E-journal collections: facilitating health information access at the
University of Pretoria’s Veterinary Science Library

Introduction

“South Africa is a country in the midst of political, social and economic transition and
transformation. It has overcome many of the challenges it faced as a new democracy in 1994.
Although many challenges remain, the country has never been in a better position to grasp the
opportunities that the world offers. South Africa faces an exciting future. As the country positions
itself to play a more prominent role globally and particularly in Africa, so will the University of
Pretoria play a prominent role as a truly South African university and a leader in tertiary education.
The University of Pretoria stands ready to accept the challenges and opportunities that the dawn of
a new era presents, and to make its contribution towards the improvement of the quality of life and
prosperity as well as the competitiveness of the country and the region.” – University of Pretoria

The University of Pretoria is the largest residential university in South Africa, with more than 30 000
full-time students enrolled in 2004. The Faculty of Veterinary Science is located at Onderstepoort,
where one of the finest animal hospitals in the world is operated. It is the only Veterinary school in
South Africa, and plays a leading role in Africa, particularly in the Southern African Development
Community (SADC) region.

Fundamental changes in the educational environment, developments in information and
communication technology and the associated emergence of the knowledge and information
society, are some factors that influenced information delivery over the past decades. The
University’s Virtual Campus, which was established some years ago, has proven to be a very
effective mechanism for enhancing the learning experiences of both residential and distance
students (University of Pretoria Strategic Plan: Inspiring the Innovation Generation 2002 – 2005:
50).

This paper will give an overview on how health information access, in particular animal health, has
been facilitated by the University of Pretoria’s Veterinary Science Library. Emphasis will be placed
on the development of an e-journal collection, in order to serve the unique clientele.

Serving our clients

As the only Veterinary Science faculty in South Africa, and helping also with the information needs
of the wider region, the user group is diverse and extensive. High quality information services and
resources are important to serve and support the information needs of post-graduate students,
distance learners, researchers, lecturers and research assistants. With more emphasis on
outcome-based education, the information needs of the residential, under-graduate students
increased over the last few years.

As the largest supplier of veterinary information in South Africa, the library (Academic Information
Service) also serves a group of registered outside users, who are mainly private veterinary
practitioners. Challenges with regard to health issues, especially animal and community health, are
high priority information needs in Africa that have to be served.

Focusing on E-information services

In the computer age, time and distance limitations have been eliminated, and have led to a shift in
traditional library roles and information services. Libraries are no longer simply storehouses of
information, but rather serve as “vigorous disseminators of information”(Ashcroft, 2002: 147) The
Internet, with access to a world of information, is available to most students and other library users.
It is however important to state that the librarian is still the disseminator of this information. Users
want the right information, at the right time, with effortless and easy access. Full-text electronic
journal collections evolved into important collections for libraries, due to their accessibility and convenience of use. It is thus important to focus selection processes of e-journals primarily on user needs (Ashcroft 2002: 147).

According to studies by Melgoza et al (2002: 34) graduate and upper-level undergraduate students indicated the following factors as most influential in electronic information searches: accessibility, accuracy, convenience and ease of use. They also found a preference for all electronic-based resources. “The electronic format lends itself to availability beyond time and location.” (Melgoza 2002: 39). Easily accessible and effortless gathering of information, at any time of the day or night, are only some of the information needs that can be satisfied through the use of electronic journal collections.

One of the University of Pretoria’s key strategies is to become an e-university, so the development of e-collections is a top priority of the Academic Information Service (AIS). Tyds@Tuks, the University of Pretoria’s e-journal collection, was established during the middle 1990’s. In 1999 access was available to 2025 titles. By the end of 2003, the number of subscribed titles increased to 21843.

The increase in subscriptions to e-journal titles can be seen in figure 1. During the period 2002 – 2003 a large conversion from paper subscription to electronic-only subscription took place. This is still the trend at the University of Pretoria’s Veterinary Science library, in order to become a virtual library.

![Subscribed e-journal titles](image)

Fig. 1. Electronic journal subscriptions for the period 1999 to 2003

Figure 2 shows the relationship between searches and articles used from the University of Pretoria’s e-journal collection, Tyds@Tuks. A large increase in searches done between 1999 and 2000 can be seen. This can be due to the fact that e-journal platforms, like Science Direct, have been added to the collection. These platforms are not only hosts of full text journals, but provide a whole package of information services. The journal collections are supplemented by relevant bibliographic databases to expand literature searches further and a growing program of online reference works, and in some cases also e-books. Other features include different search options, alerts (journal issue, search and citation), cited by, export citations, save a favourite journal list, linked references and CrossRef links. Over the last five years, these services played a more prominent role in the researcher’s use of electronic journal collections.
Marketing

As libraries move towards digital collections they must ensure that users are aware of both the information available to them and how to access this information. Effective promotion remains a particularly important issue (Ashcroft and Langdon in Ashcroft, 2002:147).

