



Creating the Next Major Shift in e-Libraries



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The e-library has changed since it emerged in the 1990s. But what does a contemporary e-library look like? In this article, Nick Collison, Couranto's Director of Library and eContent Support, discusses how a modern e-library must not only serve user needs, but do so much more. Nick explains the role of discoverability and user analytics – and outline how cutting-edge technologies such as API connectivity and AI are creating the next major shift in e-libraries.

E-libraries have been around for a while in various shapes, with Wikipedia suggesting that the concept took hold in 1994. Needless to say, there's been a lot of change since, which begs the question: what does a contemporary e-library look like in 2022 – and how does it compare to your status quo?

Your resources need to match your needs

Going back to first principles is a good way to judge the status quo and matching needs to requirements is the cornerstone of a modern e-library. It may sound as if I'm stating the obvious, but in information management practice often what's provided can diverge quite significantly from what's required.

Information needs shift over time, and in some instances, information needs were never thoroughly assessed to start off with. It can mean that even the most well-equipped, comprehensive e-library fails to meet the needs of the people that use it. In contrast, a contemporary e-library should get one thing right first and foremost: meeting business needs.

It can be a complicated question to answer but it's worth investing a substantial amount of time

looking at real, on the ground needs and evaluating how these can be met – including which sources are the best fit.

Discoverability is key

Matching needs and resources is a start, but arranging various sources in a humdrum manner and assuming that the resources will get used to their full extent isn't a recipe for success. Back in the day, e-libraries could function by simply providing a list of resources arranged alphabetically with links to click on.

In today's information-saturated and time-pressured world the stakes have changed. Your users are busy and may well decide to go without the source they thought they needed (or indeed pick an inferior source) simply because there's a deadline, and they're unable to spend any more time browsing for information.

A modern e-library will contain tools to help maximize the value you get out of your resources. Couranto's Discovery platform for example makes it so much easier to deliver an e-library where your users can easily find what they need.

Discovery is a customizable self-service platform that enables information managers to organize information sources to promote accessibility. Key sources can easily be located through simplified search, easily accessed through single sign-on, and information managers can provide visible tips and pointers too.

Usage analytics matter

e-Libraries should be a good fit from the outset, but sometimes needs and requirements can drift over time. Besides, starting off with the right fit is easier said than done – sometimes a needs assessment doesn't quite hit the mark and ongoing adjustments are needed.

That's why modern e-libraries need to monitor usage, keeping track of how resources are used over time. At the very least, you'll identify which resources are deployed in excess, which helps optimize spend in the long run.

Here, Couranto's Clarity platform helps information experts better understand how resources are used. For example, with Clarity, you can view the proportion of seats typically in use for an information source and compare the login rates across information sources to get a sense of where demand really lies.

With Clarity you get deep insight into utilization all through a single, at-a-glance dashboard. It gives you the opportunity to course change through the year and delivers important insights when you're due to review and renew your agreements for the next financial year.

The future e-library

A truly modern, cutting-edge e-library would go beyond simply listing sources and waiting for users to browse these sources. Sure, analytics can help guide fit but, in the end, time-pressured professionals often tap less out of these resources than they could. So there are two other points to think about.

First, close integration with organizational IT helps. Yes, single sign-on is a small but important step that removes tedious login hurdles. However, with the recent commodification of API technology, you may find that many of your resources could integrate directly into existing systems so that library resources and data are available right within enterprise IT applications.

Next, finding and distributing information can be aided by AI-enabled tools. Using automated data retrieval and enrichment, your colleagues can find the critical nuggets of information they need much faster. It speeds up the long slog of sifting through the huge volume of information that's available today so that your colleagues can spend more time utilizing that information.

There's a shift underway

Even today, e-libraries take many different shapes and forms. Not every online library has kept up with the times, and for many organizations, it would be worth taking a second look at what's being offered. We've pointed to discoverability and usage analytics which are today's must-haves.

But there is a next stage that will help your colleagues make sense of the information overload, and

to mine the most valuable nuggets out of the vast wealth of data that's accessible. Together API technology and AI point to the next major shift in e-library provisioning, just one of many step- changes we've seen over the decades.

So yes, consider teaming up with a partner to provide a more intelligent way to provide access to sources. Working with API connectivity to draw more directly on resources and deploying AI to improve search and discovery. Not delivering basic discoverability and usage analytics? Get in touch with Couranto to discuss how Clarity and Discover can help you make the most of your current e-library.

Nick Collison has decades of experience in managing information access, budgeting, strategic planning, and knowledge services. Collison is a Fellow of SLA, the Special Libraries Association.