

## 8. Information Products and Services

### Introduction

The ultimate objective of any documentation service should be to provide information products and services to help users and potential users to:

- keep abreast of new developments in the sector
- identify specific documents or sets of documents relating to their work or interests
- obtain copies of such documents
- obtain factual information on specific problems

It will do this by developing information products and services which meet their needs and are sustainable in terms of available resources. The relative importance of the various types of information products and services will vary according to the relative importance of these different kinds of user needs. Information products and services may be made available

- to all users
- only to some users
- free of charge
- in return for payment

For example, some services may be provided only to staff of the parent institution, or staff of the parent institution may receive them free of charge, while outsiders have to pay a fee or subscription.

A newly-established documentation service should begin offering information products and services to users, even on a limited scale, as soon as possible. This helps users to see what the service can do for them, and makes it easier to obtain support from the parent institution and other sources.

### Teaching information skills

When the staff of the documentation service have themselves acquired a good knowledge of its information resources (including external resources) they will be able, not only to help users to find the documents or information they need, but also to teach users how to find information for themselves.

**See also: Healthlink Worldwide Resource Centre Manual**

7.3 Introductory sessions and information skills

### Types of information products and services

Information products are documents produced by the documentation service and based on the information and documents it acquires or contains, or to which it has access.

Information services are ways of disseminating information products, and information in general, to users. The main groups of information products and services are:

- current awareness products and services
  - providing information on current developments in the sector, including new publications, ongoing research and development projects, forthcoming events, new products and services, and so on
- literature searching services
  - providing bibliographic details of specific documents or sets of documents required by users
- document supply services
  - providing the originals or copies of complete documents or parts of documents held by the documentation service or available from elsewhere; includes reading in and borrowing from libraries
- query answering services
  - providing answers to users' requests for information, ranging from quick reference services designed to provide immediate answers to simple enquiries, to research services designed to investigate complex problems
- information packs
  - collections of information materials on specific topics

These services are described in more detail below.

## Electronic delivery

The development of the Internet, the World Wide Web, e-mail and other electronic methods of finding and obtaining information has had a major impact on the design, operation and use of information products and services in recent years. These methods may be used, alone or in combination, to deliver most of the information products and services described below. As noted in the introduction to these guidelines, a local documentation service which does not have a computer and access to the Internet will not be able to benefit from access to the wide variety of information products and services which are currently being made available in electronic format – many of which, in addition, are available free of charge or at low cost.

**See also: Healthlink Worldwide Resource Centre Manual**

- 6.9 Electronic resources [lists of]
- 6.9.1 Websites
- 6.9.2 Electronic journals and newsletters
- 6.9.3 On-line training
- 6.9.4 Electronic conferences
- 6.9.5 Databases and other resources on CD-ROM
- 6.9.6 Databases on the internet
- 6.9.7 Image collections on the internet

## Current awareness products and services

Users of the documentation service need to be aware of current activities in their fields of interest in terms of new publications, new products and services, forthcoming events, new, ongoing and recently completed research, and general news.

- Before developing specific current awareness products and services, the documentation service should ensure that its users can keep up to date by providing
- an adequate collection of current periodicals, including newspapers, newsletters, abstracting bulletins, acquisitions lists, etc.
- access to external sources of current information, including online news services, e-mail alerting services, list servers, web sites, etc.
- displays of information about new information resources, notices of events, general news of new developments, etc.

Whenever possible, arrangements should be made for current awareness products and access to external sources to be provided directly to users at their workplaces.

A documentation service with access to a computer will be able to

- design and produce more attractive current awareness products
- distribute current awareness information more cheaply in digital formats – for example, via e-mail or a web site.

Providing good current awareness services makes considerable demands on staff time, but is usually much appreciated by users.

