

Conference report

Virtual Communities – EUSIDIC Annual Conference¹

22–25 September 2002, Lisbon, Portugal

EUSIDIC, the “European Association of Information Services”, was founded in the 1970s as the “European Society of Information Dissemination Centres”, using the model of its American sister association “American Society of Information Dissemination Centres” (ASIDIC). EUSIDIC acts, like ASIDIC and its other American sister association, “National Federation of Abstracting and Indexing Services” (NFAIS), as an umbrella association of different groups with a common interest. These groups represent information users, such as corporate information managers, university librarians and representatives from the information industry – information producers, providers and aggregators. In addition to the main objectives of EUSIDIC are communication between members and support for effective access to information resources. EUSIDIC differs from most of the other associations because the nature of its members – users from corporate, government and university libraries as well as information providers. This fact makes EUSIDIC a unique meeting platform. There is an interview with the Chairman of EUSIDIC Chairman, Johan van Halm, at the end of this report. EUSIDIC’s Annual Conference was organised jointly with the Caixa Geral des Depósitos, the largest banking group in Portugal. The papers of the conference can be seen on the EUSIDIC website using the following link:

<http://www.eusidic.org/Lisbon2002Final/Lisbon2002FinalWeb.html>

The main topic of the conference was “Virtual Communities – Making Technology Work for You”:

“Communities of all types, involving collaboration and teamwork, are being used to communicate and to share information and services. The EUSIDIC Annual Conference 2002 will review how to build learning and sharing communities and how to enhance their effectiveness, using state-of-the-art strategies and tools. . . .”

The conference encompassed six sessions over three days with a total of 17 presentations, a podium discussion and a number of product presentations. The opening session was followed by sessions with the following topics:

- A: Business Models for Information Companies Serving Information Communities;
- B: Building Virtual Information Communities: New Strategies to Market Information;
- C: The Semantic Web: Challenges for the Information Industry and Information Services;
- D: E-Publishing: Discovery, Retrieval, Delivery and Usage;
- E: Financial Information Services.

¹An amended and a translated version partly based on an article in the Austrian Online-Mitteilungen Nr. 74 (October 2002).

The Key-note Lecture with the theme “Virtual Communities & Virtual Cash?” was delivered by **Derk Haank**, CEO of Elsevier Science. With reference to the journals crisis of the last 10 years, he pointed to it as a “lose-lose situation”. Both publishers and libraries have been losers in the recent past (something which was queried during the discussion following his presentation²). Elsevier Science has invested more in the last five years than in the hundred years before that even though prices for Elsevier journals have increased less than those of the competition. (However the price changes between 1990 and 1999 were not mentioned.) When one compares the price for quantity (number/bundle of journals) and usage, than customers have received the double amount of information for 1.1 times the price (a 10% increase) in 2001 with a double usage, in the year 2005 customers will for 1.25 times the price (an increase of 25%) receive with an 8 times higher usage 6 times more content³. Haank stressed the pricing policy of his company, emphasising that large libraries should pay more than small libraries. He also announced the agreement between the Royal Library (KB) in The Hague (Netherlands), whereby the KB has acquired a complete copy of Science Direct for the purpose of long-term archiving. Haank also believes that virtual communication without real money and without real organisations will not be possible.

Janet Lees of OCLC PICA touched also on the problem of long-term archiving of scholarly publishing and believes that OCLC PICA could solve this problem on behalf of libraries. Her argument is that OCLC can already count among its customers more than 40,000 libraries in more than 80 countries. Extending its services to archiving on behalf of these customers would be a logical step. Furthermore OCLC is a not-for-profit entity (.org not .com).

A visually fascinating presentation, “New Business Models for the Information Industry – What Comes after Online Publishing”, was given by **Michael Braun** (VP Arthur D. Little GmbH). He stated that the core problem of information management is not the provision of more information but how to cope with information overload. He illustrated this with the fact that the Internet content is doubling every 3 months. The challenge is to be able to digest that information. Braun compared the information usage in academia, where the Internet is the most used resource, with users from industry, where internal systems dominate and users from SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises), who have a limited awareness of external information, which they couldn’t afford even when they would like to buy it. The information industry as such is faced with a paradigm change. Libraries are changing from warehouses to information providers, based on the principles of information and knowledge management. Publishers have to make strategic decisions over positioning their electronic products in global or niche markets. Hosts are developing from classical suppliers of secondary information into providers of Internet-based, value-added products and services. New players will enter the market who will combine IT skills with expertise in the area of data and knowledge management. All will be forced to re-orientate in order to support scientists and managers to do their job more efficiently and effectively. Part of such a solution will be a new price model which is less rigid and more flexible. Examples might include an initial fee for unlimited access to core collections or resources; a similar initial fee but with a usage-dependent component for frequently used resources or a pay-per-view arrangement for less frequent used material.

