

## THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS: THE PATH TO A SUCCESSFUL INTER-LIBRARY LOAN CONSORTIUM

**Gayle Blayney**, EnergyAustralia, Sydney  
**\*Lyn Nasir**, Office of the Director of Equal Opportunity  
in Public Employment  
**\*Fairlie Stanish**, NSW Teachers Federation  
**Marian Moore**, NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service

Fairlie Stanish  
Library  
NSW Teachers Federation  
Locked Bag 3010  
DARLINGHURST 1300  
Ph 02 9217 2481, Fax 02 9217 2481  
Email : [fairlie@nswtf.org.au](mailto:fairlie@nswtf.org.au)

***Lyn Nasir.** BA, ALIA Assoc. Lyn Nasir has been working in specials for the past 25 years and the majority of those years in special government libraries as a solo Librarian. She was lucky to be able to take advantage of flexible work practices and has worked part time and in many job share arrangements. Lyn is presently working part time as a Librarian with the NSW Office of Equal Opportunity and has another position part time as an Equal Opportunity Officer at Macquarie University*

***Fairlie Stanish.** BA, GDLS, ALIA Assoc., CP. Fairlie has worked extensively in libraries in the special, health and education sectors. She has also been a radio broadcaster, television researcher, book editor and full time family and household manager. Fairlie enjoys working for public education and has been with the NSW Teachers Federation for eight years.*

### ABSTRACT

“GLASS” is a web-based resource sharing initiative between the special libraries of GLINN (Government Libraries Information Network in NSW) and LOTSS (Libraries Of The Social Sciences). In this paper we show how the GLASS database was established in mid 2000 using the GRATISNET (health libraries consortium) model and how it has since developed.

“GLASS” (Government Libraries And Social Sciences) provides its members with a web-based platform for easy access to a shared database of journal holdings and administration of inter-library loans. We discuss the pleasures and pains of our experience, from marketing the system to a group of disparate subject specialists, liaising with the member libraries, negotiating with a private supplier, and cooperating with colleagues in the larger GRATISNET group.

GLASS has been running successfully for three years. It is now appropriate to share our experiences and discuss the potential for such platforms to support resource sharing among libraries which may not necessarily share a common subject area and may not initially see the value of the network.

## Historical Context

From the 1920's libraries in Australia and overseas began to engage in inter-library lending. The subsequent development of union catalogues during the 1930's began with the German national union list the *Deutscher Gesamtkatalog*. By the 1950's union catalogues had really taken off around the world, one of best examples being the United States *National Union Catalog* (The New Encyclopaedia Britannica 1985). The same era saw an explosion in the number and variety of special libraries. To most libraries, resource sharing is important but to special libraries it is usually core business. "If we don't hold it here we will get it in for you" is our motto.

It is from this context of strong partnerships and resource sharing that GLASS derives. GLASS stand for Government Libraries and Social Sciences. It is comprised of two dynamic groups, GLINN (Government Libraries Information Network in NSW) and LOTSS (Libraries of the Social Sciences). GLASS also invokes an image of a window of opportunity for participating libraries in the present and a vision for what is possible in the future in the area of cooperative collection building and information sharing.

Three key factors came into play in providing the impetus for the formation of GLASS. These were financial constraints, the power of networks and utilising new technology

## FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

During the 1990s most special libraries faced the prospect of diminishing real budgets. This was partly due to the rapidly increasing costs of journal subscriptions fuelled by a falling Australian dollar. Also associated with the financial issue was a rise in the cost of document delivery which put extra pressure on special libraries. Many libraries faced the gloomy prospect of staff cuts, usually at the Library Technician level – the very staff needed to run document delivery services.

The final straw was delivered with the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in July 2000. On a standard inter library loan of \$12 we had to charge \$13.20 to cover GST. This created an administrative nightmare for accounts departments with many rejecting the continued use of ALIA vouchers. Faced with the logistics of juggling a combination of vouchers, invoices and credit card payments, many special libraries looked for a time saving and effective alternative. Networks with free of cost lending between members, were seen as one saviour of our document delivery services. The benefits and low membership costs for inter-library loan consortia were looking increasingly attractive. However we still faced the uncertainty of whether networks would be exempt from the GST.

It was at this time that the health librarians' consortium, GRATISNET, submitted a proposal to the Australian Taxation Office. It successfully argued that a consortium should be exempt from the GST as inter library loans were the core business of the consortium and the reason why the group was established. Reciprocal agreements were out "free" document delivery services could go ahead. GLINN and LOTSS took heed of the decision and paved the way to the GLASS consortium.

## THE POWER OF NETWORKS

The GLINN and LOTSS networks are New South Wales based. They are independent groups that have come together to form the GLASS consortium for the sole purpose of ILL resource sharing. Each network consists of small to medium sized member libraries that

have a subject specialty which are nevertheless of value to other members. They are often one person libraries and each has a story to tell about limited time, funding and resources.

Members within GLINN and LOTSS were inspired by the success of the health libraries' GRATISNET model which was introduced to the LOTSS group in 2000. Initially the GLINN group was a little hesitant. What would we get out of this? Most of us already had loose arrangements through our own networks for inter-library loans and document delivery. What we lacked however was a union list and the platform to launch it.

Meanwhile the LOTSS network had been using a union list as far back as the 1980s and like GLINN, had a long history of providing free interlibrary loans to members. LOTSS were very keen to establish the new document delivery model. What they lacked however were the required numbers for membership, so an approach was made to GLINN. Both groups, now recognised the benefits of an efficient, equitable web-based resource-sharing platform - and so it was agreed in principle between the two groups that the idea of a shared consortium would be explored. A Steering Committee with GLINN and LOTSS representatives was formed.

