

How to run the library on a shoestring

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Introduction

I am happy to be here in Zagreb with you. Elisabeth and I have been teaching similar courses all over Eastern Europe throughout the nineties. We never teach the same course and we love teaching.

Hartmut Walravens is also an experienced librarian and teacher with a lot of teaching and project experience in Eastern Europe. Bernd Hess is new on our team, and we are glad to have him. He has been representing the Swets Company in Croatia for a while. Most of you know him, which is good.

Jadranka Stojanovski and I have known each other since 1993. We have been working on a cooperative journal subscription and document delivery project during the past 3 years.

The idea to teach this seminar in Zagreb is Jadranka's. Elisabeth and I were teaching a seminar on *how to run the library on a shoestring* in Kiev, Ukraine, last November, and Jadranka said that this was just what she and her colleagues needed. Elisabeth is always enthusiastic about seminars she was asked to teach.

I know Jadranka and some other Croatian colleagues well enough to know that there is not anything we can teach you, because you know everything we know. All the Croatian colleagues I have met were as fit as the players of the Croatian soccer team. These guys can teach us all. I am sure you all have watched your soccer team play. They play with a lot of power and in a positive sense aggressively. That's why they won. They played well and aggressively. And they are the world champions.

This will be a special seminar. We are not teachers or lecturers, we are your colleagues. We want to exchange ideas with you, on what we can do in the current situation. We firmly believe that there are still some things we can do. And most of them we can do together better than on our own.

The current situation

I would like to make some remarks on the current situation.

We are in the middle of profound and quickly accelerating changes. These changes are affecting everything. Most of these changes are rooted in our societies and in the world economy. This phenomenon was described by Alvin Toffler as future shock.

I feel that in Croatia many people are ready for changes for the better, whereas change is not a popular concept for the majority of Germans. Change is inevitable. Tom Peters called the ability to cope with change thriving on chaos. Chaotic turbulences are changing our world and our profession to the core. If you are so well adapted to this chaos that you cannot even imagine having a comfortable 9 – 5 job selecting books to buy with an unlimited budget, then you are fit to survive in the next century. If this comfortable job is all you are dreaming of, please wake up.

We used to think of libraries as places to borrow books from. Not you and I, but our staff did. Some of my staff still do. During the nineties the Internet emerged and changed the way we produce, convey, use and archive information profoundly. With the Internet it does not make sense to think of the library as a book circulating institution; it makes much more sense to think of the library as a gateway to the knowledge of the world. And you are in the position to have excellent Internet access. Be proud of it and use it. Aggressively like your soccer team.

We are no longer building comprehensive library collections. It has become impossible to buy, maintain and archive these collections. There is too much information available. We can at best provide the journals and books our customers need most. At Bochum University Library we made a conscious decision to ask our clients what they need most. Document has long ago become an integrated part of resource management. Also, we collected relevant but free information on the Internet and integrated it into our Website.

We are building up subject specific electronic libraries for our clients. We already developed a prototype of an electronic engineering library with a lot of added value. And we are currently applying for funds to develop an electronic geology library. We do this together with our customers who give us ideas and real life feedback. We are constantly thinking of ways to fulfil our customers' information needs. Not all their needs have to do

with an unlimited budget. There is a lot we can do on a shoestring – or almost on a shoestring.

I am ready to admit that sometimes I am not as optimistic as I may be sounding now. While we are running the library successfully on a shoestring we should also be lobbying for better budgets. There are no great universities without great libraries. However, my customers seem to think that lobbying for a better budget is only my job. It does not make sense if it is only me who claims that the library is important. Our customers must help us here. I keep telling them: Please, demand the library you are entitled to. From the library you should demand excellent service and from the university administration adequate funding. You should be saying: Damn, the library must cancel journal subscriptions again. I cannot do my research without at least the core journals in my field. But this is not happening.

Also, if access to information becomes more important than ownership of materials, there must be some libraries that own the materials and are able to provide access. Recently I used a historical analogy in a discussion with the ministry. They found that the subsidized geology journals in Bochum were not used heavily enough. I answered that already the Romans were pondering where to grow the wheat: on the Roman peninsular or in Carthago in North Africa. We should also ask the question if we always want to send requests to Carthago if we need bread – or if it would not be better to grow some wheat closer to Rome.