

Piggybacking access: providing library access to the College of Intensive Care Medicine

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Overview

In late 2019, the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists library began supplying library services to the College of Intensive Care Medicine. It did this by “piggybacking” the new service on the back of its existing library service. This model is presented as a way of providing library services to smaller institutions that would not normally be in a position to manage their own library service.

Background

The Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) is a medical college based in Melbourne servicing over 6000 fellows and 1500 trainees. The trainees themselves are normally based in hospitals throughout Australia and New Zealand, with the library operating predominantly as a remote access service. In addition to a large online collection of e-books, e-journals and databases, the library offers print loans, document delivery, reference, and literature search services. The College of Intensive Care Medicine (CICM) is a relatively small medical college – also based in Melbourne – servicing over 1000 fellows and 250 trainees. CICM was originally an offshoot of ANZCA, with the two colleges sharing some of the same trainee-base.

After splitting from ANZCA in 2008 – and despite an offer to retain some existing services at the time – CICM decided to forego any library service in order to establish itself in its own right. Within a few years, that had changed and CICM decided to take on several journal subscriptions (all with an intensive care medicine focus) which were managed by their IT department. The number of subscriptions eventually grew until CICM had a small stable of e-journals made accessible through EBSCO Full Text Finder.

In early 2017, following several years of informal advice and discussion, CICM and ANZCA began formally negotiating a proposal for ANZCA to take over the CICM

journal subscriptions, with a view to allowing CICM trainees and fellows access to the ANZCA library as fully-fledged users.

Opportunities

The proposal offered many advantages over the then current arrangement. It would allow for a massive expansion of CICM library resources beyond what their current staffing and expertise could manage, which at that point was limited to approximately 10 journals with no e-book access whatsoever.

It would allow CICM to take advantage of ANZCA's expert library staff, particularly with regard to their subscriptions, which at that point were spiralling out of control cost-wise with minimal negotiation taking place during renewals.

It also allowed for a further strengthening of ties between the two colleges, which had been steadily rebuilding since the split. As mentioned, the two colleges share many trainees, who often have similar library resource needs. Indeed, ANZCA was already subscribing to many of the same journals as CICM (partly as a result of their former relationship). This made building a library service for CICM a somewhat easier task, as there were already a number of established vendor relationships in place. More prosaically, the proposal opened up a brand new revenue stream for ANZCA, at a time when the college was looking to expand its revenue-generating endeavours. In particular, it demonstrated the value of the library and provided opportunity to grow the collection in a landscape where resource costs are continually increasing.

Finally, we were fortunate that the CICM library deal was being negotiated during a period when ANZCA was going through the process of selecting a new library system to replace its aging Inmagic system. This allowed prospective replacements to not only be evaluated with regard to the existing ANZCA library service, but also for the expanded library service involving CICM.

Initial challenges

As noted, whilst the selection of a new library service offered a more crafted solution – than if we had simply bolted CICM onto an existing system – it made the selection of that new system a much more complicated and convoluted process, as there were many additional factors to consider. This had the effect of stalling any concrete work on the CICM library service until such a point as the new system were up and running for ANZCA.

Fortunately, once these issues were addressed (see below) and a new system selected, ANZCA was able to implement this new system relatively quickly, which meant that we could then turn our attention to the CICM implementation shortly thereafter.

Some of the key access issues needing addressing were:

