

*DRTC – INDEST (IIT, Delhi) - USEFI
Joint Symposium on Consortia
6th – 8th October, 2004
DRTC, Bangalore*

Paper: N

Resource Sharing through Consortia: An Experience with FORSA Libraries

Y. M. Patil

Librarian, Raman Research Institute,
Bangalore 560 080.

Abstract

The paper shows the importance of consortia in ever growing need for library cooperation and resource sharing. It gives a detailed overview of the formation of FORSA Consortia and the problems confronted with at various levels. The author shares the experiences of FORSA Consortia formation.

1. Introduction

It is well known that there has been steady increase in cost of journals and proportional cut in subscription every year. Library professionals have initiated several measures by way of co-operative acquisitions, resource sharing, inter-library loans and document delivery. This was fine as far as print media was concerned.

Rapid increase in information, escalating costs, enabling technology have fuelled both our need and ability to co-operate. But in many cases, the co-operations we engage is only skin deep. Today, we have few examples of deeper and more profound co-operation, and institutions coming willingly to share their information. Emergence of information technology has drastically changed information-handling activities at all levels, viz. Publishers, aggregators, librarians and users.

The publishing industry represented mainly by commercial, societal and academic publishers, has been experimenting with the new technology and marketing strategies for several years. The latest being, making journals available in e-format. If this trend continues, one day we may end up with e-format only. The question being looked into is: will these publications be affordable by an average institution and under what conditions? What will be the role of libraries in accessing / preserving technical information?

This trend has forced librarians to look for ways and means to subscribe / access maximum number of e-journals with reasonable costs on negotiation with publishers / vendors under consortium guidelines. Consortium is an institutional alliance bringing the like-minded institutions with common aims, policies and collective agenda. Indeed, it is for meeting across table between willing buyers / sellers either directly or through intermediary / aggregators with 'win - win' situations to all. We are not joining consortia to be a good citizen. It is our enlightened self-interest.

Experiences have shown that the concept of consortia works well between organisations, which are similar in size, funding, and those, which are headed by, enlightened library administrators. Unlike consortia models existing in developed world, where they are all well established, the ones in India are still in their infancy and there is need to study their models and establishing guidelines and methodologies.

For consortium formation, one needs willingness, courage, and determination. Some of our successes to date may well be the result of our having picked the low hanging fruits. New possibilities may not come as easily as our earlier efforts. But it is convinced that our efforts are the well worth the payoffs: increased access to our students and faculty, broadened access to our users and recognition that libraries receive for their spirit of co-operation.

While negotiating for consortium, one should look into existing guidelines brought out by International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC), which has extended 'OLIVE BRANCH' to publishers in the form of "current perspectives and purchase of electronic information".

Now let us look into how a group of like-minded professionals has emerged with the sole aim of resource sharing.

2. Forum for Resource Sharing in Astronomy & Astrophysics (FORSA)

In the early 1980s, due to proliferation of science and technology literature, librarians working in institutes where astronomy is one of the major research areas, felt the need to establish a forum for sharing and exchange of information. The need was primarily felt due to the following reasons:

- Very few institutes were involved in research in the field;
- Considerable interaction existed amongst astronomers;
- Due to high infrastructure available for research in astronomy, libraries infrastructure was also reasonably well equipped compared to many other libraries.

No library can be self-sufficient in the resources and access to the holdings of the member libraries would help in minimising duplication. There was dire necessity to exploit information resources held in each library for mutual advantage. Seven libraries from OU, IIA, PRL, RAC, RRI, TIFR and TIFR Centre came together to formulate strategies for co-operation, collaboration and co-ordination for resource sharing.

As a result, during the first meeting on July 29, 1981, at RRI, Bangalore, it was decided informally to launch a Forum for Resource Sharing in

Astronomy & Astrophysics (FORSA). The mission of the Forum was to compile union catalogues of scientific serials; annuals and other irregular publications; reference tools; recent research in astronomy; books on order and theses holdings; holdings of duplicate issues and facilities available in each library.