The panel discussion at the end of the first day had the theme “The Information Chain: a Big Bang?” It brought **Marjorie Hlava** (NFAIS), **Derk Haank** (Elsevier), **Johan van Halm** (EUSIDIC), **Michael Braun** (Arthur D. Little) and **John Buckman** (Buckman Communications) together. The topics of the

²Compare Science and technology: Publishing, perishing, peer review. In: *The Economist* 346 (1998), Jan. 24, pp. 77–78 (it has been noted that commercial publishers have been able to make profit margins before tax of 40% or higher).

³It could be questioned if libraries do really benefit from enforced bundling of journals at higher prices. Usage statistics could be the real measure for the future price model of scientific journals (note by Heinz Hauffe).



The panel: Marjorie Hlava, Derk Haank, Johan van Halm, Michael Braun and John Buckman.

previous sessions (journals crisis, portals as a vehicle for access to heterogeneous resources, virtual communities, etc.) were reviewed and discussed with participation from the delegates. One of the conclusions was that traditional, physical, libraries will lose their importance, unless they transform themselves into meeting points and cafes. However the library profession may gain importance.

In the session, “The Semantic Web”, **Jürgen Krause** (Universität Koblenz-Landau and IZ Sozialwissenschaften Bonn) spoke about “Standardisation and Heterogeneity: a Key Conflict in Digital Library Projects”. Taking into account that approximately 85% of all scientists use scientific search engines, although only 6% of the estimated number of 800 million web-sites are characterised as being scientific, Krause concluded that web search engines are not able to provide world-wide searching needs: they are only a first step. The IZ Bonn is working on an information system for distributed databases, for example in the CARMEN project (“Content Analysis, Retrieval and Metadata: Effective Networking”)⁴. Automatic generation of metadata is not problem-free because of multiple inconsistencies. To solve this dilemma, a key role will be played by the automatic transfer of content analysis between various methods and standardisation of documents.

Poul Henrik Jørgensen (Portia System I/S and chairman of the Danish Z39.50-Implementation Group) dealt with the topics “RDF, DC, FRBR and SRW – Standards for implementing the Semantic Web”. The success of the World Wide Web can be attributed mainly to the world-wide application of a few IT syntax standards (such as TCP/IP, FTP, SMTP, HTTP, HTML, XML). Only recently have semantic standards have been developed:

- RDF (“Resource Description Framework”)⁵ is a multi-purpose language for the representation of Information in the WWW. This describes the semantic relations between web resources and their links.
- FRBR (“Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records”)⁶ is a package of recommendations from a working group founded in 1998 by IFLA. Implementation of the FRBR by means of complete new metadata model would cause one of the largest changes in more than 100 years of cataloguing.
- ZING (Z39.50 International Next Generation)⁷ is a web standard which supports web-based retrieval independent of local database formats.

Portals were examined in detail during the session entitled, “E-Publishing: Discovery, Retrieval, Delivery and Usage”. **Richard Biddiscombe** (University of Birmingham), in his lecture “Eurostudies and the

⁴<http://www.mathematik.uni-osnabrueck.de/projects/carmen/>.

⁵<http://www.w3.org/TR/rdf-primer/>.

⁶<http://www.oclc.org/research/projects/frbr/index.shtm>.

⁷<http://lcweb.loc.gov/z3950/agency/zing/srwu/specs.html>.

SOSIG Gateway: Indexing Source Material for the Information Society” dealt with the Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG)⁸. This portal provides access to social science documents and websites. Within SOSIG is a study “Eurostudies” developed on European information sources.