Training and marketing of the e-journal collection are essential responsibilities of the information specialist in the digital library environment. According to Ashcroft (2002:150), effective marketing can serve many purposes, including establishing communication, raising awareness of what is on offer, providing guidance and providing user education.

On the Tyds@Tuks homepage, useful information is given to new, as well as frequent users. Features such as downloads (for example new versions of Adobe Acrobat reader), guides for easy access, information regarding accredited journals, copyright, plagiarism, trials, embargoes and open access. Journals can be accessed via an alphabetical list, through the links to the different journal platforms, or through browsing the subject lists.

New and important information for users is also added here. UpexPlore (the library catalogue), other databases, inter lending services and the Infoportal (UP’s Academic Portal) are all linked to each other.

A similar collection, consisting of e-books is available. This portal provides easy access to e-books and e-book collections. A link to this collection is also available from the Tyds@Tuks homepage.

Infomania is the newsletter of the Veterinary Science Library, and a handy tool to communicate and promote library services and products. It was established in 1998, and with two issues per annum, it keeps the Veterinary Science Library users up to date with library matters. This newsletter is available electronically as well as in paper format.

User training is one of the most important ways of marketing the e-journal collections. Formal as well as informal training sessions are important information specialist activities. Formal training sessions are mainly focused on new users (first- and second year students), fifth year students, final year students and lecturers. Once a year a Research Methodology course is presented to all new post graduate students. Training includes information databases, of which Tyds@Tuks is one. Some of these post-graduate students apply for more in depth training, and this is given by appointment by the information specialist for that particular subject field. One-on-one training sessions are also given to lecturers, researchers and technical assistants.

Special marketing projects focus on specific electronic products at a certain time. E-journals have been marketed directly to faculty members on special occasions such as faculty day, which takes place once a year.
In October 2002 the GAELIC and Friends Marketing Fair was held and featured the Electronic Product Marketing Competition as its focus. The winning team came from the University of Pretoria (AIS) with an effective marketing plan for Science Direct. After this competition, the marketing plan was implemented, and the results were a notable increase in the use of Science Direct.

Management and administration of e-journal collections

According to Ashcroft and McIvor (2001:378), the management of electronic journals cannot yet be considered trouble-free and they will impact on aspects such as working practices and staffing requirements; requiring more technical skills and competencies as well as changes in management priorities and the management of change. In order to maximise the benefits of electronic journal collections to their end users, it is vitally important that librarians stay up-to-date with new developments and review their skills base.

In order to stay informed and communicate the latest information to all our clients, the AIS has a team of information workers, representing each service unit, which meets every month to discuss issues regarding Tyds@Tuks and e-journals. An e-journal coordinator is also responsible for the management, administration, facilitation and coordination of the e-journal collection of the Academic Information Service.

The following aspects are involved in the management of the electronic journal collection: Licence agreements, copyright, lack of permanent archive, instability of journals, passwords and access, cost implications, relationship between libraries and e-journal vendors, statistics and maintenance.

Licence agreements are legal agreements between the suppliers of digital databases and users that have conditions on use of the databases (Keenan and Johnson, 2000: 154). Copyright, on the other hand, is the right given to the creator, author, or other person who may own the copyright of certain types of works, not to have that work copied (reproduced) without authorization, according to patent attorneys John and Kernick in Von Seidel (1996: 23). Licence agreements as well as copyright issues brought new controversial questions regarding information delivery.

Notwithstanding the advantages provided by digital information, access licences can hamper copying, reproduction, and in some cases use if a user is within a group of persons not authorised to use the information (Masango, 2004: 5). It is thus essential that the e-journal librarian is aware of the exact terms and conditions of the licence agreement, the contractual obligations that have to be honoured, as well as how legal terms such as assignment, termination rights and applicable law should be handled.

According to Masango (2004: 8) the vagueness of licensing agreements to clarify the limits of their existence, places librarians in difficulties when they have to send information that can only be found in digital format through Inter Library Loans, notwithstanding that some licenses permit Inter Library Loans. It has however, been argued that once digital information is copied on paper, the copyright law prevails and the fair dealing exemption as it is applied in print media prevails.