**See also: Healthlink Worldwide Resource Centre Manual**

7.9 Current awareness services

### *Newsletters and information bulletins*

Many of the specific types of current awareness information described below may be combined in a general newsletter or information bulletin. Such a bulletin should provide information about the information resources, products and services of the documentation service itself, as well as disseminating general information of local interest. It might include, for example:

- information about new and forthcoming publications
- information about publications recently acquired by the service
- information about new products and services for the water and sanitation sector, especially information products and services
- photocopies of press cuttings
- news of forthcoming events, including training courses
- information about current research projects
- general news about the documentation service, its parent institution, other institutions in the water supply and sanitation sector in the country, and national and international developments relevant to local concerns

- examples of how information resources and knowledge management have helped people working in the field to achieve their objectives

An information bulletin should be given a clear and appropriate title and carry full details of the publisher, editorial staff, frequency of publication, subscription (if any) and so on. The current volume and issue number, and the date of publication, should also be clearly stated.

**See also: Healthlink Worldwide Resource Centre Manual**

6.7.4 Electronic journals and newsletters

7.13 Newsletters

An example of a comprehensive news service covering many of the topics mentioned above, in English, French and Spanish and with both online and paper output, is the Source Water and Sanitation News Service produced by IRC (Box 8A).

#### *Accessions lists*

An accessions list is a list of documents which have recently been acquired by the documentation service. If the service is co-operating with others in the locality, its accessions list may include documents acquired by all the co-operating services.

An accessions list may give details of

- all the documents which have been acquired by the service during a given period (e.g. the last three months)
- only those which the staff think will be most relevant to the needs of the service's users.

The list may be arranged by subject, or in some other convenient way (e.g. in main sections like those in which the collections are arranged). The list should give enough information about each document to help users to decide whether or not it is likely to interest them. It should therefore include details of the author, title, publisher, place and date of publication, series, and any other relevant information about the document.

This information is usually included also in the catalogue entry for the document, so that:

- if the service has a computerised catalogue, the accessions list can be produced very easily from the computerised records
- if the service has a card catalogue and a photocopier, the accessions list can be produced by photocopying the catalogue entries

An accessions list should include request forms on which users can enter the details of any of the listed documents they wish to see.

### Box 8A: Source Water and Sanitation News Service

The Source Water and Sanitation News Service is provided by the IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre in co-operation with the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) and local partners. The service comprises:

- Source Weekly, published 26 times a year by e-mail and online.
- Source Bulletin, published 6 times a year online and on paper.

#### *Source Weekly*

Source Weekly is available online at: <http://www.irc.nl/content/view/full/168>

Source Weekly sections:

- International
- Africa South of Sahara
- Asia & Pacific
- Central & Eastern Europe
- Names
- Vacancies
- Readers React
- Lessons Learned
- Funding
- New on the Net
- Quote of the week
- Middle East and North Africa
- Latin America and the Caribbean
- Western Europe & North America
- Projects
- Training
- Experts' Choice
- Technology Update
- Source - New Publications
- Conferences & Events

#### *Source Bulletin*

Source Bulletin is published online and on paper every two months. This gives more in-depth sector news, news from the WSSCC and IRC and is available for developing country readers and editors, training and educational institutions, and libraries and documentation centres in the north.

Source Bulletin is available online at: <http://www.irc.nl/content/view/full/10697>

#### *Further information from:*

Documentation Unit, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, PO Box 2869, 2601CW Delft, The Netherlands. Tel. +31-15-219 29 39. Fax: +31-15-219 09 55.

E-mail: [library@irc.nl](mailto:library@irc.nl) Web site: <http://www.irc.nl>.

### *Abstracts*

An abstract of a document provides a summary of its contents as well as the basic information about its author, title, etc. included in an accessions list.

Abstracts may be

- included in an accessions list
- published in a separate abstract bulletin

An abstract bulletin may contain abstracts of documents which are not in the collections of the documentation service. Other institutions may supply abstracts of their recent

publications, or other documentation services may supply abstracts of documents recently added to their own collections.