During last two decades, FORSA has been acting, as the catalytic agent in resource sharing and had several meetings to chalk out needs directing libraries to cope with changing information handling scenario. Since 1989, FORSA members have been meeting every alternate year synchronising the meetings of Astronomical Society of India. Besides interacting among member libraries, FORSA members also interact with the astronomers in the joint session, in which a presentation about the achievements of FORSA is made and comments/suggestions are invited from the astronomers to improve quality of information services rendered. This is the only kind of interaction observed between the users and library professionals during users professional meets. It is interesting to note that all FORSA libraries have been fully computerised with all modern IT applications and capable of coping up with ever changing library information technology.

At present, FORSA has eleven members under its umbrella covering institutes from different government departments, DST, UGC, DAE, etc.

- Aryabhata Research Institute for Observational Sciences, Naini Tal;
- Bose Institute, Kolkata;
- Harish Chandra Research Institute, Allahabad;
- Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bangalore;
- Inter University Centre for Astron. & Astrophys.; Pune;
- National Centre for Radio Astrophysics (TIFR), Pune;
- Osmania University (CASA), Hyderabad;
- Physical Research Laboratory, Amhedabad;
- Raman Research Institute, Bangalore;
- Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, Kolkata;
- Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai.

The 12th Institute which has shown keen interest to join FORSA is:

- S. N. Bose National Centre for Basic Sciences.

2.1 The Objectives Of FORSA Are:

- Collection Development in IT environment;
- Facilitate e-access to journals and books;
- Actively participate in resource sharing, inter-library loan, and document delivery (e-mail; fax; courier, speed post)
- Database merging of libraries holdings (books / journals) and facilitating access to merged database;
- Digitisation of archival materials of the institutes and making it available on website for access by all;
- Participate actively in consortia plans for sharing e-journals/books and other databases with various publishers and academic societies;
- To encourage Open Access and establish Institutional Repositories.
- The membership is open to those organisations, where astronomy is one of the subjects of study and library has collection pertaining the subject.
- FORSA is participant in the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC).

Now let us look into types of consortia that have been evolved in the country during last two to three years.

3. Types of consortia and models:

The types of consortia identified are generally based on various models evolved in India in variety of forms depending upon participants' affiliations and funding sources:

- Open Consortia:
 - FORSA; SNET's LISA and INDEST

- Closed Group Consortia
 - CSIR; DAE & IIMs Consortia
- Inst.Hqrs funded model
 - TIFR & Branch Libraries
- Centrally Funded Models:
 - CSIR; INDEST & UGC-Infonet
- Shared Budget Model:
 - FORSA; IIMs; HELINET
- National Consortium:
 - INDEST; UGC-Infonet; and ICARNET (Being developed)

Now let us look into characteristics of 'Open Consortia', as FORSA is one of the examples in this category.

- This is open-ended consortia provides flexibility for the libraries to join and leave at their need, convenience and will.
- Small homogeneous group, who have a need to cross-share the resources in a specific subject area generally driven by this kind of consortia.
- The initiative may come from a group of dedicated library professionals or by a publisher for identified set of resources.
- This type of consortia works with members coming willingly to form consortium with the spirit of true co-operation and trust.
- The model is self-funded as each member pays his part of the cost.
- Once the critical mass of membership level is achieved and if the consortia sustain over two years, it is likely that consortium is stabilised and will last longer.
- Publisher/vendors will be too happy to co-ordinate and support the consortium efforts.
- In this model, an obligatory three years contract is envisaged and no member could drop any title during the period.

- This conflict can be resolved if the publisher offers swapping the journals that needs to be dropped out by another journal that is needed. The solution assumes significance only if publisher has a title that concerned library needs. Otherwise, what could be the fate of the consortia?
- The experience reflects that the consortium should begin with a charter of set guidelines in the form of MOU from participating members and another set of MOU recording specific commitment for each resource for which consortia deals are entered into.

4. FORSA Consortia

This is an open model, wherein institutes are affiliated to different government departments. This is a model where professionals willingly come together and support consortia formation. FORSA has gone into formation of two consortia, viz. Indian Astrophysics Consortium (IAC) (Kluwer 2002+) and Nature Online (Nature Publishing Group, 2002+), keeping in view the following points:

- It is a voluntary consortium with shared goals being one of the several types of consortia;
- Governed by discussion/consensus among participant library professionals;
- It was started with nothing but good will and shared goals, without staff support, no office, and one of the participants has to become the co-ordinator for dealing with all FORSA matters.