The current situation in South Africa, regarding copyright and licensing applicable to electronic articles for academic use, is not very clear. The South Africa Copyright Act No.98 of 1978 (as amended) and its regulations, does not address electronic media, and no adequate provisions are made for Inter Library Loans. South Africa, however, has a national initiative, The South African Site Licence Initiative, (SASLI), similar to Britain’s National Electronic Site Licence Initiative (NESLI), the Canadian National Site Licensing Project (CNSLP, and the Korean Electronic Site Licencing Initiative (KESLI), where national site licensing is seen as a smart solution to provide equity of access while leveraging its size to achieving economies of scale through special discounting (Veldsman, 2000:1).
According to Susan Veldsman, the Project coordinator of SASLI, SASLI’s role lies in the area of negotiating licenses with publishers, pricing, co-ordinating of access and delivery, and other issues related to the cost-effective use of electronic information. In fulfilling this role, SASLI works directly under The Coalition of South African Library Consortia (COSALC). It investigates overseas experiences, identifies the required journal titles or databases, conceptualises funding models and negotiates appropriate contracts on behalf of the South African higher education sector. It also addresses any issues which hinder effective use of and access to such electronic information.

Although there is still much to develop regarding copyright issues and electronic information, SASLI created a remarkable environment in which academic libraries and library partnerships in South Africa, can approach this issue.

The lack of a permanent archive of e-journals is a continuing concern for most librarians. Initiatives such as JSTOR serves to allay fears about the lack of a permanent archive for electronic publications (Ashcroft & McIvor 2001: 379).

To build a library collection of e-journals requires time and day-to-day maintenance, due to the instability of electronic journals. It is easy to detect free e-journals on the Internet, and build links from the e-journal portal, in order to facilitate use by library users, but these journals can “vanish” any time from that address, or they can suddenly not be free anymore. The e-journal representatives from the different service units, report any problems, new titles to be added on the title lists, dead links, and other issues regarding e-journals to the e-journal coordinator, who is responsible for the maintenance of Tyds@Tuks.

“A particular annoyance is a proliferation of passwords” (Ashcroft & McIvor, 2001: 378). Users want to access information as easily and conveniently as possible. They don’t want to struggle first to get passwords, before they can access the needed information. To some extent this barrier is being solved by Internet Protocol (IP) control, however it is still limited to on-campus users only.

At the University of Pretoria our users can access e-information through Innopac, by means of the rewrite proxy of Innopac. To use this, no specific setting is necessary in the browser. The URL to the database is changed so that the proxy server is part of the link. The request is routed automatically to use the correct proxy server, which verifies the user and gives access to those permitted.

In this case, the change of the URL forces the user, without his knowledge, to use Innopac as proxy server and be verified in this way as a legitimate user and someone that may gain access to that academic web page. Users must be registered on the Innopac system. They use their surname and university ID once, and may access the information, without being asked for passwords again.

What are the cost implications of electronic journals? What is the difference in price between the printed- and electronic version of a journal? Here aspects such as the binding costs of journals, costs to replace missing and damaged copies, time spent on claims and Inter Library Loans, as well as the ease to access electronic journals must be taken into consideration. Consortia purchasing also plays an important role in cost decisions.

Good relationships between libraries and e-journal vendors are significant for mutual assistance and support. Service level agreements have to be developed in order to promote co-operation and collaboration. Subscription agents have to inform e-journal librarians of new titles that are available electronically as well as other issues such as moves of journal titles to other vendor platforms, price changes, collaboration between publishers and new product developments, to mention only a few.

In order to keep up to date with new electronic journal titles in the veterinary science field, an initiative from Jean-Paul Jette from the Bibliotheque de Médecine vétérinaire, at the University of
Montréal comes in handy. A regular update of new veterinary science e-journals is distributed on the European Veterinary Libraries Group (EVLG) Listserve. Similar to Jean-Paul Jette’s list of veterinary science titles, is the Free Medical Journal Alerts from Bernd Sebastian Kamps.

In order to evaluate the use of the electronic journal collection, usage data and statistics have to be kept. The actual electronic media can be used to track usage of these journals more carefully than it was ever possible with paper journals (Ashcroft & McIvor 2001:381). The publishers and suppliers also provide useful user data and statistics (see also figure 2).

Our information role in Africa

Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) once said: “As a general rule the most successful man in life is the man who has the best information.” Despite many successful initiatives, there is still a lack of access to essential information in Africa.” Health is perhaps the area of most intense demand for greater access to scientific and technical information, partly because failure to obtain it can be literally fatal” (Momen, 2003:700).

