How to achieve better performance in ILL, a Norwegian point of view

Mette Krog
University of Oslo Library
Library of Medicine and Health Sciences
Box 1113 Blindern
N-0317 Oslo
Norway
Mette.Krog@ub.uio.no

My paper is divided in two parts, first I am going to talk about the Nordic Performance Measurement study that took part in spring 2001, and then talk about how we work at my library: the Library of Medicine and Health Sciences, which is part of the University of Oslo Library.

The Nordic Performance Measurement Study

The purpose of the Nordic Performance Measurement Study was to measure some features of Interlibrary Loan activities in Nordic research and university libraries, and one of the aims was improvement of the performance in ILL and document delivery. The Study is based upon Mary Jackson's study from 1998: Measuring the performance of Interlibrary Loan operations in North American Research and College Libraries.

The project was funded by the by the Nordic Council for Scientific Information. 15 libraries from Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway participated, 5 from Iceland. The Steering group nominated by the national ILL-groups had one representative from each country.

Contrary to Mary Jackson's study, user satisfaction was not measured. We measured cost, turnaround time for borrowing and fill rate for both borrowing and lending. The part concerning cost was a general questionnaire about the costs of ILL activities: staff, network/ communication / delivery, photocopy costs, equipment and software. Since few of the

University Libraries in Norway at least, pay their own networking and communication such as faxes and telephones, or postage it is not easy to compare the actual results. The data collected is from 2000.

The second part of the study is the monitoring of the turnaround time for borrowing during five-six weeks in spring 2001, when approximately 150 randomly selected borrowing requests were monitored.

When it comes to fill rate the data is collected by the Steering group from the National statistics for the year 2000. The figures and tables I will show is from the project leaders report to NORDINFO.

Turnaround time

Turnaround time is defined as the number of calendar days to complete a borrowing request. Unfortunately lending turnaround time was not included.

The six dates recorded in the questionnaire are:
  a) Recorded on patron's request form
  b) Accepted at initial service point
  c) Processed by ILL staff
  d) Sent to first potential supplier
  e) Material was received in ILL department or transaction not filled
  f) Patron notified

The borrowing requests that were not filled by the end of the survey time are not included in the average time. This means that the actual figure are slower than shown in the table.

Turnaround time for borrowing, average in calendar days :

	Nordic total	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Books	13,0	17,5	10,0	16,6	8,3	12,4
Copies	9,8	14,7	6,3	9,7	8,6	9,7
All requests	10,4	15,6	7,1	10,5	8,4	11,1

For all countries, except Norway, books are delivered quicker than copies. In fact Norway is a tiny bit slower with the copies which is quite inexplicable. The reason why Norway is so quick with the books is due to the BIBSYS catalogue. All Norwegian University Libraries, the National Library, all college libraries, and a number of research libraries are members of BIBSYS and use their services. This means that it is very easy to check the status of the holdings. BIBSYS also has a good ILL module for the member libraries, and an electronic ordering facility for patrons and libraries that are not members of BIBSYS.

Finland has by far the quickest delivery of copies, and that is due to the fact that Finland unfortunately is the only Nordic country that allows electronic delivery by Ariel. But in Norway we are still hoping for an amendment to the very strict Copyright Law.

If we compare with the U.S. the average turnaround time for the books were 16,9 days, the copies 14,9 days, and average of all requests are 15,6 days (i.e. in 1998). In Australia they have only counted the average turnaround time of all requests and that is 10,8 days, only a little slower than the Nordic total.

Fill rate

Fill rate is defined as the percentage of borrowing and lending requests successfully filled. The figures are taken from the National statistics of 2000. It is also important to take into account that some of the figures are calculated from turnaround time forms, because in some countries libraries do not collect data for fill rate.

The result is that the average fill rate for borrowing is between 84 –92% for the different Nordic countries, and that the average fill rate for lending is between 75-90% . The borrowing fill rate for my library is 92,1%, and the lending fillrate is 95,7% which is above the average of both Norway and the rest of the Nordic countries.
This means that both borrowing and lending is quite succesful, and that the Nordic library systems support resource sharing, have good locating tools and that most of the catalogued materials are available, which reflects a liberal lending policy. This is contrary to the North American and Australian studies, where fillrates for lending was 58% (in 1998) and 77%.

The project leader of the study appointed my library, The Library of Medicine and Health Sciences which is part of the University of Oslo Library, as one of the highest performing libraries. And I am now going to tell you about how we work.

The Library of Medicine and Health Sciences is a part of the University of Oslo Library, and consists of four units: The Library of Arts and Social Sciences, which is the biggest, The Faculty of Law Library and the Faculty Library of Mathematics and Natural Sciences.

The Library of Medicine and Health Sciences

My Library is a merge between several libraries: the Medical Faculty Library with seven institute libraries, the Library of the Rikshospitalet University Hospital plus the Dental Faculty Library. Today we have 4 units: 2 institute libraries (Library of Nursing Science and Social Medicine Library and the Department of Psychiatry Library) pluss the Dental Faculty Library and the Main Library.

We have been the resource library for medicine until the arrangement with resource libraries ended a couple of years ago. We are now the Norwegian International Medlars Center.

Our primary users are the students and staff at The University of Oslo, primarily The Medical and the Dental Faculties and the Rikshospitalet University Hospital. We are aslo open to the general public.