Uwe Rosemann (Technische Informationsbibliothek Hannover), discussed “Information Networks and Subject Libraries: New Efforts in the German Digital Library”. He introduced GETINFO⁹, a new one-stop-shop document delivery service for printed and electronic documents in the area of natural sciences and technology, operated by FIZ Karlsruhe and the TIB Hannover. GETINFO integrates and consolidates the previous TIBorder und FIZ AutoDoc services, as well as the “Virtuelle Fachbibliothek Technik” (ViFaTec)¹⁰ and portals covering social sciences. “How Libraries Team Up with their Users – Smell, Taste, Feel the Customer” was the title of a presentation by **Maria A.M. Heijne** (Delft University of Technology). She introduced the Virtual Knowledge Centre (“Virtueel Kenniscentrum”¹¹) based on Metalib and SFX technologies. The TUD Library has been engaged continually in development and user involvement from the concept in 1998 until the installation of the prototype in 2002.

The social programme of the Conference included a welcome dinner, sightseeing tours, high-quality lunches in the restaurant of the CAIXA and the traditional conference dinner, this year in the fine ambience of a classic Fado restaurant. The high quality, formal and exclusive social programme really merited greater participation! However, the EUSIDIC 2003 Annual Conference, which will be held 19–22 October 2003 in historic Prague, has an attractive and topical theme “Branding of information products and services”. It is fully expected that this topic will again attract a more traditional and substantial number of delegates, helped by the prime location.

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Interview with Johan van Halm by Dr. Heinz Hauffe, Innsbruck University Library

Johan van Halm is Chairman of EUSIDIC (The European Association of Information Services) and owns a library and information consultancy company in Amersfoort, The Netherlands.

HH: Johan, is it easy to survive as a consultant in the information industry?

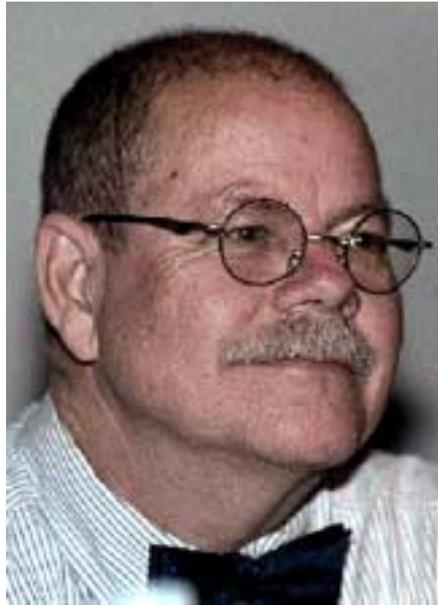
JvH: I have been active as a consultant now for more than 25 years and after some cash flow problems in the second year, I have been able establishing myself as an ongoing factor in this information and library business. My clients are either information users or information producers, providers

⁸<http://www.sosig.ac.uk/>.

⁹<http://www.getinfo-doc.de/>.

¹⁰<http://vifatec.tib.uni-hannover.de/>.

¹¹<http://www.library.tudelft.nl/ctkc/>.



Johan van Halm, EUSIDIC Chairman

or aggregators, as well as software suppliers/facilitators in this area (coincidentally, this represents exactly the constituencies of the EUSIDIC membership). A few descriptors to illustrate my activities might be: evaluations, user surveys, marketing, strategy development, Visibility projects, joint ventures/co-operation projects, recruitment (Top Jobs).

HH: You're a member of many national and international professional associations. Are you an active member?

JvH: Yes, in the sense that I attend most of their meetings but I have board functions as well. I'm on the board of the "European Library Automation Group" (ELAG) and the Dutch "Platform Informatie Management" (PIM), an association of independent information brokers and consultants. If you allow me, I would also like to mention, that I'm one of the 17 founding members of the American "Association of Independent Information Professionals" (AIIP), which is now a flourishing association with more than 1,000 members (I started my own business as the first commercial Information Broker in Europe). Furthermore, I have been active in many Dutch professional bodies. Professional activities include: lectureships at the University of Konstanz and the Fachhochschule Köln, and Editor-in-Chief of the journal "Information Services and Use".

HH: You're Chairman of EUSIDIC since 1 January 2002. What does the acronym exactly mean?

JvH: EUSIDIC stands for "The European Association of Information Services", but was originally an acronym based for the "European Society of Information Dissemination Centres". This latter name is similar to that of our older sister association in America, the "American Society of Information Dissemination Centres" (ASIDIC). ASIDIC and EUSIDIC were both founded in the 1970s when the online information industry emerged. The other American sister association is the "National Federation of Abstracting and Indexing Services" (NFAIS). At present, we are exploring ways of co-operation between these associations.

HH: What are the principles and objectives of EUSIDIC and what are its activities?

