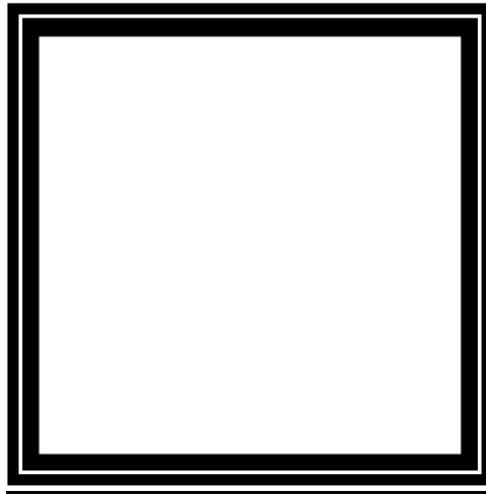


E-learning through libraries



by

Vrushali S. Kulkarni

Librarian,

Bharat College of Commerce and Science

Badlapur

Email: vrushali.savale@gmail.com

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Introduction

The prefix “e” has become increasingly evident in the lives of people in many ways that one could not have imagined less than ten years ago. With relative ease, the “e” is used with activities like real estate, retailing, banking, entertainment and now education. The “e” stands for electronic and it relates to the use of the Internet to undertake the wide range of activities. We readily recognize <http://www.....> as an Internet web site and see it plastered on vehicles, billboards, hot air balloons and in the electronic and print media. Educators are now beginning to hear terms like e-teaching, e-learning and e-education as these words have become part of our regular vocabulary.

What is e-learning?

According to Wikipedia:

Electronic learning or E-learning is an all-encompassing term generally used to refer to computer-enhanced learning, although it is often extended to include the use of mobile technologies such as PDA's and MP3 players. It may include the use of web-based teaching materials and hypermedia in general, multimedia CD-ROMs or web sites, discussion boards, collaborative software, e-mail, blogs, wikis, text chat, computer aided assessment, educational animation, simulations, games, learning management software, electronic voting systems and more, with possibly a combination of different methods being used.

This broader definition helps to explain why e-learning is becoming such an important topic.

In short “E-Learning is Internet-enabled learning. E-Learning provides faster learning at reduced costs and increased access to learning.

Technologies for E-learning

Web 2.0 technologies allow users to create networks, share information and develop a whole new range of ways to support the vital interpretation of that information. These informal learning networks place the learner, rather than the teacher, at the centre of the learning experience and allow them to distil, reflect and then act on the information that is being shared.

E-learning through libraries:

With the advent of computers, the nature of libraries has changed dramatically. Computers are being used in libraries to process, store, retrieve and disseminate information. As a result, the traditional concept of library is being redefined from a place to access books to one which houses the most advanced media including CD-ROM, Internet, and remote access to a wide range of resources. Libraries have now become digital institutions.

Gone are the days when a library was judged by its quantitative resources. Today, libraries are surrounded by networked data that is connected to the vast ocean of Internet-based services. Moreover, electronic resources relevant to the professions are also developing these days.

Academic libraries are considered to be the nerve centres of academic institutions which support teaching, research, and other academic programmes in various ways. Demographic changes, technological advances and globalization have totally changed the concept of education. The important question today is no longer whether to implement e-teaching and e-learning in academics but how to run it well and how to get the best out of it.

Academic libraries serve the educators, including the new generation of teachers who will work in an Internet environment in both regular and virtual classroom situations. E teachers collaborate, build and discover new learning communities and explore newer resources in their interaction with information, materials and ideas with their students and colleagues.

An Academic Library must have an effective e-learning strategy. It must be a good combination of the technology and the content it carries.

Academic Libraries and E-learning

Academic librarians generally serve the subject academicians to provide information regarding teaching, learning and research. From the library side it has been a great opportunity to integrate the library resources and services in support of learning, research and outreach.

Most of the modern academic libraries are digital and e-learning can effectively take place in a digital environment. Academic libraries apply appropriate communication technologies in support of e-learning and e-research by providing seamless access to electronic resources and services. Electronic resources include online catalogues, databases, multimedia, online journals, digital repositories, electronic books, electronic archives and online / electronic services.

Both students and lecturers can undertake learning and research without being in the library.

Measures:

- An academic library, faculty and academic development department managing e-learning may use appropriate technologies to facilitate learning and access to resources and services.
- The initiative which should be taken by the academic libraries towards establishment of an e-learning support centre which would undertake training of the academic staff in integrating the educational technology into the curriculum to provide access to the content.
- As a part of this initiatives, an Educational Technology unit will develop e-learning smart classrooms, along with video conferencing and assignment tools enabling flexible learning and teaching with the students studying at their own place.
- The academic library must have a holistic approach in e-learning whereby different traditional and digital methods and media are integrated in learning and teaching.