To give you an idea of the size of the library I will give you som statistics: The total of lending was 46.812 (returnables 32321, non returnables 14.491). There were 90.310 visitors to the Main Library in 2002.

The lending requests

The old Medical Faculty Library was regarded as a slow lender, with heaps of requests.

To improve we started with the internal routines, which was very conscientious:
If the issue was NOS (Not on the shelves) it was filed in a box to be checked next week. After it had been checked again the following week and still was not on the shelves, it was filed in another box to be checked for the third time the following week.
In fact we could keep the request for 3-4 weeks after it had arrived.
First we cut off the last checking, reducing the requesting library's waiting period with one week, with the aim of returning the request the same day that it was not found on the shelves.

We also stopped verifying in Medline all the requests that were incorrect, and started sending them back to the requesting library with the comment that the bibliographical information was not correct.
The peak was in 1995 with 36.346 fulfilled requests for copies of articles.
We received much more than that, and that was due to a widespread misunderstanding amongst the other libraries. We received a lot of unverified, unlocated requests. Many libraries thought that the Medical Faculty Library being the resource library for medicine, was the place to send all the request whether we had it or not. So we talked about this whenever we had the opportunity, wrote an article and made some calls.
Also the Internet and easier information retrieval helped reduce the heaps. From 2000 we started using the Subito services, and we talked about this at a meeting amongst medical librarians. We also wrote an article about the opportunities, and the result was that lots of our customers started using Subito too. Last but not least there are the electronic journals.

So from 1996-1999 we reduced the time for inhouse handling by reducing the number of checkings from three to one. In the strategic plan of 2000, we decided that all incoming requests should be executed within two workdays or we should contact the user. Rush orders should be executed as soon as possible, at least within the same day.

The sore point when it comes to document delivery of non returnables is that electronic delivery is not allowed in Norway due to the copyright law. An amendment to the copyright law is sent out for comments, with a closing date June 25 this year. The amendments do not look too promising, though. So delivery must be by post or from 2003 the Norwegian Library Transport which is a courier system.

The borrowing requests

The statistics for borrowing of non returnables is very much lower than for lending, in 2002, we got 2049 articles from Norwegian libraries and 2463 from foreign libraries, and this has been quite stable for the years back to 1996, except from the years when we merged all the libraries and the moving in to the new hospital was delayed. According to plan the move should have taken place in Oct. 1998, but was postponed. The next date we got was August 1999. At that time everything was packed, but again the move was postponed. It was impossible to unpack, so we borrowed things we owned. We moved in before Easter 2000. In

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1999 we borrowed articles from journals that were packed, and the statistics showed more than 17.457 articles from Norwegian libraries and 3950 from foreign libraries.

When we wrote the strategic plan for 1998 we made a goal of making one online file in BIBSYS for all ILL request, even if some of the ILL staff did not agree because this meant writing orders twice to the libraries outside BIBSYS. The idea of the paperless office met some resistance at first – it means writing every request to libraries outside BIBSYS twice, the advantage was that every person on counter duty could see if a request was sent and to which library.

We offer ILL to all the primary user categories, and there is no limit to the number of requests each user may submit.

Deciding which libraries to order from

We started monitoring lenders in 2000 about the time we started using Subito, which we did just after the Nordic ILL conference in Finland in the autumn of 2000.
ILL librarians always have a certain feeling about which library is quick and which is slow, but we wanted to know for certain. The longest checking period was in March 2002. We made lists of preferred lenders, and Subito distinguished itself from the beginning. We discovered that our own libraries used 3-3,2 work days from ordering to delivery. We made lists of libraries with turnaround time less than, 3, 4 and 5 days, and in this way discovered which libraries to avoid. It also turned out that, some of the Subito libraries are not so quick and that there were quite substantial differences. If Subito can't help us, we use NLM. Previously we used The British Library most, but NLM send articles electronically, so it is much quicker and the price is about the same as BL.

Pricing

The University of Oslo Library charge their customers. The price for copies is 60 NOK pr copy. This is the general price calculated by the National Office for Research Documentation, Academic and Professional libraries some years ago. All external customers and students have to pay a fee, staff members are not charged personally, but their departments or institutes recive an invoice 3-4 times a year.

The service from Subito is very quick and it is important to us that our customers get their copies as quickly as possible. Our charging system used to differ between copies from Norwegian and foreign libraries. The prices of Subito being so low, it would be unfair to charge the user with the ordinary fee for copies from abroad.
So with the consent of the Library Director we regard Subito as a Norwegian supplier and only charge the 60 NOK. After a while we also managed to reduce the price of copies from all the foreign libraries to 60 NOK.

Declaration of Service

Since we have been successful in managing to speed our document delivery system we have put a declaration of service on our webpages where we among other things guarantee that we will send requested copies from our library within three workdays otherwise free of charge. Books we will send within two workdays, and ILL requests will be processed within two workdays.

So the conclusion is to focus on the end user to be a high performer. One must focus on fulfilling orders quickly, and to do that one must focus on the internal routines. One must also choose the libraries with the quickest response. Last but not least, one must encourage the staff to reach to goals you have agreed on.

Reference:
Vattulainen, P. Performance of Interlending in Nordic Academic Libraries. Helsinki, Finland; 2003