Writing abstracts is a labour-intensive task which should be avoided by a small documentation service unless suitably-qualified staff professional and technical staff are available and willing to do it. As a rough guide, an abstractor working full time should be able to prepare about fifteen abstracts per day.

Many documents -- particularly periodical articles -- already include abstracts prepared by their authors, and these may be used instead of writing new abstracts. Similarly, abstracts of relevant documents may have already been published by existing abstracting services. If the service subscribes to any of these services, there is no need to prepare new abstracts of these documents. If the service subscribes to an online abstracting service, it may be able to download abstracts of interest to its own users and add them its own database or include them in its own abstracts bulletin.

An abstract bulletin should include request forms on which users can enter the details of any of the listed documents which they wish to see.

**See also: Healthlink Worldwide Resource Centre Manual**

7.10 Abstracts

7.10.1 Examples of abstracts

*Current contents*

An easier way of providing information about the contents of new documents than writing abstracts is to make photocopies of their contents pages and circulate them to users at regular intervals.

This kind of service is called a 'current contents service'. It is often restricted to the contents pages of periodicals, but there is no reason why the contents pages of books and reports should not be copied also. Circulating copies of the contents pages avoids the problems associated with circulating the original documents -- particularly current periodicals -- which are discussed below (Circulating current periodicals).

If there are not many documents and not many users, and if most of the users share common interests, all the contents pages which are copied at any one time may be combined into a general current contents bulletin for distribution to all users. Otherwise, the contents pages may be distributed to users selectively, in accordance with their interests. In this case, users will have to inform the staff of the documentation service about their interests. A user profile form can be devised similar to that formerly used by the Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) service of the IRC Library and Documentation Centre. A current contents bulletin should include request forms on which users can enter the details of any of the listed documents which they wish to see.

### *Press cuttings*

A press cuttings service supplies users with photocopies of news items or features of interest which have recently appeared in general newspapers or newsletters.

This kind of service can be important for policy makers, planners and managers who are concerned with the social, political and economic aspects of water supply and sanitation rather than with purely technical aspects.

The usefulness of a press cuttings service will depend on

- how many newspapers or general newsletters the documentation service receives
- how many of its users have direct access to the same sources.

If the service only receives newspapers which most of its users already see, there is little point in providing a press cuttings service, though it may be worth keeping cuttings of relevant items in a file for future reference. Cutting newspapers can be time consuming, but can be rewarding if relevant cuttings are put up on a display board and changed regularly. This will attract people into the documentation service centre.

### *Descriptions of research projects*

A register of ongoing research projects can provide information about the research activities of the parent institution or other institutions. Such a register involves a great deal of time and effort to collect and edit descriptions of research projects and to maintain an up-to-date list. It may be easier to include informal news of local research projects in a general newsletter or to reproduce project descriptions already prepared for national or other research registers.

### *Calendar of forthcoming events*

News of forthcoming events can be easily gathered from published sources (including online sources), or may be received direct by the documentation service or its parent institution. Information from various sources may be combined into a calendar of forthcoming events which may be distributed as a separate publication or published in a general newsletter. Information about education and training opportunities (courses, workshops, scholarships and awards, etc.) is often provided separately from information about other forthcoming events. Once such a calendar has been created, it is easy to keep it up to date by eliminating past events and adding new ones, particularly if the service has access to a computer.

### *Circulating current periodicals*

Instead of distributing copies of the contents pages of current periodicals, the periodicals themselves may be circulated, to allow users to consult them at their workplaces. This service is usually much appreciated by users if it works well, but this is not always easy to achieve. It involves the following steps:

- deciding which users should receive the service

- it is advisable to restrict the service to specific groups of users -- for example, senior managers or research staff -- whose workplaces are not too far away from the documentation service
- finding out which periodicals each user would like to receive
  - if the service receives a lot of periodicals, or is staffed only on a part-time basis, it may be advisable to limit the number of titles which each user may receive
- preparing a circulation list for each title
  - this gives the names of the users who are to receive the title, in the order in which they should normally receive it
- distributing current issues of each title in accordance with the circulation list

A copy of the circulation list is attached to each issue of the title when it arrives in the documentation service. The issue is sent to the first person on the list, who is supposed to read it and pass it on to the next person within a certain period of time -- usually two or three days. The last person on the list is responsible for returning it to the documentation service.