A number of initiatives from publishers and professional societies developed over the past few years, in order to fill the information gap between developed and less developed countries. These initiatives focused largely on the supplying of journals and the provision of online information.

In spite of many limitations and barriers to access of information sources in Africa, progress has been made. Godlee et al. (2004: 295) mention that information and communication technologies are increasingly available, more and better content is available to a growing number of people; more and better free resources are available on the Internet and a larger and wider range of health information support programmes are available. There is also an evolvement of an international community, which is committed to improve health-care information with governments and other bodies in developing countries.

A few initiatives, especially focused on the delivering of free electronic journals, are among others The Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI) which provides free or very low cost online access to the major journals in biomedical and related social sciences to local, non-profit institutions in developing countries. Journals from Blackwell, Elsevier Science, the Harcourt Worldwide STM Group, Wolters Kluwer International Health & Science, Springer Verlag and John Wiley are included in their service.

The International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) is a cooperative network of more than 1000 organizations and individuals worldwide, working together to improve access to relevant, reliable information for health professionals in developing and emerging countries. Participation is free of charge and without obligation.

A few other initiatives include SATELLIFE , who produce in conjunction with two physicians from Harvard Medical School and Management Sciences for Health three clinical and public health information publications (HealthNet News) that are distributed via e-mail and free to health professionals in developing countries. The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library (TEEAL) is an indexed library of key agricultural, environmental and related science periodicals created to help institutions in developing countries (Dauphine et al, 2003: 51).

It is, however, true that the majority of health professionals in the developing world are not better informed than they were 10 years ago, according to Godlee et al. (2004: 295). Lack of access to information remains a major barrier to knowledge-based health care in developing countries. The development of reliable, relevant, usable information can be represented as a system that requires cooperation among a wide range of professionals including health-care providers, policy makers, researchers, publishers, information professionals, indexers, and systematic reviewers. The system is not working because it is poorly understood, unmanaged, and under-resourced.
Limitations regarding the access of online information in Africa include factors such as irregular or non-existent electricity supplies, the expense of equipment, and lack of technical skills. Factors regarding the physical access to information, including aspects such as absent, slow or unreliable Internet connectivity, expensive paper and high subscription costs of products are also barriers in the way of information supply to Africa (Godlee, 2004: 295).

Scientific animal health information is also disseminated through various works and periodicals published by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), notably the *Scientific and Technical Review* (3 issues a year). Apart from online publications by the OIE, not much other initiative, regarding the supply of veterinary science information to Africa has been taken up till now. As an African library, best equipped with animal health information in Africa, the Veterinary Science Library of the University of Pretoria has a leading role to play in the supply of veterinary information to Africa.

“Vet Books for Africa “ is an initiative of the Veterinary Science Library of the University of Pretoria, supported by the students of the Faculty of Veterinary Science. It is a biannual venture, established in 1993 and aimed at distributing textbooks and journals, of animal health interest, to veterinary faculties in a number of African countries, where these commodities are in great need. It is made possible by the donation of books from international benefactors as well as journal donations from pharmaceutical firms in South Africa and the Veterinary Science Library, as well as the students who embark on the journey in order to deliver them. African countries that will be visited in 2004 include Botswana, Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

The building of networks with the information centres of veterinary faculties of different African countries is very important. Information needs can be shared and solutions found to problems. Requests for journal articles are sent by fax or e-mail to the Veterinary Science Library of the University of Pretoria, and then these articles are sent to the African library in the format they requested.

The University of Pretoria’s Veterinary Science Library successfully hosted a conference in 1995, the First Conference of African Animal Health Information Workers, where networks were developed. Pre conference workshops are being planned for the 5th International Conference of Animal Health Information Specialists (5ICAHIS) that will take place at Onderstepoort in 2005 with the aim to equip librarians in Africa with better skills in information delivery.

Information specialists of the Veterinary Science Library of the University of Pretoria have created web products, aiming to deliver information on a specific topic or species. These products include Information on African goats and goat production systems in Africa, an ostrich web portal, animal infectious diseases as well as a poultry web portal. All these portals contain links to full text articles that are available on that specific subject.

**Conclusion**

In an era where information is delivered without any space and time barriers, e-journal collections are an important portal for users of information to access needed information as easily and conveniently as possible. The University of Pretoria’s e-journal collection, Tyds@Tuks is such a portal that facilitates use and access to a world of online journal articles. Its development and management have been discussed with emphasis on its use in the Veterinary Science Library.

With an expanding clientele, also including users outside South Africa’s borders, the Veterinary Science Library is an information service focused on the delivering of relevant scientific and technical veterinary and animal health information.


