AR system in 2007. The original group of partner libraries in ARD consisted of academic libraries in the United States, including a number of Association of Research Libraries (ARL) members. In 2008, several libraries from the United Kingdom and Australia joined the consortium. Since 2008, some libraries have left the group for a variety of reasons while other libraries have added ARD to their arsenal of tools to benefit their users. Currently, membership consists of four U.S., three U.K. and five Australian libraries with another Australian library are poised to join the group.

Implementing ArticleReach was not difficult. Each library was required to complete a profile that was used by ILL to set up the structure for retrieving journal titles and holdings. As part of this process, the initial group gathered together at ILL Headquarters for training. Initial training included hands-on work because ILL was making changes to the product during the set-up of the system. Today, implementation is handled in a different way, one that does not require travel or central training.

Problems and issues that were encountered during training were addressed at that time or shortly after with a period of testing by the partners before the system went live. The original group made changes to their local library web sites to reflect the new service and announcements were sent out to the various academic communities.

To demonstrate the reach of AR, the current ARD libraries are listed below with the respective size of their patron body and the holdings for each library (numbers are approximate).

Institution	Students	Faculty/Staff	Holdings
Alliant International University	3,700	500	140,000 print vols., 16,000 e-journals
Australian National University	16,719	3,986 staff (1612 academic)	2.5 million vols., 55,107 print journals
Azusa Pacific University	10,000	800	240,00 print vols., 46,000 e-journals
Georgetown University	17,000	3,000	2.4 million vols.
Michigan State University	48,000	11,000	6.5 million vols., 75,000 serials
University of Glasgow	23,000	6,000	2.5 million vols.
University of Liverpool	30,000	4,700	2 million vols., 20,000 print journals, 500,000 e-books
University of Sydney	51,000	3,000	5.5 million vols., 85,000 e-journals
University of Technology, Sydney	36,357	3,068	900,000 print volumes
University of Warwick	19,086	4,353	933,317 print books, 47,622 journals, 69,960 e-books
University of Wollongong	30,000	1,900	500,000 vols. 100,000 e-books, 90,000 journals
Victoria University	30,000	2,500	530,000 vols., 488,000 e-books, 24,000 e-journals

As you can see, the number of possible users who could be served by ARD at each university is substantial with impressive holdings available to the consortium.

In the calendar year 2012, ARD filled 85,184 requests for the patrons of the member libraries. ARD can automatically cancel requests for items owned or a library can mediate a request, so for this time period, 26,192 requests were cancelled. In addition, 39,040 requests were passed to traditional interlibrary loan because they were not available from consortial members.

ARD Statistics for 2012

Cancelled (held locally)	26192	17%
Filled	85184	57%
Pass2ILL	39040	26%
Total	150416	100%

Agreement and Guidelines

Consortia cannot function without a basic agreement and guidelines. This can be determined mutually or by a governing group. In the case of ARD, the library directors established the initial agreement with very basic guidelines. Originally, the library directors agreed that ARD would be comprised of libraries that were members of the Association of Research Libraries. They also resolved that there would be no charges between the members for the fulfillment of the requests. In addition, copyright issues were addressed and a 24-hour fulfillment standard would be observed. Some basic guidelines for scanning were also included in the document.

Since the inception of the original agreement, the guidelines have been reviewed, refined and agreed upon by the members with the latest version accepted and approved in February of 2012. The group also developed a set of standards that addresses the turnaround time, cancelling and passing procedures, image quality and resends.

Challenges

As one can imagine, there are unique challenges to conducting the business of an international or multinational consortium or any other international group. Some of these issues are out of the control of the member libraries while other challenges are more directly controlled by the partners.

The first issue to be addressed for ARD was the vast distance between member libraries. Three different continents are involved in the formation of the group. Travelling to meet in person is not feasible. For the first few years, some members would gather at the Annual and Midwinter Conferences of the American Library Association (ALA). As members from the U.K. and Australia were added, the ability to meet as a group at these conferences was no longer a viable option. In addition, some member libraries lacked funding to send staff to conferences.

Regular communication between members was crucial. Many options were considered and the most feasible was to institute monthly conference calls. Michigan State University, a founding library of ARD, agreed to host the line for teleconferencing.

Calendar dates and times zones for each member were important elements in establishing working practices and addressing concerns with the vendor. World Clock^{iv}, made it easy to set up meeting times through its meeting planner. For the U.K. and U.S. libraries, it was the same calendar date, while the Australia libraries are a calendar day ahead and absolutely could not meet with the U.K. members. Therefore, each monthly conference call is actually two calls, one for the U.K. partners and another for the Australia group. The U.S. libraries can choose to attend either meeting while MSU coordinates and participates in both.

