THE WEB SITE OF A SCIENTIFIC LIBRARY: FROM INTRANET TO INTERNET

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Abstract

This study reports the experience of the library of the Istituto Superiore di Sanità (ISS), the Italian National Institute of Health, focusing on the implementation and development of the library Intranet services through the results of an investigation conducted among the users of the site.

Introduction

The rapid advance of information technology have greatly modified the way scientists use their libraries. To promote knowledge sharing, medical and research libraries have to redefine their mission, their policy and strategies to cope with the overflow of information. Thus giving added value to the knowledge they manage, in order to satisfy the new requests of the users and facilitate access to information resources available both through the library and on the Web.

The library of the Istituto Superiore di Sanità (ISS) – The National Institute of Health, developed during the year 2000 a project for implementing an Intranet site which could provide the local user with information on resources, on any kind of support, available through the library. The intent was also to supply all the scientists of the Institute with daily updated information directly on their desktops.

Design and implementation of the Intranet

The working team (3 people) analysed at first the user needs in connection with the different areas of interest and Institute goals and mission. A parallel study was conducted analysing different typologies of informational resources available. The graphical aspect of the pages was also studied and it was decided to give it a very simple structure and appearance, with few images in order to achieve better time responses and to obtain a very user-friendly interface. The library Intranet was launched by the beginning of 2001 and it is now accessible both in Italian and in English.

The homepage shows a general index of the content as follows:
- *Information*
- *Library Hours*
- *Catalogues*
- *Databases*
- *E-journals*
- *New books*
- *Other links*
- *What's new*

Information
It contains a direct link to the Internet page assigned to the library inside the web site of the ISS and provides information concerning library structure, collections, access to information, loans, photocopies and document delivery.

Library hours
It gives information on library hours, both for internal and external users, and the holiday schedule for the current year.

Catalogues
It gives access to the library online catalogue which contains descriptions of documents held by the library since 1984.
This section contains also links to:
other Italian catalogues of interest for the researchers of the ISS, such as the Italian periodicals catalogue ACNP (serials held by the Italian libraries) and the National Library Service Index (SBN) a catalogue of documents (monographs, serials, etc.) held by more than 1.000 libraries;
main foreign National and University Library catalogues and National Library of Medicine Catalogue.

Databases
It gives access to databases available on the net. They are grouped by area of interest: legislative resources, Ovid databases, Chemical Abstracts, Free Medline (Pubmed), NLM Gateway. This page provides a short description of each database and gives also indications on the access procedures, both free and restricted to the internal licensed users (with ID code and password).
A second part of this page gives a list of databases available on CD-ROM at the ISS library and the years of coverage.

E-Journals
This page gives access to more than 2700 e-journals. It contains links to:
Science Direct, the site of full text e-journals published by Elsevier and available to the ISS users by means of an interlibrary consortium;
full text e-journals subscribed by the library of the ISS;
web sites of free full text e-journals.

New books
It links to the library accession list with the bibliographic description of each new book or serial including the call number. Monthly updated.

Other Links
It gives a list of national and international Institutions which could be of some interest for the ISS researchers with a direct link to their homepages.

What's new
It provides information on the new initiatives and services of the library.

