FROM THE CONVENTIONAL TO THE VIRTUAL LIBRARY: THE ROLE OF THE ACTIVITIES CONNECTED TO THE USERS' EDUCATION.

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INTRODUCTION

Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Regioni Lazio e Toscana (n.d.t.:Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale of the Latium and Tuscany Regions , i.e. IZS-LT) is a veterinary Public board operating in the following areas: animal health; animal origin food and foodstuff hygiene; breeding and animal production hygiene.
IZS-LT is structured by a central site located in Rome and eight local departments located in the Latium and Tuscany Regions. The staff employed amounts to about 270 people.

The scientific research activities actually represent one of the vital functions of IZS-LT. The central library is in the headquarters in Rome, indeed, it is connected to the single small libraries located in each department.

THE PROBLEM

The adventure we are telling you of dates back to 1997, when we started to work for the library of IZSLT. The Institute and the library were founded in the same years but after a period of stimulating activity and remarkable intellectual liveliness, it experienced a less successful period. The library looked like a **non-library.** We wondered where we could find the basic elements of a library, i.e.:

- bibliographic material
- facilities
- users
- appropriate premises.

The premises of the library and the reading-room were taken up by other ofiices, the bibliographic material lied in unsuitable areas, far away from the reading-room, it was neither registered nor even identified; the access to those documents was not ruled. The impact on the research activity, the milestone of the mission of the Institute, was strong: the bibliographies of the publications were defective. Indeed, there was no perception of the existance of an organized library, the vocational updating being thus limited to one's own initiative. The researchers were getting out of the habit to update. The sense of awkwardness was stressed by the urging of the technological innovations.

In the globalization era, we were tackling an outstanding and backward structure, with a noteworthy holding, made up by thousands of monographs, collections and journals but idle. Therefore we resolved to stir up its vigour.

Whichway had to be chosen? Should we prefer to recover the holding thus establishing a conventional library, characterised by preservation? If so, we had to recover an obsolete fragmentary catalogue, full of gaps and devised out of the international standards. The alternative was to comply with the patterns suggested by the *virtual library*, already adopted by the most important scientific libraries all over the world. (Fig. from *Alice in Wonderland* by. L. Carrol)

The thorny starting situation could be faced by means of two parallel approaches, the one being linked to the peculiar and contingent need of the Institute to exploit the holding; the other, to promote and support the users'access to the document universe offered by the electronic resources. Furthermore, another important need was to attract the researchers into the library, fostering an approach aimed at the awareness of the indisputable role of the continuing professional education and updating.

THE CHOSEN STRATEGIES

We have chosen to combine the reorganization of the library with the users'fidelity, by optimizing the services since the main objective was to stimulate the continuing education of the researchers of the Institute. The synergic relationship between the development of the library and the cultural growth of the researchers of the Institute could be furthered by an effective investment in training and advising the users of the library as well as in the electronic publishing.

THE INFORMATION STRATEGY

Thanks to the subscription to e-journals and on-line services (i.e. *Sciencedirect* by Elsevier Science) and the purchase of bibliographic databases and databanks (CABI, ANABS, Deagiuridica), the library is more effective and efficient for researchers by solving the problems of the access to updating for the users of the peripheral structures sited in two regions.

The information strategy deviced has required coordination, planning, evaluation and corrections: we have analysed the environment, the climate, the target and eventually we have settled the objectives. In order to investigate into the customers' satisfaction, suggestions and claim, questionnaires, polls and interviews were carried out. Then, an experimental stage has been started.

Client-oriented services have been advanced aiming at promoting the library, investing chiefly in reference activities, even on the phone, as well as in the production of information material:
- periodical information bulletin with the TOC of the journals under subscription;
- legislation bulletin with laws and rules according to the specific areas of scientific and managerial interest;
- selective dissemination of articles and /or documents *ad personam*;

- document delivery of the articles under request;
- journal review;
- showcase indicating news, events, interesting websites and new entries;
- *desiderata* lists, with requests of books, monographies, manuals, print or electronic journals;
- bibliographies and *alerts*, customized services and promotions.

As a consequence, a systematic management has been approached by ruling the services, organizing the activities, integrating the resources, evaluating and bench-marking the holding and the opportunities of the access to the electronic resources, establishing relationships with other libraries aiming at the Interlibrary Loan as well as the consortium set up among the libraries of all the *Istituti Zooprofilattici* sited all over the Italian country.

THE TRAINING STRATEGY

The figure of a <u>manager librarian</u> able to expect the demand and the expenditure, to show the *value for money*, to sell services, to implement a scale economy by statistical surveys of the various resources, meets the one of a <u>trainer librarian</u>, where the library assumes the assignments of an Institution for permanent education, the motive power of change and effective support to the research activity.

First and foremost we chose to invest in the human resource. We have coordinated the various activities in the acquisition, communication and facilitation of information, by fostering knowledge management. We have encouraged partecipation and training so that the friendly use of the electronic resources as well as sharing information and knowledge have contributed to emphasise the researchers'motivation. The library operates in a dynamic world where continuing education, updating, information and research actually interact. The librarian is required flexibility, creativeness and intuition.

