
Discussion Group A

How do we assess the impact of e-lib for information users and user research

Sacha Shaw (Goldsmiths College)

As one of the speakers had already reminded us, there were no stated aims for e-lib. So, we wondered, what might information users have expected? We imagined that they might reasonably expect e-lib to lead to greater availability. Their priority would be the real information content of the products and services developed.

We felt that project workers were focusing on what they were developing. Librarians are being changed most, rather than other information users. We know about e-lib; we are involved; we have to be positive.

It may be some time before the full extent of any impact on users can be observed, as this will follow the impact on the library community. Users may not even know that e-lib is affecting them. Do they care? Should they care? We were reminded of the IMPEL study of academic staff use of electronic information, the initial analysis of which indicates scepticism.

The idea of the hybrid library is important. People use information sources on a need to know basis. Most people still like print. We noted the relevance of the paradoxes identified by the IMPEL team. If users are simply asked what they want, they don't know. They only want to find out how to use resources when they need them for a specific purpose. Academic staff are content driven, not process driven. One finding from IMPEL is the importance to them of time. People will only use the electronic environment when they come to see it as the natural way of doing things and when they can see that using it makes a positive difference. Content is the factor that may determine the lasting influence of e-lib.

Industry does its market research before launching new products. Should we have done our market research before launching e-lib? Or is e-lib an (expensive?) market research exercise for the hybrid library? The market will determine fully what the impact of e-lib will be. The three year duration of e-lib is a long time in technological terms, but it is not a long time in people terms. We cannot yet assess the impact of e-lib as a whole on users. We concluded that this phase has been partly market research for the hybrid library. Maybe in another three years the hybrid library will have started to pull things together.

We noted that users are suffering from questionnaire fatigue. We are still looking for a satisfactory instrument for the assessment of culture change in users from e-lib as a whole.

Report from Discussion Group B

How do we assess the impact of e-lib for
information research and innovation?

*Barbara Buckley (British
Library, Research &
Innovation Centre)*

Five major points emerged from this discussion
group:

- Effects of regionalisation will encourage cross-sectoral collaboration and expansion of e-lib experience to other types of libraries.
- A valuable resources base and expertise have been developed.
- There is a changed culture for undertaking research within institutions at local level.
- E-lib projects should have an impact on the National Research Strategy from the Library and Information Commission.
- There has been good experience for staff in undertaking research. "The point of e-lib projects is we don't know what we're doing."