We have a 'sunset' clause, i.e. review every three years for IAC and on-line single title every year for renewal keeping in view everybody's concern and experience of the past years;

4.1 Indian Astrophysics Consortium: 2002+

- Vendor : Informatics (India) Ltd. For Kluwer Journals.
- Participants : IIA, IUCAA, RRI, ARIES & HRI.

- This is a consortium with homogeneity of subject group - Astronomy & Astrophysics and negotiated licensing with the following terms and conditions:
 - Single payment by one of the participants or through an agent/vendor and license has to be signed by all;
 - Initial minimum subscription was for 5 titles with 10% cross e-access fee, but one of the member had two titles only, and they wanted to be in the consortium, thereby cross e-access fee was hiked 12%;
 - The members are expected to maintain same level of subscription during contractual period;
 - Publishers found it convenient to negotiate with members through an agent and agent raising individual invoices to all members and single payment to publishers;
 - Institution-wise usage statistics to be provided to ascertain as to how often users access to all titles subscribed;
 - It was a "win-win" situation for both publishers and consortium participants in terms of the decreased cost of electronic access to e-journals and increased volume of sales for publishers;

4.1.1 Problems Encountered

- It was a maiden venture for FORSA. To begin with we did not have established guidelines/procedures to go into consortia formation.
- We have to believe in middleman, who is expected to work on our behalf.
- The agent added one more member to our group, whose titles were outside the group, then diluting the objectives of the consortium. As a result, the consortium was burdened with other titles with marginal interest to one or two members;
- This kind of incidence could have been avoided if members were aware of consortium guidelines and a formal committee to decide the membership of the consortium or FORSA;

- Usage statistics was provided on institutional bases rather than title-wise and now with introduction of COUNTER, one can get access to usage statistics for each title.

4.1.2 Review of Consortia

After completion of three years of consortium term, a review was done during recent meeting held in July 2004, between publisher/vendor and the group. The past experience of the group was discussed and each one had assessed fairly good use of consortium titles and agreed for renewal for the coming year. In the mean time, Kluwer was taken over by Springer and we had to negotiate with Springer. Many FORSA members also subscribed Springer journals and we agreed to go for consortium for both with following terms and conditions:

- Charging of 10% cross e-access fee.
- Fresh title list prepared for 2005 should be maintained for the contract period and in the event of any cancellation which may reduce the Print cost; the publisher will explore the possibility of increasing the cross e-access fee or remove the price cap agreed. Here the members have flexibility of reviewing journal titles subscribed during 2004 and addition/deletion can be affected.
- The cap price fixed is applicable on print subscription for the three year contract period;
- Perpetual access is provided to all the members for the subscribed content for the subscribed years.
- Back files provided for access is from 1997 onwards.
- Springer titles under consortium will be COUNTER compliant.
- If need be, besides e-access through IP address, additional PW/IP can be provided for use by field stations/ or staff moving on sabbatical, etc

4.2 FORSA Nature On-Line Consortium: 2002+

Participants : 2002-2003 : IIA, IUCCA, NCRA, PRL, RRI, JNCASR*

2003-2004 : BI, IIA, IUCCA, NCRA, PRL, RRI, TIFR, JNCASR*

2004-2005 : ARIES, BI, IIA, IUCCA, NCRA, PRL, RRI, TIFR, JNCASR*

(*Non-member, but wished to join Consortium)

This consortium is formed direct with publisher. This is a model for a single title, which is common to all libraries and one of the very high impact factor journals. Although the title was available on-line earlier, but kept out of subscription as the cost was exorbitant and all libraries were getting print edition by airmail. FORSA extended its boundaries to other members in order to negotiate and share the high cost. To begin with, we had six members during 2002-2003 and it is nine for 2004-2005. The renewal is yearly basis and no cap price is offered.

- On preliminary enquiry, two pricing models were offered for 2002-2003 having users group between 1-999 and 1000-2000. The first option was fitting to the group, as the total users strength was less than 700.
- On negotiations for option 1, Publishers informed that there was no price change as pricing model was universal.
- Publisher demand was for one invoice, single payment and one of the participants has to sign the licence agreement.
- To overcome the above hassles, publishers offered to go through subscription agent without commission. On further negotiations, certain additional points were considered in order to get through with Consortium.
- All participants will receive invoice separately and to be settled within a reasonable time.