The special attention addressed to the client has been furthered by the double *vision* of the department which incorporates the training and education requirements of the Institute as well as the documentation and the choice to comply with the Quality System.

The training initiatives have been planned following an investigation into the training requirements of the staff of the Institute accomplished by means *of focus groups* and questionnaires.

Various plans concerning the training activities targeted for the library users have been carried out as follows:
- several theoretical and application courses for small groups (about 10-12 people) on the use of electronic resources, with a final examination and specific manuals;
- reference activity in the library and on the phone;
- meetings to inform on new electronic products and services pertaining each peculiar area of interest.

Indeed, the occasion to make the available electronic resources user-friendly and the employment of training and education as main instrument has turned out to be strategic to the deveolpment of the library. From one hand, the library has managed to attract more clients, especially external users; on the other hand, it has fostered education and updating as well as the quali-quantitative increase in the research activity of the Institute.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The choices adopted have given rise to good results considering the objectives, as the following indicators show:

- the number of user accesses to the library / year increased from 80 in 1997 to 300 in 2001 (Figure n. 1);

- the number of documents provided/year (scientific papers, booklets, leafleats, brochures, slides, videotapes, bibliographic inquires, articles, published laws, etc.) increased from 210 in 1997, to 1200 in 2000 and to 1050 in 2001. This indicator decreased from 2000 to 2001 showing that the personnel used the electronic resources from their own PC (Figure n. 1);

- the usage of our databanks has increased especially thanks to the several courses on electronic information resources carried out in 2000, 2001 and 2002, which involved 75 people. From February to June 2002, five courses on the use of *Sciencedirect* were carried out customized for 50 people: the document delivery requests for full-text articles amounted to 10 in February 2002 and have increased up to 142 in May 2002 (Figure n 2); the bibliographic searches have increased in the same way (Figure n. 3).

In addition, from the customers' satisfaction surveys yearly carried out by our department through questionnaires, we have realized a dramatic increase in the positive judgements as far as the various aspects of the library are concerned: suitableness of the electronic services; document delivery service; the quality of the reference activity; skill, care and thoughtfulness of the library staff; quality, usefulness and effectiveness of the training activity carried out; suitableness of the print journal holding.

A critical point is still represented by the book acquisition, due to the long time required by the administration which is in contrast with the users' needs.

Even the research activity of the Institute had benefitted from the development of the library services, thus increasing the number and the quality level of the research projects forwarded and carried out.

As a matter of fact, the route we have chosen, marked by the training and education approach as main instrument, has lead to an increase in the number of the

users, to a constant improvement of the services of the library, which implies an unquestionable cultural growth of the Institute.

A noteworthy result concerns the characteristic aspect of the library of the Institute and involves its future perspectives. The increase in the electronic resources and services based on the concept of *"virtual library"* have stirred up the *"conventional"* material. The requests of print documents have dramatically increased, just showing that innovation is not in contrast with tradition but complementary.
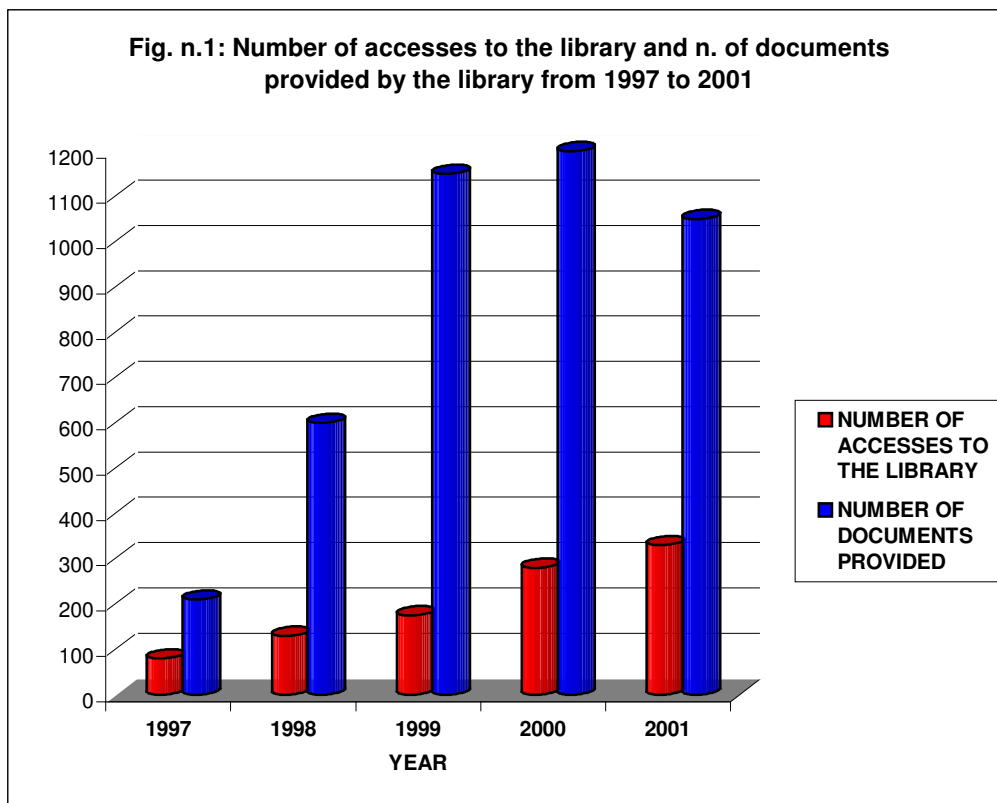
Fig. n.1: Number of accesses to the library and n. of documents provided by the library from 1997 to 2001