Although all partners had a mutual cultural heritage and language, spoken English varies widely among English-speaking countries. This was most noticeable during the conference calls. In addition, cultural

and environmental differences meant that making assumptions was not helpful in the communications between members. Even the weather could present issues that were not shared by all consortium members.

Naturally, it is important to mention the various differences in national laws, including copyright. Laws and interpretation of laws differ from country to country, even though many laws are related or interrelated. It goes without saying that copyright also falls within this realm. Copyright statements for all three countries are therefore included on all ARD forms. There will be more about this later.

Some aspects of distance may be more under the control of a member library. This can include licensing, policies and library cataloging. Member libraries may have the ability to negotiate terms for licensing e-resources that can expedite requests in ARD. However, if the resources are purchased through other consortia, the ability to dictate those terms may be severely restricted. Also, it should be noted that the laws of the country may also impact the ability of the institution to determine the ability to share. Library policies are often set by the library but home institutions may also impinge on the ability to share resources. Finally, cataloging practices and system requirements may determine what items are available for supplying to the group. The ArticleReach system looks for particular elements in the record in order to perform a match for processing. If the data is not represented in a consistent way in records, the program is unable to consistently identify matches in the system. Some of these issues can be addressed by the home library and hopefully, the library has reviewed all external impediments to sharing before joining the consortium.

Communications

Communication can take many forms and mean many things to members of a consortium. It may involve meetings, statistics, documents, e-mail lists, web sites and, today, social media.

Our first line of communication is the listserv that was generously set up and maintained by III. This listserv was originally established to assist with product development and group formation. Later, it was an excellent means for the member libraries to contact each other with questions, concerns, issues, and news.

Meetings are held monthly if possible, through teleconference calls. To allow participation by all members, two monthly meetings are held. Since there is a 9 to 11 hour time difference between the U.K. and Australia with various time zones in the U.S. to consider, it is not possible to hold a single meeting every month. The range of times is a result of the changes from Standard Time and Daylight Savings Time for all members. Unfortunately, the teleconference line requires callers outside the U.S. to pay a fee. This meeting access inequity is being addressed by the search for a VoIP option. Most recently, Adobe Connect has been used for this purpose with hopes that future meetings will be held through this medium.

Holding two monthly meetings has been a critical goal for the group in order to coordinate processes and make substantive product improvements to Innovative Interfaces. This means that it is extremely important to provide organized agendas and produce succinct minutes for the group. A call for agenda items is usually sent out before the meetings and an agenda a few days before the scheduled meeting. Minutes for each meeting are distributed as soon as they are compiled so that members have the ability to check on the progress of the consortium.

To inform ARD partners about the progress of the group beyond the minutes of the meeting, group statistics are compiled by the co-coordinator and distributed to the group. This set of statistics is based upon parameters set up by the NExpress consortium. Each member has access to most of the data but the compilation of information assists with determining the requesting relationships load balancing in ARD. In ARD, it is possible to set up tiered requesting by region but since articles can be supplied in a timely way, geographic requesting has not been implemented.

In order to make available all of the documents of the consortium, a Google Docs site was established and all members were given access with editing rights. In this Google Site, members find the Guidelines and Standards, Contact Information, Agendas and Minutes, Statistics, Users Surveys, Enhancement

(lists), and other Resources. The availability of these documents through a site that is easily accessed has been extremely helpful in unifying the group and providing a basic background of the consortia to new members.

Again, using tools made available through Google, a web site was created for the consortium. This site was designed with a view towards prospective members. It includes information about ARD, direct access to the ARD catalog, the guidelines and standards, some basic annual statistics and faculty/student comments culled from surveys. The link for this site is <https://sites.google.com/a/msu.edu/articlereach-direct/>.

Finally, in an attempt to tap into the latest technological development in communication, a Facebook group was formed. Some members were added initially and others joined later. It was hoped that sharing a social image with other members would improve communications. Since we are unable to meet in person, having a general idea about the other people involved may promote a feeling of familiarity when conversing during the meetings.

Copyright

Because copyright is so critical in a service that delivers articles, it made sense to discuss it as a separate issue. Each country has its own laws and regulations in regard to copyright, as well as international laws and agreements. Understanding copyright issues is a challenge for one's own institution but become even more of a demand when considering multinational implications.

In ARD, it was necessary to develop a form that contained copyright statements for the U.S., the U.K. and Australia. Each country needed to specify copyright requirements for their patrons at the time of requesting. Since ArticleReach uses a single form for all members, it was necessary to include each of these statements.

Success and Failures

While there is always hope in any enterprise that the project or effort will prove to be successful, such is not always the case. So it has been with ARD. Since it is a group that is unrelated in any other way, there has been a goal to promote a sense of partnership within the group. Finding ways to do that has been exciting and unique.

