Lifting the Curtain on Unfilled Interlending Requests

Heidi Visser
University of Pretoria

Janet Zambri
University of the Witwatersrand
Discussion on -

- Current situation of interlending in South Africa
- Why unfilled requests?
- Role of staff
- Performance indicators and unfilled requests
- Grouping of libraries
- Reasons for unfilled requests
- Issues to be addressed to enhance interlending services
Technological Advances in Interlending in Southern Africa

- 52% libraries working online
- 7% libraries allow unmediated requests to be placed
- 13% libraries use ARIEL software
- More than 90% articles shipped electronically
- Electronic delivery of articles to e-mail of patrons
- Interlending Fee Management System
- Electronic retrieval of management information
Information Retrieval in South Africa

- 85% researchers first use the internet to obtain information
- 1% researchers first use the library catalogue
Research Project

- Gauteng and Environment Library Consortium (GAELIC) initiated the research project
- South African Library and information Trust (SALIT) funded the project
Goals of the Research Project

- Investigate the reasons for unfilled requests
- Suggest remedial actions
- Determine the training needs
Methodology

- Selection of a 3 month period, including a peak period
- Data retrieval:
  - Number of new requests placed & received
  - Number of filled documents
  - Reports on reasons for unfilled requests
  - Data to calculate turn-around time
Impact of Staff on Interlending Services

- Best performance by fulltime, specialized staff
- Interlending service influenced by:
  - Attitude: motivated & committed staff
  - Training and experience
  - Capacity: insufficient number of staff
Interlending Performance and Unfilled Requests

- Focus on relationship between unfilled requests and
  - productivity (number of requests handled)
  - fill rate (quality of work and efficiency of staff)
  - turn-around time
Fill Rate

- Represents the percentage of filled requests
- Reflects quality of work and efficiency of staff
- A low fill rate implies a high number of unfilled requests
Requesting Fill Rate

- More important
- Crucial to satisfy patron’s needs
- Unfilled requests often caused by inability of staff to select the correct supplying libraries
### Number of Attempts to Fill a Request

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total analyzed</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>&gt;5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>438</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Supplying Fill Rate

- Lower than requesting fill rate
- Fast turn-around time important
- Search shelves only once
- Unfilled requests to move immediately on to next library
### Grouping of Libraries According to Size - Requesting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library size</th>
<th>Number of libraries</th>
<th>Unfilled requests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1000=Large</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300-399=M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-299=S</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Grouping Libraries According to Size - Supplying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Libraries</th>
<th>Unfilled requests</th>
<th>Expired</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1000 = Large</td>
<td>8 (Received 76% of all requests)</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300-999 = Med</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-299 = Small</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grouping Requesting Libraries According to Fill Rate

- Requesting and supplying libraries with the least unfilled requests, handled the most requests
- Supplying libraries have had the least expired requests
Grouping Libraries According to Turn-Around Time

- No definite correlation
- A high percentage unfilled requests does not necessarily correspond with a slow turn-around time
Reasons for Unfilled Requests

- 25 reasons to choose from on ReQuest, the Southern African interlending system
- Incorrect usage of reasons
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requesting point of view</th>
<th>Supplying point of view</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not owned</td>
<td>In use-on loan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expired</td>
<td>Not owned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In use-on loan</td>
<td>Not on shelf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not on shelf</td>
<td>Expired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Not Owned (1)

- Human error is frequently the cause for unfilled requests
  - Lack of commitment
  - Lack of experience/training
  - Insufficient number of staff
Not Owned (2)

Inaccuracies on SACat (South African Catalogue) result in staff placing unverified requests

- Records not found on SACat
- Multiple records on SACat
- Incorrect information on SACat
Not Owned (3)

- Libraries not updating information on SACat and other bases regarding
  - Lost books
  - Books on order
  - Numbers of volumes not received
  - Cancelled serial subscriptions
  - Journals with only title holdings
Expired Requests

- 98% of expired requests due to supplying staff not attending to requests within the stipulated time
- Human error
In Use – on loan

- Less books are bought due to ongoing cuts in budgets
- Demand for available books grows – patrons revert to interlending
- Requests have to be rerouted more often
- Late return of books
Not On Shelf

- Books shelved incorrectly
- Books not returned to shelves soon after they have been checked in
- Lack of experience and searching skills
- Students/clients hiding books
- Library staff keeping books in their offices
Issues to be Addressed in Order to Enhance Interlending Services

1. Service Provider (Sabinet Online)
   - Revise list of reasons for unfilled requests
   - Supply separate reports regarding unfilled requests for books & articles
   - Eliminate multiple records on SACat
   - Provide reliable turn-around time reports
Issues to be Addressed in Order to Enhance Interlending Services

2. Libraries

- Ensure that whole stock is reflected on SACat and international databases
- Regularly update loan status of records & holdings
- Patrons to be encouraged to use electronic resources and the internet.
Issues to be Addressed in Order to Enhance Interlending Services

3. Library Management

- Study interlending management information to detect:
  - progress or decline
  - training needs
  - need for additional staff
Issues to be Addressed in Order to Enhance Interlending Services

4. Interlending Staff

- Should be well trained
- Attend workshops that focus on:
  - new developments
  - advanced practices
  - general updating
  - common errors
- Should report database inaccuracies
Conclusions: Staffing and Databases

- Assumptions regarding unfilled requests proved to be correct
- Commitment, training, experience & sufficient staff are keys to service excellence
Conclusions: Databases & Books

- Regular updating of databases
- Shortage of books
- Overdue books must be addressed
- Shelving issues to be attended to
Conclusions: Fill rate

- Enhancement of requesting fill rate
- High fill rate + cost effectiveness + fast turn-around time = service excellence!
Thank You
Acknowledgements

- Gwenda Thomas – former director of the GAELIC consortium for assistance and guidance during the research period
- SALIT for funding the research project on unfilled requests
- Sabinet Online for continuing assistance and co-operation
- GAELIC libraries for their co-operation and allowing the usage of their management information
References

- **BAKER, Kim**: The rethinking resource sharing initiative - an overview for South African libraries. 2007
- **GAELIC/SALIT Interlending project**: Unfilled interlending requests and related matters. 2005