Fig. n. 3. *Sciencedirect:* **bibliographic searches.**

4a. Search Activity
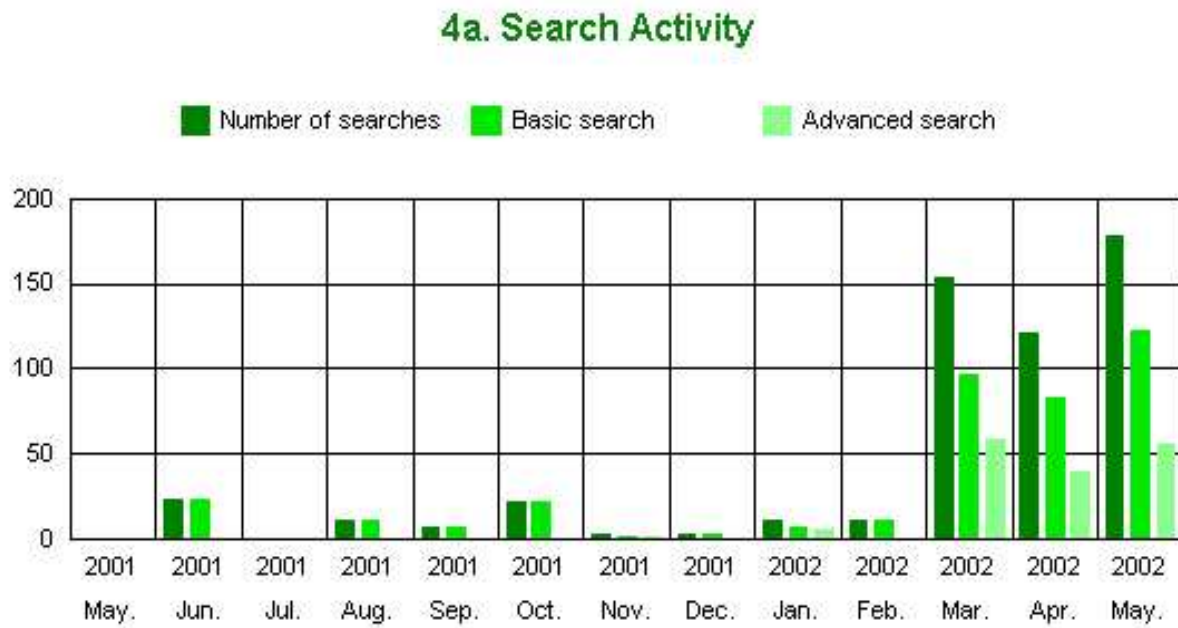
Fig. 2 Doc. Del. Requests for full text articles from *Sciencedirect*:

3b. Requests for Full Text Articles (non-)subscribed
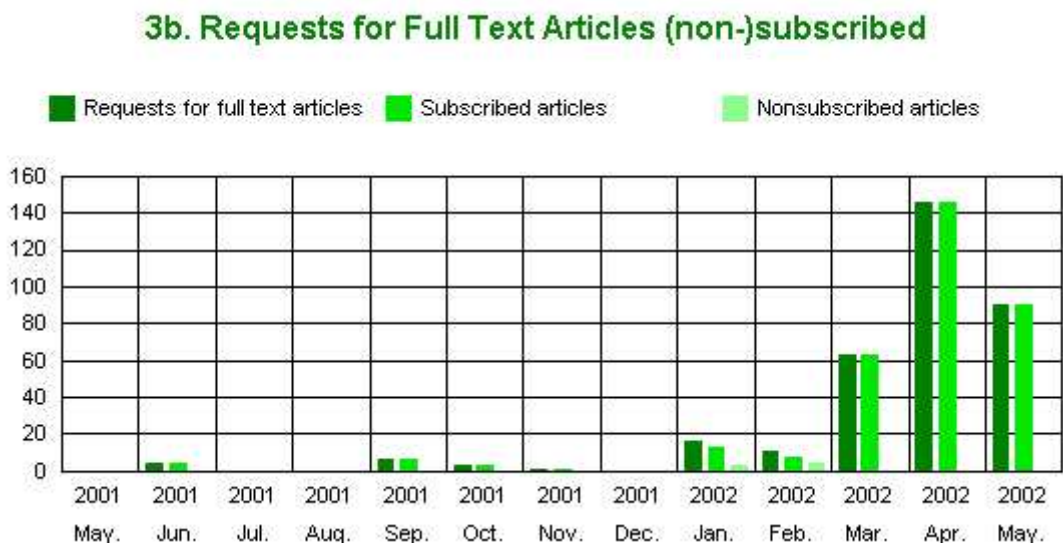
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