

111 1987 (0054)
INF. SERVICE

Lucknow Librarian 19(1); 1987, 1-4.

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Modern Concept of Reference Service in a Special Library

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A contemporary concept of reference service is given with outlines of modern form of information and documentation services in a special library. If such services are found absent, the character of specialisation of such a library or an information system cannot be established as it would not satisfy the needs of its users.

Informal help to library users was provided as courtesy by library staff from the very beginning of library service. During late 19th Century, an identified necessity inspired the library staff to think and formulate a well organised service which later was termed as reference service. The pioneer in this direction is the American Librarianship. The dedication towards the use in place of preservation and open to all in place of a selected few led to abandon the custodial approach of library service. The growth in size of collection, users and multi-dimensional needs of information capable of serving industrialists, traders, labourers,

officers, teachers, students and the general public developed the phenomenon of active use of the collection. In 1876 at the first ALA conference Mr Samuel S. Green stressed for Personal relations between librarians and readers. It is considered the first formal demand to establish an organised and systematic reference service. Melvil Dewey described ALA as "Ask Librarian Anything" to mean the same.

Journey through a Century

Since 1876, the gradual acceptance and implementation of the concept of personal-

ised service found its support through Poole, Winsor, Melvil Dewey. Kaplan in 1883 evidenced to recruit a reference librarian, post in Boston Public Library. Since 1900 the concept of reference service got wide expansion in response to new social, economic and educational imperatives. The expansion of education, increasing importance of research in govt., industrial and social aspects, exponential growth in body of recorded knowledge led and compelled the librarians to set a systematic approach to help the regular or anticipated users. It resulted in subject departmentalization in a library and creating a full fledged reference department with a wide range of reference sources and tools.

With the advent of long range reference service the reshaping, bibliographics, exploitation and repackaging of information formed the essential parts of librarianship. The specific work of collection, analysis, organisation, reshaping, repackaging, for the purpose of dissemination of a bit of relevant information termed as documentation in 1934 by Paul Otlet and in 1948 by S C Bradford with deep coverage of the objectives laid by the reference service. The whole spectrum again moved towards the new term Information Science during 1959 in U.S.A. The USSR termed it as Informatics with the similar objectives.

Relationship between reference service & documentation/information science

Documentation service is the name taken by reference service when the emphasis shifts from Macro to nascent micro thought and from generalist to specialist reader. It is intensified reference service.

Reference service in general is pin pointed, exhaustive, expeditious service of the documents relevant to the pursuit of the subject engaging attention of the reader or a class of readers at the moment. This shows the documentation service is mostly long range reference service^a.

Main function of reference service

1. Informational
2. Instructional
3. Bibliographical
4. Appraisal
5. Supervisional

These functions are serviced through:-

1. Provision of brief, factual information of the "ready reference" variety, particularly such as names, addresses, statistics, etc. that can be located quickly in a limited group of general reference sources.
2. Assistance and instruction (formal or informal) in the use of the library, including locating a desired material use of catalogues, classification scheme used, sources of information like directories, indexes etc.
3. Assistance in the identification and choice of reading- as what to get for a specific reading and from where and in its original text form or in a condensed form etc.

Reference work in a special library

Besides 1 & 2 above which are general in nature, 3 requires special attention parti-

cularly in special libraries. This function has further created separate sections, divisions with the name of documentation section, Information division or a like. They have to perform the responsibilities of:

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1. Conducting literature searches and compiling bibliographies/documentation listing on topics of interest and on which information can be sought.
2. Preparing indexes, and the sources for vocabulary control.
3. Providing abstract, digest and other condensate services.
4. Providing pin pointed and selective services, preparing reviews, trend reports, state of the art etc.
5. Providing translation and reprographic services.
6. Conducting surveys for evaluation and reformation of the current system.

Present System

With the increasing application of computers in library and information services, the long range services have reduced to quick delivery services where computers could be used. The specific data bases covering the universe of information brought out periodically on the relevant topics is collected and transferred to computer readable data bases like MEDLARS/MEDLINE in the field of Medical sciences, AGRIS for agricultural sciences, INSPEC for physical sciences, COMPENDEX for Engineering Sciences, etc.

Information Services

Information services can be grouped into the following categories²:

1. Current Awareness or Alerting Services
 - (i) Title announcement services-like current contents.
 - (ii) Announcement of research in progress in a particular field or for a selected group of readers, organisations.
 - (iii) Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI)
 - (iv) Notification of forthcoming events like seminars, meetings, workshops, etc.
 - (v) Newspapers clippings
2. Condensation services:
 - (i) Abstracting, reviews. etc.
 - (ii) Extracts,
 - (iii) Digests, news brief etc. (may be separate for variant type of readers like management, workers, technicians, consumers etc. in the same organisation).
3. Location services
 - (i) Catalogues, Indexes.
 - (ii) Bibliographies,
 - (iii) Documentation lists.
4. Repackaging Services
 - (i) Critical evaluation compilations,
 - (ii) Handbooks, Directories, manuals,

- (iii) Data service
- (iv) Trend report and state of the art reports.

5. Reference service

- (i) Readers guidance & instructional services
- (ii) Quick query services
- (iii) Restrospective searches
- (iv) Referral services.

6. (i) Reprographic services

- (ii) Translation
- (iii) Editing, styling and publishing service (preparation of charts, slides, getting print outs, etc.)

7. Liaison Service

- (i) Advisory, consultancy and liaison service arrangements.
- (ii) Conducting surveys, user studies, user education in terms of library/documentation procedure and use.
- (iii) Formulation of new techniques for better organisation and storage for speedier and precision in recall (dissemination and retrieval).
- (iv) Training of information personnel for application of new techniques and equipments like computer.

Conclusion

Information is a vital and essential

organ of the present society and without relevant information nothing could be done in correct perspective. To foster the development in any direction, scientific research is a must. To feed the research people, providing relevant information and leaving all other irrelevant is a task before the present information and library personnel. Timely use of available information is another responsibility on the workers as information is liable to be obsolete at a very fast speed due to large quantity coming up every moment and pushing the old back. Present reference services in the shape and name of information and documentation services are designed to meet the present requirements of the specialist users. These can be provided as per users' needs, and resources available.

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