Libraries Australia and Trove – a special network for special libraries

All libraries are special. Libraries Australia, the national cooperative information service, recognises this by supporting each sector of libraries through a separate funding model. The group of libraries known as special libraries has to be broad-ranging in the scope of its responsibilities, because each special library has a particular remit to meet the subject-specific demands of its community.

Special library representation in Libraries Australia

Libraries Australia has supported special libraries since its inception as the Australian Bibliographic Network in 1981. They were broadly defined: their library services may be delivered to federal, state, and local government departments, the education sector, health service providers, the legal community, or to corporate agencies. Since then, special library participation has ebbed and flowed, but following the launch of the current service in 2006, the special library sector has contributed a modest proportion of Libraries Australia revenue (about 16%) while representing the largest number of libraries subscribing to the service (more than 500).Those 500 member libraries now reap the benefits of the newest service provided by the National Library – Trove.

The Libraries Australia – Trove connection

Trove has been developed over more than three years. It is built on the 20 million bibliographic records and 42 million holdings in the Australian National Bibliographic Database (ANBD) and the 220 000 authority records in the Australian National Authority File (ANAF). Trove also combines the content of many other services including Picture Australia and Australian Research Online (ARO) to provide a 'one-stop shop' discovery experience for all Australians. Other rich sources of information have been contributed via the People Australia program and external sources of interest such as Wikipedia are linked in. However, it is the complementary features of Libraries Australia and Trove which can be tailored to each special library community that make their connection valuable for individual libraries.

All libraries that are members of Libraries Australia have committed to a common good to share in that network, especially those libraries which send their holdings to the ANBD. Why are holdings important? When libraries share their holdings on the ANBD, keep location and availability information up-to-date, and ensure web links are current, many processes are streamlined for any library. Collection development and analysis are far easier, interlibrary loan requests are also streamlined. For materials which only exist in print form, a situation likely to continue for a few decades at least, the ability to allow staff to activate unmediated requesting in these agencies (known as enhanced requesting in Libraries Australia) is a value-added service which works most efficiently at the network level because it invokes interlibrary lending seamlessly.

Trove provides a new spotlight for shared Australian holdings. If you need to know where government publications reside in your state or federal counterpart because you are considering collaborative purchasing, an exchange or a shared repository arrangement, then Trove can help to provide the answer. If special libraries are considering a collaborative purchase, a Trove profile can be set up for a group of affiliated or networked libraries to examine distributed holdings.

While Trove offers this functionality to its fullest extent (any number of libraries of interest can be declared in a profile), it is building on the data received by Libraries Australia and the agencies which list themselves in the Australian Libraries Gateway. The functionality could also be exploited to create a virtual shared catalogue. This is true for any group of libraries which have an interest in affiliating with each other. Given the flexibility of the Trove design, the addition of bespoke branding is also feasible. The power of a shared discovery layer across a range of open sourced and vendor-sourced integrated library management systems should not be underestimated, especially for the research communities which special libraries support.

The intermediate step of submitting records to the ANBD is satisfied by a range of technologies supported in Libraries Australia. They include the Record Import Service, SRU Record Update, and OAI's Protocol for Metadata Harvesting. These technologies also work in reverse for local catalogue refreshment and enrichment. On behalf of Libraries Australia members, through a virtual catalogue experience or through its entire corpus, Trove returns researchers to their individual member services. Dempsey describes it as indirect discovery: "… 'leverage' a discovery environment which is outside of your control to bring people back to your environment."[1]

Unlocking special library collections

The value of all of these features becomes significantly greater when special libraries share the details of their unique collections across the Libraries Australia network. The national, state, and territory libraries have been working on a project to help unlock the value of undiscovered collections. Recognising that individual item description is costly and time-consuming, the project "aims to identify ways of achieving faster, simpler, and less resource-intensive record creation and to agree on the metadata standards that should apply to different categories of material." New guidelines for describing materials and sharing them via Libraries Australia and hence Trove will be available soon.

Conclusion

In an age of globalisation when library services are being redefined, the National Library has used 21st century technologies to deliver their continued promise. However, the technologies are successful because of the commitment and contribution to national platforms. Special libraries can leverage this commitment extensively for their own tailored services.

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[1] Indirect discovery, Dempsey, L., 13 June 2010, **http://orweblog.oclc.org/archives/002105.html**