1. Authentication: ANZCA currently relies on a hosted EZproxy solution, which integrates with our college user management system for authentication. CICM operates a completely different user management system, with no integration with ANZCA's system. Moreover, due to legacy issues arising out of the fact that CICM was once a part of ANZCA, both systems had parallel, overlapping and conflicting ID numbering for users. Various mechanisms were explored for integrating CICM users into ANZCA's user system, but none proved seamless and all involved an ongoing workload. Ultimately, it was decided that a 2-tier system would need to be used for authentication purposes, so that users were authenticating against their respective user systems. The options open to us were adding a 2nd CICM-specific link alongside all links originating from our discovery interface (something we felt would be confusing and create issues for ANZCA-only users) or the implementation of a CICM-only interface for access (which meant duplicating a lot of services).
2. Contract: The creation of a mutually-agreeable legal framework for both colleges proved difficult, mainly due to the lack of in-house legal expertise on either side. This remained a critical stumbling block for many months and was only resolved when ANZCA took on a commercial manager, who was quickly able to craft an agreement (with considerable input from ANZCA library staff as regards costing).
3. Budgeting/re negotiating deals with vendors: This proved especially difficult where *both* colleges had an existing deal for the same journal. As already noted, CICM's renewals had inflated significantly – well beyond the comparative value of the ANZCA own deals. Whilst the intention was that ANZCA would simply pay a directly proportional increase based on the number of additional users, this didn't always prove possible. In some instances, vendors still wanted the colleges counted as two different institutions for revenue purposes, whilst on other occasions there was the issue of the relative value of a journal to each respective college from a society perspective. As a result, some negotiations were quite protracted and often concessions needed to be made to ensure society revenue wasn't adversely impacted. This has made calculating budgets somewhat cumbersome, and a complicated Excel spreadsheet eventually ended up being created for budgetary purposes.
4. Staff overheads: The new deal placed a lot of extra pressure on existing ANZCA library staffing levels. Many time-saving measures had to be instituted to streamline existing services, not only to free up staff time for the CICM integration, but also for the initial ANZCA systems implementation itself. Ongoing, there was also the added burden of maintaining the combined services. As a result, a decision was made early on to limit the CICM library service to an online-only one – with no access to such staff intensive services as physical loans, document delivery and literature searches.

Implementation and outcomes

Central to the eventual CICM rollout was finding a discovery solution that was both discrete (with regard to authentication) but scalable. Ultimately, this led to the adoption of OCLC's WorldShare Management Services (WMS) as a way of doing this. An initial, fully-featured instance of WMS was rolled out for ANZCA, and then a second scaled-down WMS instance was configured for CICM. It was then possible for ANZCA to simply share all of its existing (pre-configured) online collections with the CICM instance, which were enabled as required, but with CICM's own authentication service plugged in at the institution-level. This meant that any update to the ANZCA collections automatically flowed through to the CICM instance, thereby significantly reducing the amount of staff time required to maintain services.

End-user access was facilitated via a CICM-only discovery layer (utilising WorldCat Discovery Services), essentially replicating the ANZCA setup. This avoided the need to have multiple conflicting links on the one interface. This solution also allowed ANZCA and CICM to create a branded, promotable service. In addition to the above, ANZCA created a CICM library "micro-site" using LibGuides, which allowed us to quickly duplicate existing assets for CICM reuse but on a smaller, more manageable scale.

Most vendors proved very cooperative and allowed CICM to tag onto existing ANZCA deals, although there were some major exceptions. The big gain from an ANZCA perspective was that the CICM deal allowed ANZCA to institute a number of multi-year deals with our larger vendors. This had the effect of both lowering overall prices and reducing the need for all of our deals to be re-negotiated each year. Some smaller subs were excluded due lack of suitability, accessibility issues and to minimise overall costs.

As mentioned above, there was a definite impact on library staffing at ANZCA, as even with all the streamlining and "piggybacking" there is still a need to source CICM-specific content, broker CICM-inclusive deals, manage a very complicated budget and coordinate with CICM IT staff for any authentication issues that arise. This additional workload has been partly mitigated by the decision to keep CICM an online-only service, and the allocation of a portion of the CICM service fee to ANZCA library staffing costs.

The result is that CICM now has access to 900+ e-journals and 12,000+ e-books, including the majority of their recommended exam texts – which are proving to be some of their most popular e-resources.

The Future

CICM are delighted with their new library service, and there has been much favourable comment from both staff and users. On the statistics front, there has been

a slow but steady growth in usage on the CICM end, with the main barrier to growth being the limited promotional opportunities due to the advent of COVID-19. Going forward, CICM has the option of taking up additional services (such as document delivery provision and literature searches) as added-value services if they desire. Moreover, the current solution is completely scalable, and in theory, ANZCA could manage a number of libraries along the same lines, perhaps supplying services to other small medical colleges with insufficient resources to manage a library. In summary, ANZCA has been able to deliver a relatively low-cost, high-yield solution that can be easily replicated.