JvH: EUSIDIC acts as an umbrella organisation for different communities of shared practices. These communities or groups, represent corporate and academic users of information, information and content producers, aggregators and distributors. Our Strategic Plan 2002–3, which will be published soon, will present and discuss our present and future activities.

HH: Could you explain more about the customer benefits?

JvH: Meeting opportunities, discussion platform notably for users and providers, information exchange, reviewing information policies and lobbying. Our website (<http://www.eusidic.org>) is being re-designed and, in 2003, will become an even better tool for demonstrating member benefits, such as:

- activities;
- conferences;
- directory of members;
- news and press releases (ready for e-mail distribution);
- members news;
- monthly member profile (Member of the Month);
- special offers to members: discounts, etc.;
- member tips:
 - URLs, publications, other meetings (professional information),
 - recommended restaurants, and other trivia.

HH: What is your perception about the changes in the information industry?

JvH: In the past, users of information were concerned about content but now they have to assess a variety of platforms with the same content as well. Some issues here are: the quality of the interfaces offered by aggregators, the choice and quality of content and its metadata. Outsourcing gets more and more important. Providers and users are concerned about new business models, such as pay-per-view. Management capabilities have gained importance and some skills are now indispensable; negotiation, co-operation and knowledge of consortia and virtual communities. A new area is the integration of library and teaching functions at universities and large corporations.

HH: Will the printed medium disappear, notably for the scientific journal?

JvH: I believe that print medium will survive, although not to the same extent as before and not for all categories of print media: more for professional and SME-targeted literature than for scientific literature. Universities are turning rapidly towards electronic journals, not only for economic reasons but also to improve internal efficiencies, such as:

- optimisation of workflow;
- savings in physical storage;
- feedback between user statistics and acquisition or licensing policies; and
- functionalities that we don't find in paper, like links to citations or citing literature (CrossRef).

I'm not convinced that the so-called publicly funded discovery networks/research aggregation, such as undertaken by PubMed, Public Library of Science (PLOS), FIGARO, etc., will be able to take over a substantial part of the commercial electronic publishing activity. This is because of the lack of the infrastructure, peer review, chasing authors, standards, metadata, etc. The PLOS has only 5% of the number of articles expected at its inception and an even lower percentage has been "published" or otherwise made available.

HH: Do you believe in e-Books? Do they have a future?

JvH: E-Books make sense only when they offer added-value compared with their more traditional, printed counterpart. This means that e-Books should:

- not only contain text;
- have links to other documents sharing the same context, or to literature references;
- offer opportunities for information analysis and information processing by means of spreadsheets, calculations, etc.

Handbooks and reference works especially would benefit from an electronic format. This would allow, for example, simple and convenient more efficient use. The inclusion of e-Books in library operations still faces such “how to” barriers as: cataloguing, circulation and ILL. Also copyright issues play a role, as well as lack of standards. All these have prevented a real breakthrough in the sales of e-books. There is no “read-anywhere-on-any-device” e-book because there is no overall agreement on platforms and file formats (NISO)¹².

HH: The producers of “classical” online databases need from weeks to months to review and process newly released literature. Will they survive, when we take in consideration the high instance of information services, often with full-text, provided by primary publishers?

JvH: Yes, when we take into account also the issue of the platform choice (see earlier in this interview). Much will depend, however, on increased co-operation between primary and secondary publishers as early as possible in the production process. A potential problem could be vertical integration of primary and secondary publishing activities. Conglomerates could, for commercial reasons, limit access to their own controlled platforms. However, secondary publishers could prosper from the new dissemination options and the proliferation of platforms.

HH: How do you see the future of libraries and information services?

JvH: Under certain conditions, there is a bright future! To operate as meaningful service organisations in the new millennium, libraries must become highly proficient, technology-driven learning organisations, where the employees are well-trained and equipped to provide the best service possible. Staff must be ready to master change and provide new technology-based services, including digital library concepts and digital rights management (Rob McGee and Johan van Halm)¹³. Only intermediaries which provide such value-added services to its users will survive. A user who will be able to get the same information online will not use a physical library unless that library offers him some combination of higher quality – for example, better metadata, more quantity – but less fragmentation and more aggregation, a comfortable environment and all that for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (24/7).

¹²NISO National Information Standards Organisation (USA).

¹³Workshop Information Technology Strategic Planning for Libraries.