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E-journals for school libraries

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Over the last decade there has been an information revolution using digital methods of publishing and online access. This has led to certain printbased journals being available online and the frequent appearance of new e-journals. Schools can benefit greatly from this publishing phenomenon, particularly with the utilisation of high-speed Internet access. Busy library staff are faced with the task of selecting e-journals appropriate to the needs of teachers and students.

Broadly defined, an e-journal is a journal that is published electronically and available using Internet technologies including World Wide Web (browser interface), email and listserv. The ease of publishing in this format has led to a proliferation of e-journals, newsletters, ideas forums and themed websites. Sometimes the difference between these four terms becomes blurred, with newsletters being refereed by peers and themed websites being cited.

A significant role of the school library is that of a portal offering guidelines and information to enhance effective curriculum support for teachers. As school libraries increasingly move core services from holdings to access, the reliance on paper-based journals is diminishing in favour of those available easily and cheaply on the Internet. While paper journals are popular with clients, the cost of multiple subscriptions, their management, and storage can become excessive. If teachers can easily access a variety of e-journals or quality newsletters these can supplement, or replace, existing print-based resources.

Benefits in accessing e-journals

The benefits in accessing e-journals are significant, including:

- multiple access points
- currency
- links in articles to other websites
- the ability to enhance content with quality photography, audio and video
- back copies available from the same terminal
- the ability of publishers to update content in current issues
- a wider range of publishers
- the ability to use search engines to uncover even more e-journals
- no air freight charges
- the ability to offer email discussions.

Problems in accessing e-journals

There is also a down side to accessing e-journals. Some e-journal publishing sites may be somewhat ephemeral and the availability of back copies cannot be guaranteed. Although

updating current issues offers benefits, it can create a whole range of problems too. Links that are embedded in articles are often integral to the article yet with the vagaries of Internet publishing these can disappear. Printed journals are portable and easier to read (they have a higher graphical resolution) than e-journals - this is a significant factor for many readers. The sheer quantity of e-journals that can be accessed may also overwhelm clients.

Dual-publication choices

Profit-driven commercial publishers are now offering dual-publication choices, sometimes included in one price. Their e-journals are usually only available by subscription; however in many cases they offer part of the content for fee-free public access. This access can range from showing the contents of the current publication to viewing whole key articles. This valuable option allows library staff to judge the relevance of the e-journal for their clients or to view articles from a wide variety of publishers. School staff enrolled in university courses can often access an enormous amount of e-journals from university libraries by keying in their appropriate student identity passwords.

The ease of producing e-journals or newsletters has given smaller publishers the ability to cheaply publish content electronically. These publishers are usually non-commercial and often fall intothe realm of professional associations, educational institutions or individuals.

Standards for selecting e-journals

When selecting either a commercial or noncommercial e-journal, library staff need to apply the same rigorous standards as they do to other facets of the collection.

- Foremost is the authority and accuracy of the e-journal. We need to ask ourselves if the publication is refereed by other professionals or peers and if it is cited. Many self-published e-journals fall down in this key aspect.
- Is the publisher or author well regarded in their area of expertise?
- Is the material current?
- Is there a bias in the content?
- Does the content support and enhance the current curriculum areas at our school?
- How many clients will use the e-journal if we subscribe to it? Is there a network licensing agreement?
- Are search facilities available within the publication (including back issues)?
- Are the issues indexed?
- What about user comfort? Is the font size appropriate? Are the graphics easy to read?
- Has the publisher made use of the abilities of creative software to enhance the content?
- Does additional software such as Acrobat Reader™, Shockwave™ or Flash™ plugins need to be installed? Is this easily accomplished on our network?

Finding the right e-journal

The task of locating appropriate e-journals can be exhausting. A good starting point is to use a search engine such as Google™. Results can be rewarding, but searching often requires time, thoughtful selection of search terms and patience to obtain the most suitable resources. Gateway searches through university-subscribed databases are often of the required academic level, but access can be restricted to current students of the university. Portals and journal search sites such as The Australian National Library's Australian Journals Online and Education Network Australia (EdNA) provide users with a searchable database, giving details of e-journals. Annotated lists of journals provide a precis of e-journal sites, which can aid in the search for appropriate journals. A selection of e-journals sites for library staff is included at the end of this article.

When you find particularly useful e-journal sites, advertise them to your library users. Highlight

the fact that these additional resources are available to teachers. This may take the form of promoting new e-journal sites (with a brief abstract) in your school's Intranet or library newsletter, adding the e-journal cataloguing record to the library's catalogue or placing it on suggested resources lists.

As school libraries move further along the continuum from holding resources to accessing resources, e-journals and quality newsletters can significantly enhance curriculum content and the professional development needs of library staff, teachers and other school staff. By sifting through the multitude of publications and subscribing, or selecting, only the best material, library staff can introduce their library users to a range of timely, cost-effective and relevant e-journals. Library staff can add significantly to their own knowledge-base with access to relevant library, education and technology e-journals.

E-journal sites
Ariadne
Curriculum Leadership

D-Lib Magazine
From Now On: The Educational Technology Journal
The Horn Book
School Library Journal
School Library Media Research
Teacher Librarian

Newsletter sites
The Big 6 Enewsletter
Connections newsletter

Search portals
Australian Journals Online
Education Network Australia

Annotated lists
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Western Libraries, Western Washington University

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