Services offered:

As a part of e-learning an academic library must provide the services to its students and staff from remote access which includes:

- ✚ List of new acquisitions to indicate newly acquired materials for each department through email.
- ✚ Facility to see materials borrowed by an individual user with an option to renew the borrowed materials without visiting the library.
- ✚ Request for materials that are borrowed by another user. Upon return of the material, communication is sent to the user who made the request to come and borrow the material.
- ✚ Users can suggest additional items that the library should acquire based on their need. The request can be made online.

Role of Academic Librarians in e-Teaching and e-Learning

The librarians help students in determining useful scholarly resources; work with the faculty in planning and developing distance education courses (in particular online courses) to integrate concepts of information literacy throughout the curriculum. Faculty need support in these activities because the ability to articulate information needs, find appropriate information resources and critically assess the results of an online search are key to success in e-learning and this leaves the faculty to focus on course content.

Requirements of the latest generations of learners

For our latest generation of professionals all these technologies, including e-learning are the norms. Modern learners will have an expectation that resources will be there to support them and in many cases will opt for an online alternative to traditional training. This generation is comfortable with the use of information that moves with them, wherever they are.

- ✚ They expect to use tools such as instant messaging, podcasts and social networking sites such as Facebook.
- ✚ These learners will have their own informal communities, often global communities, with whom they are comfortable sharing ideas and learning.

Products and programs for E-learners

❖ **LibGuides and Campus Guides**

These products are developed by Springshare. This is the latest approach for developing popular research guides or pathfinders. LibGuides can be used to help students with subject-specific topics, or they can be more assignment driven. These tend to be very popular with the students because they provide precise instructions on where to locate information from many sources and in various formats. While this program could be considered a bit pricey it is highly customizable and has enjoyed widespread use among libraries.

❖ **Koonji**

This is multimedia friendly and allows blogrolls, RSS feed, embedded video and works well with Amazon and Google maps.

❖ **Delicious**

The free bookmarking site Delicious has also been used for creating great research guides.

Library Online Services

Ask-a-Librarian

A distinctive feature of libraries is the ability to provide reference assistance. Therefore, it is crucial for libraries that serve distance learners to offer some form of virtual reference. Options could include a statewide partnership, like Ask-a-Librarian, or perhaps a local help desk. Smaller institutions may benefit from a consortium or statewide cooperative desk as they typically provide longer coverage hours, and flexibility for limited staff. This may give students a more personal experience and offer a more customized reference service.

Virtual Reference

Virtual reference or chat reference can also take place in an e-mail and SMS (text messaging) format. Mobile technologies have evolved sufficiently so that conversation naturally takes place in these forms. Library users may feel more comfortable texting or e-mailing their questions.

Some cooperative desks have this feature already built-in. Others may resort to using services like Text-A-Librarian, Google SMS, and Twilio.

Document Delivery

Another library service we can make available to our distance learners includes making print journals, magazines, and newspaper articles available through document delivery. Most libraries have an interlibrary loan department whose mission is to obtain materials from other libraries for their patron use. In the case of distance learners this department can make local or print materials accessible by scanning and e-mailing these items to the student.

Ebooks

Students tend to associate books with research. In fact most reference questions begin with “I need a book about ...” Ebooks are wonderful additions to the library as these can be accessed remotely and are easy to use once the patron is authenticated. For many libraries a sizeable portion of the collection development funds are being designated toward these resources. E-books are becoming more sophisticated with features like highlighting, insertable comments, and the ability to convert text to hyperlinks making this a very popular resource for distance learners.

Access to online databases

Access to articles in journals and magazines are mainly through library subscription to databases. A prominent link for e learners on the library page could be very useful. The same link could be made available to all online instructors for the purpose of being added to their learning management systems. This can be achieved by using a browser add-on, like Lib X for Firefox, which will alert the user if the library owns resources on that page.

Evaluation of services

As with all services and programs, evaluation is of the utmost importance. Making sure that all services are meeting the faculty’s needs for online courses means periodically re-evaluating these services. Surveying not only faculty but also students to see if services are being used, why (or

why not), how they are being used and ways to improve should all be a part of the process. Instructors should be contacted each semester to review and revise the library services offered within the online courses. Syllabi should be reviewed to ensure that all library links, articles, and contact information are accurate. Communicating with faculty shows a commitment of support from librarians to the online community.

Conclusion

Information professionals have been innovators in their use of e-learning. More support is likely to follow, as tools and resources change more rapidly and, as our learners become more sophisticated, the use of engaging interactive e-learning will increase. This is evidenced by the greater use of virtual classrooms, webinars and live online tutorials.

So, the library is no longer just a brick and mortar building. As the needs of our users change, libraries and library services must also continue to evolve and grow in new directions. Only then can we remain relevant and useful to our users.

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