Problems may arise when:

- there are too many people on the distribution list
- users do not pass on the issue within the time limit
- users are absent from their workplaces for any length of time

These slow down the circulation process and cause dissatisfaction among users near the end of the list, who may not receive periodicals until they are long out of date.

To avoid such problems, the documentation service should maintain strict control of circulation. The promptness with which users pass on the periodicals to the next on the list should be monitored, and persistent offenders removed from the list. People who are absent from their workplaces for long periods should be temporarily removed from the list, or by-passed until they return.

If there are more than about ten people on the circulation list for a particular title, a second subscription should be taken out. If this is not possible, either the title should be taken off the circulation list or the number of users on the list reduced.

#### *Selective dissemination of information (SDI)*

The term 'selective dissemination of information' (SDI) may be tailored to meet the specific needs of individuals. For example, different lists of new acquisitions, with or without abstracts, may be prepared, each containing details of documents considered likely to be of interest to specific individuals.

An SDI service may be provided most effectively using a computer, but can be provided on a limited scale by a documentation service which does not have a computer.

Organising an SDI service involves the following steps:

- deciding which groups of users can use the service
  - If computer facilities are not available, it may be advisable to restrict the service to specified groups such as top managers or researchers. If a computer is available, the service may be offered on a subscription basis. A subscription helps to restrict the service to people who benefit from it.

finding out the interests of potential users

- asking users to list the subjects in which they are interested on an SDI interest profile form similar to that shown in Appendix C, Figure 6.
  - It is advisable to restrict the number of topics which a user may include in his profile, particularly if the service is not to be computerised.
- creating a user profile for each user.
  - This may be done by assigning classification numbers to the listed subjects, using the same classification scheme as is used to classify documents. Another way is to translate the terms used in the list into matching descriptors taken from the thesaurus used in indexing.

If the SDI service is to be computerised, the user profile is entered in the computer. When new documents are added to the catalogue or database, they can be automatically compared with each user profile and individual lists of relevant documents printed out for each user.

If the documentation service does not have access to a computer, a limited SDI service can be organised manually. In this case, the subject interests of users should be recorded in a card index arranged by classification number. After newly-acquired documents have been catalogued and classified, they should be checked against the index to see if any of them match the needs of any of the users. Such documents may be set aside while a notice is sent to inform the user that they have been received.

### Literature searching

Literature searching is the process of searching published and unpublished bibliographical sources (catalogues, lists, indexes, bibliographical databases, etc., in both print and electronic formats) to identify and locate

- specific documents
- sets of documents having common characteristics -- for example, documents on a particular topic, or by a particular author

Literature searches may be carried out:

- as part of the general process of identifying documents for acquisition by the service.
- at the request of, or on behalf of, a user or group of users
- by users themselves

Literature searches on behalf of users may be carried out as the result of a specific request for documents, or as part of a wider process of responding to a general request for information on a subject.

The first source for a literature search should be the documentation service's own catalogue. This is why it is important to maintain a comprehensive, accurate, up-to-date and well-organised catalogue to ensure that requests can be met from local resources whenever possible. This saves time, effort and money, raises the reputation of the documentation service amongst users and helps to ensure that the effort expended in building up a well-designed document collection is not wasted.

No documentation service can expect to have in its own collection every document required by users. Access to other bibliographical sources is essential if users are to be able to identify at least a reasonable proportion of the documents they may need. Many extended literature searches can be made via the Internet, using the search tools referred to in chapter 6 (See Boxes 6B and 6C).

