Chapter XII

Sharing Digital Knowledge With End-Users: Case Study of the International Rice Research Institute Library and Documentation Service in the Philippines

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Abstract

This chapter portrays how resources of the International Rice Research Institute Library and Documentation Service are harnessed to develop its collection of technical rice literature and other information sources by searching, selecting and organizing print and electronic resources for addition to its Web page or the online catalog. With the acquisition of an integrated library system in 1996, the creation of its home page, at http://ricelib.irri.cgiar.org, became a major concern. Links to digital resources,
like Web sites, databases, full-text electronic journals and newspapers, and reference materials are now available through this page. The Library operates on the principle that electronic resources must supplement rather than replace printed sources. The author intends to share the mechanics of linking digital knowledge with users, the problems embedded in this activity, and possible ways of dealing with them.

Introduction: Initial Steps Toward a Digital Library

This chapter describes work carried out by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) Library and Documentation Service (LDS) focusing on digital delivery of rice-related and other information. IRRI, established in 1960 and located in Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines, is one of the 15 international centers under the umbrella of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). Its goal is to “improve the well-being of present and future generations of rice farmers and consumers, particularly those with low incomes” (IRRI, 1996). In pursuance of this mandate, a Library was established in 1961, which now houses the world’s most comprehensive collection of rice technical literature. The Library and Documentation Service (LDS) has clients, which include rice scientists from more than 58 countries all over the world. It has a staff strength of 14 (five librarians and nine paraprofessionals), all equipped with computers. While utilizing advances in information technology, it is the responsibility of the LDS to link knowledge sources with potential users everywhere.

The changing information needs of IRRI staff and worldwide clients and the recent advances in information and communication technologies make digital delivery of information a necessity. The IRRI LDS management opted to take advantage of available technology and offered the convenience of digital access to its users.

Early attempts at computerization were focused on the rice bibliography, the library’s flagship project, which is a compilation of the world’s technical rice literature. In 1989, with the acquisition of additional personal computers, a field structure for the main catalog was devised using an early version of Cardbox Plus (Cardbox, 2003). The program was deemed to be sufficient at that time because exposure to more sophisticated systems was very limited. Searching and retrieval was faster than using the card catalog. However, the non-expandable fields did not lend themselves to efficient data entry.

This system was in use till migration to an integrated library system, the Innopac (Innovative, 2003), took place in 1996. The initial database consisted of 10,000
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