

THE U. OF NOTRE DAME AND RAPIDILL

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1. Introduction

RapidILL is a resource sharing system that was designed by the Interlibrary Loan staff at Colorado State. It grew out of an emergency situation – in July of 1997 a flash flood devastated the library collection, and the area that was hit hardest were the bound periodicals. A makeshift arrangement was created by Colorado State together with a half dozen other Colorado libraries so that faculty and students could quickly get the articles they needed during that fall semester of 1997, and from this effort grew RapidILL, which now consists of over a dozen groups or “pods,” comprising some 150 to 200 libraries worldwide.

2. Why did the U. of Notre Dame consider RapidILL?

Because of rising serial costs, we had cancelled various journal subscriptions and serial packages here at Notre Dame. In an effort to satisfy our patrons, we began using document suppliers more heavily: British Library Inside, Ingenta, CISTI, and others, all of this in addition to traditional ILL. The attraction of the document suppliers was the quick turnaround time; however, because of the costs involved, we wanted to explore other options.

3. How does Rapid work?

A library joins an appropriate group or “pod.” For example, Notre Dame joined the Association of Research Libraries pod, which is made up of such ARL libraries as the U. of Wisconsin, Princeton, Purdue, and approximately sixty other excellent library partners. There is a one-time set-up fee of \$9,000 (USD) as well as an annual fee of \$8,000 (USD). Notre Dame then sent to the Rapid staff at

Colorado State a list of journal holdings, which goes into a centralized database containing the serial holdings of all the member libraries of the ARL pod. Borrowing requests are integrated into the ILL management software of choice, in our case, at Notre Dame, ILLiad. Lending requests come to us via the RapidILL website, and since they are based on the holdings information we supply, they come with our own locations and call number information. Our staff trained and learned how to use Rapid in a sixty-minute teleconference. A Rapid user manual is also available online; however, the whole system is quite straight-forward and transparent. After a several-month trial period, when we determined whether Rapid was right for us, we signed the agreement and joined. An integral part of the agreement is that each library will make every effort to turn around article requests within 24 hours. Another key part of the agreement is that partner libraries do not charge each other.

4. What were the immediate effects of our participation in Rapid?

The immediate effects were very positive. After consulting the statistics and numbers that I pulled from the Rapid website, I sent the associate director here at ND an email, indicating that after eight months of participation (July, 2006 through February of 2007), we had sent 4,163 requests to our Rapid ARL partners and filled 3,961 of them with a turnaround time under 24 hours. This fill rate is over 95%. Considering the set-up and annual fees mentioned above and doing the math, that is, dividing 3,961 articles into \$17,000 (USD) I saw that the cost was only \$4.29 (USD) per article. Even in this initial period, our Rapid requests comprised 55% of all of our article requests. By contrast the turnaround time for the other 45 %, the non-Rapid requests we sent, was approximately 7.5 days.

5. Expenses

At the end of the first year of participation in the ARL pod of RapidILL, I did a little further reassessment. I looked at the money we had been spending on document suppliers. In the fiscal year prior to our participation in RapidILL, we had spent over \$90,000 (USD) with the British Library Inside, Ingenta, CISTI, and various other suppliers. In the fiscal year, 2006 to 2007, our first full year of participation in Rapid, we spent less than \$20,000 (USD).

6. More about costs

It is easy enough to do the math with regard to Rapid's set-up fee and annual fee and contrast that with the expenditures made to document suppliers. In the same way, it is simple enough to gather the statistics on the six thousand plus articles we received that first year and point to the marvelous fill rate and turnaround time. However, the real cost for the great service lies in reciprocation. During our first year of participation, we supplied 7,930 articles to our ARL partners, and in order to live up to our agreement of an under-24 hour turnaround time, lending staff needed to prioritize and more student help was required. Nevertheless, these "costs" notwithstanding, the consensus of opinion here at Notre Dame is that the decision to join Rapid was an unqualified success.

7. Further Improvements – the Rapid Manager

When we first joined Rapid, a borrowing staff member would open a borrowing request that was in the "Awaiting Request Processing" queue in the ILLiad borrowing module, and if the request included an ISSN or an OCLC number as well as a volume year, they would launch the "Rapid Client." The client would look for a match in the Rapid database. If any of our partner libraries held the title and the appropriate year, the staff member would click "OK," import the Rapid number, and mark the request as sent. Now, all of this has been automated. Rapid staff working together with the developers at ILLiad have come up with the "Rapid Manager." As soon as requests clear the copyright queue in ILLiad, if they have the required ISSN or OCLC number plus the year and if there is a match in the database, they are automatically sent to our Rapid partners. They are virtually direct requests with no staff intervention necessary.

8. Electronic Serials

Another area where Rapid has helped us a great deal has been in the area of supplying articles from electronic serials. The RapidILL staff at Colorado State has been very flexible with regard to unblocking serial holdings of those titles and publishers, whose licensing agreements allow for ILL, and blocking those whose licensing agreements are not so generous or have not been fully explored by us. This has allowed us to deal with our licensing agreements piecemeal, rather than deflecting all requests for articles from ejournals. With the drastic reduction of paper serials, borrowing and lending from electronic serials is obviously a critical area in the interlibrary loan world.

9. What makes RapidILL work so well for us?

If you look at the FAQ's on the Rapid website, you see references to the software. It is designed specifically for resource sharing. Various processes, such as the routing and road leveling, are nicely automated. However, my own feeling is that the three crucial elements that make Rapid successful are. First of all, holdings information is specific to the year; when a request goes to one of our ARL partners, there is no guesswork involved as to whether that library has a particular year/volume or not. Secondly, as noted above, each library signs a contract to the effect that every effort will be made to turn requests around within 24 hours, and the Rapid staff monitor the performance. When no one is paying attention, it is too easy to allow service commitments to slide; however, when you see ten requests on the Rapid website going from green (within 24 hours) to yellow (25 to 72 hours), you realize that your efforts are monitored, and you are sure to adjust your priorities accordingly. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the RapidILL staff at Fort Collins are extremely helpful. They are knowledgeable, ready to make whatever adjustments are necessary, and they are always available.

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