**See also: Healthlink Worldwide Resource Centre Manual**

7.4.2 How to carry out a literature search

#### *Specific documents*

Searching for specific documents involves:

- checking that the available details (author's name, etc.) are sufficiently complete and accurate to be searched for in the service's catalogue
- checking the catalogue to see if the document is already in stock, and if so, where it is located in the service
- if not in stock, checking bibliographical sources to confirm and complete the bibliographical details, including, if possible, the price

Assuming that the user wants to see a document that is not in the collections, steps should be taken either to acquire the document for the collection, or to borrow a copy from another library or documentation service.

#### *Sets of documents*

Searching in order to identify a set of documents of a particular type involves:

- finding out precisely what the user wants
  - Staff should be familiar enough with subjects of interest to users so that they can help them to formulate precise requests which reflect their needs. It is important

to obtain as much information as possible from the user, and to check it, before beginning a search. Users often tend to formulate enquiries in broad terms, for example, 'rural water supply', when they really need something specific, such as 'shallow well construction in arid areas'.

- translating user requests into terms which facilitate the search
  - If a thesaurus has been used to index the catalogue, for example, the request should be translated into the terms used in the thesaurus. If the search extends into other sources, the search terms may need to be adapted to other indexing languages.
- identifying the bibliographical and other sources to be searched
- identifying relevant documents in these sources
- selecting specific documents from among those identified
- locating specific documents
  - Following the procedure for searching for specific documents described above.

It is worth keeping a record of all searches, particularly extensive ones, noting the subject, search strategy, sources used and results obtained, for possible future use in dealing with other similar requests.

### Supplying documents to users

When users want to see documents they think may be useful the documents have to be located in the service's collections or elsewhere, and supplied, either in the original format or as a copy.

The simplest way of meeting requests is from documents in the collection, rather than having to obtain them from elsewhere. The collection should therefore be carefully selected to meet the needs of users and efficiently managed to ensure that documents can be located and supplied as quickly as possible. If the documents are not in the collection they may be:

- acquired for permanent retention, through the normal acquisitions process
- borrowed from another library or documentation service
- supplied in hard copy or electronic format by another library, documentation service or other external source
- downloaded in electronic format from an external source

If another library or service has the document but is not willing to lend it or supply a copy, the user may be able to visit the institution and consult the document, there.

Elements of a document supply system

A local documentation service needs to establish an effective document supply system capable of:

- recording users' requests
- maintaining accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date records of the documents which are:
  - on order
  - being processed
  - already in stock
- locating documents which are in stock but are:
  - on loan to other users
  - being repaired or rebound
- indicating that a document which is not immediately available has been requested by a user
- speeding up the supply of requested documents which are on order or being processed
- recalling requested documents which are being repaired or rebound or are on loan to other users
- obtaining copies of requested documents from other sources
- lending documents to users
- supplying users with copies of requested documents which are:
  - not available for loan, or
  - needed permanently by the user.

These functions are described in more detail in Appendix D.

**See also: Healthlink Worldwide Resource Centre Manual**

- 7.5 Lending
- 7.6 Photocopying
- 7.7 Document supply

*Copyright*

It is important to note that the production of photocopies is generally governed by the law of copyright. Copyright law in most countries allows for single photocopies of most documents for research and study purposes. An entire paper in a periodical may be copied; however, a complete book may not be copied without permission from the copyright holder, who usually the author or publisher.

Many documents in a local documentation service may be free of copyright, having been produced by international organisations, non-governmental organisations and others who allow free reproduction to achieve wider dissemination of information.

The Healthlink Worldwide Resource Centre Manual includes an example of a statement of permission for reproduction in section 7.6.

## Enquiry services

Users of a local documentation service often seek answers to substantive or complex queries from colleagues rather than from the documentation service. However, the documentation service does have a role to play in complementing these informal channels by providing more systematic query answering services. The nature of the query answering service that can be provided will depend on:

- the kinds of information needed by users
- the capacity of the service to provide the required information, in terms of:
  - access to appropriate information sources
  - the availability of suitably qualified staff.