### **UTILISING NEW TECHNOLOGY**

The first job of the Committee was to approach the University Coop Bookshop management about hosting the consortium. It was a natural step to approach the Coop as it had been hosting the LOTSS union list on fiche for many years. The Coop also hosted GRATISNET. Once we had agreement from the Coop, regular meetings were then held on how to establish the consortium.

The designer of the GRATISNET software, Prosentient Systems Pty Ltd was approached about our needs and requirements. Prosentient agreed that the software could be modified to suit GLASS as the software would support one database but would block each consortium from seeing the other's holdings.

### **“GLASS” IS BORN**

The next step was to come up with a name for our new group – GLASS. We engaged an artist who designed our logo and colours and a test site was set up.

A subscription rate of \$110 per institution was agreed. The Committee then communicated to members that GLASS was ready to be launched and they needed to pay their subscription to become members of the network. To assist this process an e-list was established through ALIA – aliaGLASS (<http://www.alia.org.au/alianet/e-lists/>).

Convincing members of the benefits of joining the consortium was not always easy because they were often from small one person libraries with limited budgets. The Committee soon realised it was one thing to sign up to an idea in principle but quite another to get the full commitment and the money in. Some libraries found it difficult to meet the administrative start up workload, while others were fearful of how much work would be required to meet the supply side of requests. Also free arrangements between libraries had been active until this time and now, under the new arrangement, we were asking for payment of a subscription.

The hard sell was on by the Steering Committee and eventually we passed our magic number of 40 participating libraries. The consortium was launched on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2000.

The next task was to encourage members to put their holdings on the system. This was quite difficult as small libraries have many pressing tasks and this was an extra administrative load that was often given a low priority. However, the Steering Committee assisted by the Coop, set up example sheets for data entry and encouraged members to send holdings in this format to the Coop who loaded them into the database.

Finally all member libraries' holdings were in the database and GLASS became a truly useful resource for interlibrary loans.

Still, much work lay ahead as we had to write a user manual and establish ground rules for the use of the database. A ranking order was set up which provided equity between member libraries.

### **SUCCESS OF “GLASS”**

We now had access to a centralised union list of journal holdings. In line with the recommendations of the National Library of Australia's *Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery Benchmarking Study 2001*, the GLASS database provided a cost effective document delivery system with speedy turnaround times. We had access to a centralised union list of journal holdings across the state, with a platform providing a simple method for adding holdings, editing and producing statistics.

After one year of operating our server host, the University Coop Bookshop, informed GLASS that providing this service was no longer commercially viable. GLASS then negotiated with Prosentient systems Pty Ltd – the designers and owners of the software. Following legal advice, a Memorandum Of Understanding was agreed between Prosentient and GLASS to host GLASS on Prosentient's server. On this basis, GLASS continues to operate.

After three years, the GLASS consortium has come of age. It has been very successful and well worth the time and energy expended in establishing and maintaining the network. We continue to recruit new members every year.

This simple and easy to use web-based service has added value and given support to its client members. The database offers a wide coverage of specialist titles, is affordable and requests have a quick response time. It is a service delivery model that adds value to the member library services by enabling members to meet library client expectations of accessing information wherever and whenever. GLASS is user friendly, affordable and offers a great variety and coverage of specialty journals that may otherwise be inaccessible. It allows our member libraries to build their collections in their primary subject specialties, relying on other members for free access to secondary resources.

The Steering Committee has now become the Working Group and continues to play a vital role in the management of GLASS. At our quarterly meetings ongoing issues of policy and user concerns are discussed. The Group also manages the rankings, organises the collection of statistics, maintains the database and oversees database enhancements.

The success of the network is due in large part to the work of the Steering Committee and now the Working Group. We see the positive attributes of a successful committee as including : good communication between Committee and Network members ; an equitable distribution of Committee workload ; Members representing a variety of specialist libraries ; a range of skills ; willingness to believe in the end product and to give priority time to the project when time is always scarce – and a good sense of humour helps!

## REFERENCES

Bigg, Mandy 2002, *GRATISNET: A paper presented by Mandy Bigg* (National Executive Coordinator, GRATISNET) Available:

[http://www.nla.gov.au/rsforum/download/mandy\\_gratisnet.doc](http://www.nla.gov.au/rsforum/download/mandy_gratisnet.doc).

[2003, July 8].

Bundy, Alan 2002, *Enabling the knowledge nation: what Australia needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* The Australian Library Journal vol. 51, no.2, May 2002 pp. 103-116.

Cherrett, Carolyn 1997, *Bringing the services together: how partnerships add value for the client* Carolyn in The Australian Library Journal vol. 46, no. 4, November 1997 pp. 370-375.

Greenaway, Judith and Blinco, Kerry 1997, *Creating an integrated document delivery environment in Australia: the role of JEDDS and CILLA* Proceedings of the 7<sup>th</sup> Asian Pacific Specials, Health and Law Librarians' Conference , Perth pp. 393-402.

Jilovsky, C. D. 2001, *Resource sharing: navigating the river together* . Available:

[www.caval.edu.au/about/staffpub/docs/Specials%20paper%202001.doc](http://www.caval.edu.au/about/staffpub/docs/Specials%20paper%202001.doc)

[2003, July 8].

National Library of Australia 2001, *Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery Benchmarking Study: Executive Summary* Available:

[http://www.nla.gov.au/initiatives/nrswg/ildd\\_rpt\\_sum.html](http://www.nla.gov.au/initiatives/nrswg/ildd_rpt_sum.html)

[2003, July 8].

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica - Macropaedia 1985, *Libraries and library science* in vol. 22 pp. 968-984, 15<sup>th</sup> ed., University of Chicago.

\*\*\*\*\*