- To avail the on-line access through Consortium under FORSA, there has to be some legal sanctity of the Forum, which is taking multi-site access. Hence, some one among the participants has to sign the licence agreement on behalf of FORSA members, which was agreed upon.
- Publishers also agreed for payment through an agent, but there would be no discount or commission.
- On-line access is through IP Address.
- Back file access is given from 1997 onwards and in the event of discontinuing subscription; perpetual access is given for number of year's consortium subscription.
- For renewal for 2003-2004; 2004-2005, pricing was negotiated every year and it was observed that price hike was of the order of : Pounds 434(2002-2003); 585(2003-2004); 780(2004-2005) and cost of on-line is almost equal to print edition.
- On negotiation, publisher has agreed to give PW/ID selectively as and when required.
- The statistics of usage by all members was examined and Nature on-line was the one that had maximum access. There is provision to get monthly statistics.

4.2.1 Problems Encountered

FORSA is an informal group and there was no formal understanding, as one of the members has to take the responsibility of signing the licence agreement on behalf of all members. Since the publishers expect that all members to join the consortium at the same time, irrespective of their present subscription to Print or On-line, where, there is likelihood of some period of duplication during the first year. Since negotiations were direct and no mediator was involved, it was a win-win situation for both the parties.

As per publishers, it is the first Indian Consortium for On-line Nature.

5. What we learnt from the experience

Positive aspect is - many institutions are coming forward willingly for joining consortium so as to access more information. Publishers are willing to offer more lucrative offers to consortia so as to have more assured sales. We are in the beginning stage without set guidelines, standards, procedures and every offer has to be looked thoroughly by the negotiating group. The models evolved during last 2-3 years in the country, we see some uncertainties at different levels.

5.1 *Uncertainties at Professional Level*

- Absence of willingness, courage, determination, initiative and consensus among the members of Consortium.
- Absence of awareness relating to legal matters in respect of access, ownership and archival of digital information.
- Absence of professional to deal with procedures in the libraries.
- Absence of exposure, training, awareness for library staff to deal Consortium activities.

5.2 *Uncertainties at Govt. Level*

- Lack of infrastructure to access electronic resources at institutional levels.
- Lack of co-ordination, co-operation and collaboration between organisations at National level and absence of IT laws, which dictates and facilitates to access and archive electronic information in the country.
- Absence of looking into creating National Site Licensing (NSL) with leading publishers as is done by few countries in the World. It is necessary to standardise procedures and establish guidelines to govern e-information at National level. NSL could be the best solution for India as majority of R&D organisations are governed or funded by Central Govt. Departments.

5.3 Uncertainties at Publishers / Vendors Level:

- There is a wide spread menace of publishers merging / splitting resulting in postponement of negotiated terms and conditions and uncertainty in access to information.
- Absence of suitable pricing models for developing Consortia.
- Absence of suitable models and effective communication with library administrators.
- Absence of resourceful representative of publishers or intermediary for Consortia negotiations

6. Management issues of Consortia

The successful consortia take into account not just the delivery methods, formats, pricing models, technology requirements and legal implications; it also takes into account the make up and structure of its members. While the diversity of members enhances their richness as a joint resource, it also creates technical, financial and cultural obstacles that can hinder co-operative efforts. To be successful, a library consortium needs more than just the goodwill of the consortium member and a common goal. Experiences reflected that successful consortia require time to develop a high level of trust between parties and willingness to contribute. Successful collaborative efforts are in terms of unique purpose, shared vision and concrete, attainable goals and objectives, sufficient funds and above all a SKILLED CONVENER.

7. Conclusions:

The spirit of resource sharing, the resurgence of library consortia are viewed essential with spurt in technological developments. What could be our real needs and challenges? They are:

- To provide expected services to our readers; to build internal consensus among the group; demonstrate integrity and good will with publishers; and every endeavours should be for cost effective negotiations;

- We live in a very turbulent period – if we can not make expected progress towards instant access to electronic resources – then key decision makers will shop elsewhere to meet their information requirements;
- We, the professionals have to make concrete steps towards building a Digital Library and that has to take place very soon;
- E – Journals have to come to stay and *ipso facto* library consortia;
- Indian efforts are slow in forming consortia. We need a truly national level co-ordination for setting National level Site Licensing;
- The present endeavours are no doubt a step forward for future national level needs and expectations.