The main types of enquiry service are:

- quick reference service
  - designed to provide immediate answers to simple and specific enquiries, mainly based on sources such as directories, dictionaries and encyclopaedias, and generally offered by service staff themselves
- general reference service
  - designed to provide more extended answers to more complex enquiries, mainly based on the general document collections and offered by staff, who may, in appropriate cases, have some specialised knowledge
- referral services
  - designed to refer users to other, more appropriate sources of information, such as other documentation services, based on directories, lists and catalogues of such other sources and offered by the staff of the service
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
  - prepared questions and answers covering basic information and the most common areas of uncertainty for new users
- advisory services
  - to advise users on appropriate courses of action in respect of particular (e.g. technical or legal) problems, generally based on documentary sources and the professional knowledge of an advisor, usually a professional in the appropriate field
- research services
  - to investigate complex problems and present the results to users in appropriate forms, based on all types of information sources. Generally offered by staff in collaboration with subject specialists, or by other specialists on a consultancy basis.

The extent to which a local documentation service will be involved in providing these services will depend to a large extent on the activities of its parent organisation.

All documentation services should aim to provide quick reference service, general reference service and referral services. Documentation staff may not by themselves be able to provide advisory or research services, but may, if the parent institution is involved

in such activities, be associated with professional and technical staff in providing such services.

Manual for the management of question-and-answer services. Wageningen, The Netherlands: Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Co-operation ACP-EU (CTA), 2001. xi, 130 p. ISBN 9290812443.

This manual is available free of charge as a PDF file from:

<http://www.agricta.org/pubs/qandamanual/index.htm>

It has been written as a guide for managers involved in setting up a question and answer service, specifically those providing information on agriculture and related subjects.

Even a small documentation service can provide good enquiry services provided that:

- the document collection is carefully selected to meet the needs of users
- service staff have a good knowledge of the contents of the collection
- the collection is well-organised and properly catalogued, classified and indexed
- staff have a good knowledge of other sources of information likely to be helpful in answering users' enquiries
- staff can count on the support and help of other members of staff of the parent institution and other organisations in the locality.

There are few specific procedures to be followed in respect of enquiry services. As in the case of literature searches, be sure that full details of exactly what is required are obtained and guard against ambiguity and lack of precision in specifying the subject.

**See also: Healthlink Worldwide Resource Centre Manual**

- 7.4 Advisory services
- 7.4.1 Reference interviews
- 7.8 Referral services
- 7.11 Enquiries services

## Information packs

This section is adapted from the Healthlink Worldwide Resource Centre Manual, section 7.12.

Information packs are an economical way of providing information about a particular subject area to users who cannot visit the resource centre, and for people who are visiting the parent organisation for a conference or other event.

Information packs usually take the form of folders (cardboard wallets) or envelopes containing a variety of materials, such as articles from newsletters and journals, photocopied pages from books, fact sheets, posters, leaflets, materials developed within

the organisation, or materials distributed free by other organisations working in the same subject area.

It is important to obtain permission from the publisher to include an item (text or illustrations) in a pack, unless the publisher has indicated that this is not necessary. The publisher will want to know the purpose of the pack and its target audience, the number of copies to be produced, and any charges to users (for example, to cover the cost of photocopying and distribution, or to make a profit to help the resource centre). If producing a single pack, it is not necessary to request permission from the publisher, provided copyright laws are followed.

It is important to select the right materials to go in information packs. This can be done by discussing the contents with members of the advisory committee and/or key users. It can be useful to include a short evaluation form in the pack for users to complete, to improve the contents of information packs.

Information packs should always include a contents list that provides details of the original source of each item (such as a book or periodical title, publisher and year published).

An information pack is not static. It will need to be updated with new materials, and some existing material may need to be replaced. It is important to keep a master photocopy of each piece of material, to ensure that each copy is of the same quality, and that time is not wasted looking for the original before a copy needs to be made. If the resource centre has a bibliographic database, codes could be added to records to indicate that materials are suitable for inclusion in information pack.