

The Invisible Force: supporting users of online services

The Case of the UK Data Archive

Melanie Wright
UK Data Archive

Online services at UKDA

- Email “Help Desk” archive@essex (19xx)
- Very early web presence (19xx)
- Early Online catalogue – BIRON (19XX)
- Online variable browsing (19xx)
- Download of User pack application forms (19XX)
- Full Online registration/ordering (2000)
- Expanded contextual metadata – Major Series pages (2000)
- Nesstar service (2000)

Changing Usage

- 1993-1997:
 - 24% increase in active users
 - 32% increase in orders placed
 - 28% increase in datasets delivered
- 1998-2002:
 - 16% increase in active users
 - 52% increase in orders placed
 - 102% increase in datasets delivered

Evolution of Support

- Separation of support for resource location (librarian skills) and resource use (research skills) – coded as pre- and post-order support; now merging again under topic-based support
- Full circle: dataset specific to general one stop shop to new specialist ESDS support functions

Changing Expectations

- Easier access/analysis systems potentially means more naïve users
- E-commerce informs user expectations of how access systems ought to work
- Data protection rising concern
- Era of instant gratification

Implications 1

Online Registration

- Closer control/contact with users
- Better monitoring possible
- BUT direct link to user means institution out of the loop
- What does this mean for the role of the OR?

Implications 2

Authentication

- Trend in UK to go for central one-stop authorisation (Athens)
- What does this mean for those outside the sector?
- How to meet transborder agreements when infrastructure is set up to meet national requirements?

Implications 3

Online Tools

- One size does NOT fit all
- But running multiple systems is confusing to users and expensive
- Need better understanding of new and old communities and what they want
- Managing expectations is key

Implications 3

Resources

- Online services cut dissemination costs (media, postage, human time burning media, etc)
- BUT very high upfront developments costs to get systems in place
- And higher requirements for data prep, as
 - Systems have deeper/broader metadata requirements
 - Online systems shine a painfully bright light on data quality

Conclusion