Successes

First of the successes to be discussed here is the adherence of participants to the agreement. When new members are added, it has been important to share with them the documents of the group and discuss any concerns that they may have about the consortial arrangement. Once libraries accept the precepts of the agreement, most diligently seek ways to implement the changes needed to fulfill those commitments. Some libraries have rearranged processing in order to fulfill the need to comply with a 24-hour turnaround time. Other libraries have reviewed their cataloging and made significant changes to promote a better match for the titles in the system. All of these adjustments have signified an acceptance of the consortial agreement.

Conference call attendance has proved to be crucial to the success of the group. Most libraries attend the meetings or send a substitute if necessary. If unable to attend, a library often chooses to share a report out to the partner libraries that is then incorporated into the minutes of the meeting. With the ability to use internet meeting space and sharing desktops, it is hopeful that meetings in the future will be even more productive.

Another success for ARD is the enhancement process developed by group for the product. Initially, ARD members put forth enhancements during the training process when we all met as a group. Since this is no longer possible, conference calls have dedicated time to discussing enhancements that are desired by ARD partners. Once all possible improvements are thoroughly discussed and understood, the group votes on the final document that is then sent to ILL for consideration. ILL has another enhancement process for their other products but ArticleReach has not been included in those deliberations. As an example, alternatives to Ariel for supplying articles have been developed. ArticleReach now allows the

use of Odyssey Standalone and DropBox as ways of sending articles from the lender to the borrowing patron. Once sent, the system automatically updates and notices are sent to the patrons. All based on the receipt of the article in the system. Another example of positive impact is the expansion of the AR copyright tracking capability. The Consortium's request for this functionality was an influencing factor for III development.

Failures

As with all such endeavors, there have been failures. One of the first efforts to lose ground was the gathering of partners at ALA Conferences. While it was a pleasure to meet other ARD staff at the conferences and be able to discuss issues face to face, continuation of this practice would prove to be detrimental to the consortium since all multinational partners were not involved in the discussions. There is hope, of course, that in the future, ArticleReach Conferences may allow members to interact in person rather than through other mediums.

While the initial creation of the web site seemed like a good idea, it has not produced much interest either due to the lack of promotion of the consortium or other reasons. However, at this point the site is a disappointment.

The Facebook group was a chance for staff from the various ARD libraries to get to know one another without physically interacting. There has been some activity in the group but it too has proven to be unsatisfying.

Improvements

One significant improvement has already been implemented – the use of an internet meeting program that will allow members to use a whiteboard, share a desktop and programs, share documents, chat and use audio/visual components. This will facilitate a better interaction between the members during meetings and promote the use of the various documents and the web sites established on behalf of the consortium.

To be considered in the future is a more formal organization of the membership. Since its inception, ARD has had only three co-coordinators (one since the beginning). This promotes continuity but may not spread the opportunities around the group. It may be beneficial to elect rotating coordinators who will take charge of the business of the group.

An additional improvement may present itself with a review of the processing that each member library manages for ARD. As processing improvements are realized, it is beneficial to all participants to learn about those improved methods and share the time and cost savings.

Finally, as enhancements are implemented, the software itself will improve. For Australian libraries, an additional method for tracking copyright is needed. The group is hoping to see this development soon. Currently, those libraries are using a more manual method for data retrieval. Other enhancements will add to the value of the software as well and are eagerly awaited.

Conclusion

Consortia are created with the idea of sharing resources for improved patron service. A multinational or international consortium presents its own set of challenges for these libraries. Time and distance are factors that make interactions within a multinational consortium more difficult but also very rewarding when cooperation results in success. As stated in the Report of the Task Force on International Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery Practices, "Given the importance of resource sharing to research libraries and to the communities they serve, members of the research library community should continue to participate in international interlibrary loan and document delivery arrangements..."^v Much has been accomplished in ARD's first six years. Partner libraries have shared hundreds of thousands of resources in a timely and efficient manner, a reflection of the dedication of individual group members to the goals of the enterprise and demonstrating a successful model of an informal international consortium.

Notes

ⁱ *Online Merriam Webster Dictionary* - <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>

ⁱⁱ Marshall Breeding, "Introduction to Resource Sharing" Resource Sharing in Libraries: Concepts, Products, Technologies and Trends, in *Library Technology Reports*, 2013, v. 49, n. 1, p. 6.

ⁱⁱⁱ Patricia J. Cutright "Consortia Building: A Handshake and a Smile, Island Style", *Information Technology & Libraries*, (2000), v. 19, n. 2, p. 90-95.

^{iv} *World Clock* - <http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/>.

^v "Report of the Task Force on International Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery Practices", *Research Library Issues: A Quarterly Report from ARL, CNI, and SPARC*, June 2011, RLI 275, p. 5.

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