Developments

By the end of 2001 the working team recruited new members providing refined definition to individual roles and charges. Moreover it was decided to conduct an Intranet audit among the internal users of the library in order to verify the effectiveness of work already accomplished. A large part of a widest questionnaire on the library was dedicated to this aim.
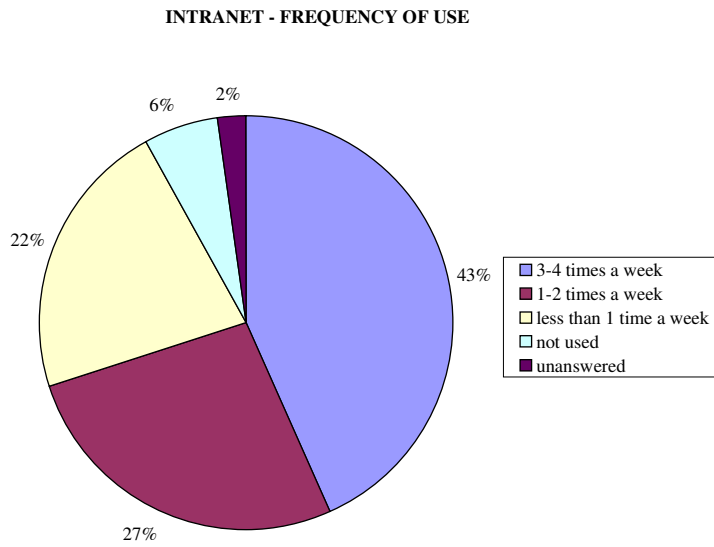We received back 562 answers on a total population of about 2400 potential users (including both scientific and administrative staff).
The questionnaire was intended to be anonymous but the indication of laboratory/structure and professional qualification was requested. The major targets were to check:
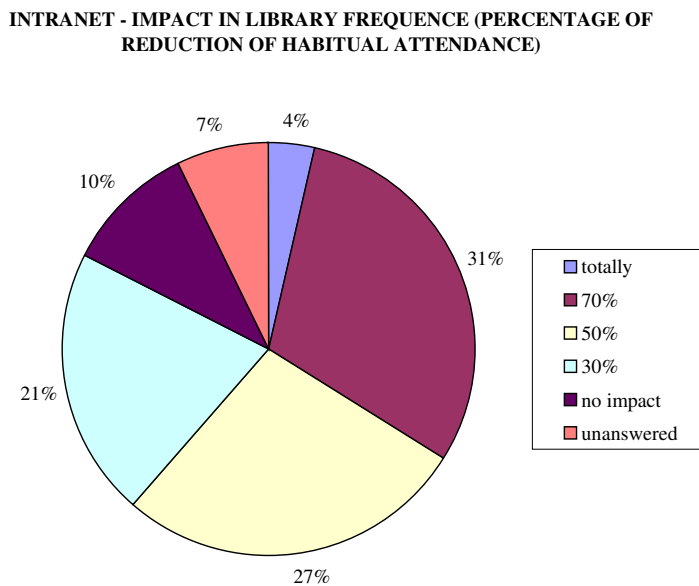- if the implementation of the intranet had significantly reduced the visits to the library
- which services were most used and which ones were to be developed and enlarged
- the opinion of the users on the physical structure of the pages
- the ease of use and possible technical problems

Results

Survey results show that Library Intranet is highly considered and used by the ISS personnel and is rapidly becoming one of the most important services activated in our Institute. Only 6% do not use it, while 43% declared to use it often, 27% with regularity and 22% occasionally.

INTRANET - FREQUENCY OF USE

6% 2%

22%

43%

- 3-4 times a week
- 1-2 times a week
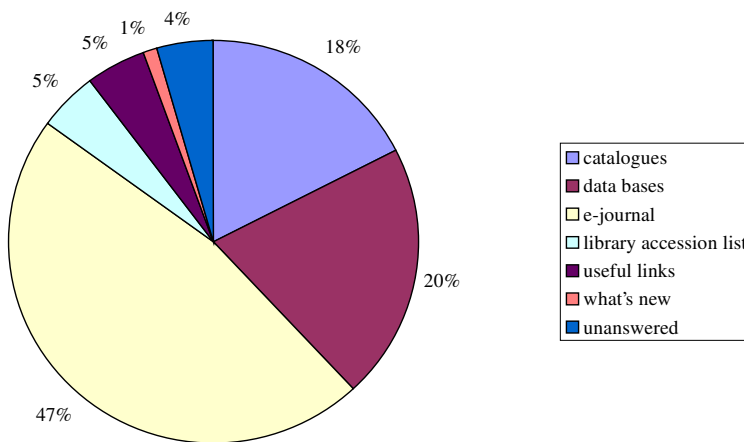- less than 1 time a week
- not used
- unanswered

27%

The introduction of the Intranet has reduced or substituted visits to the library in 83% of the cases, with significant percentages: 4% completely, 31% two visits out of three, 27% one out of two, 21% one out of three.

INTRANET - IMPACT IN LIBRARY FREQUENCE (PERCENTAGE OF REDUCTION OF HABITUAL ATTENDANCE)

7% 4%

10%

31%

21%

- totally
- 70%
- 50%
- 30%
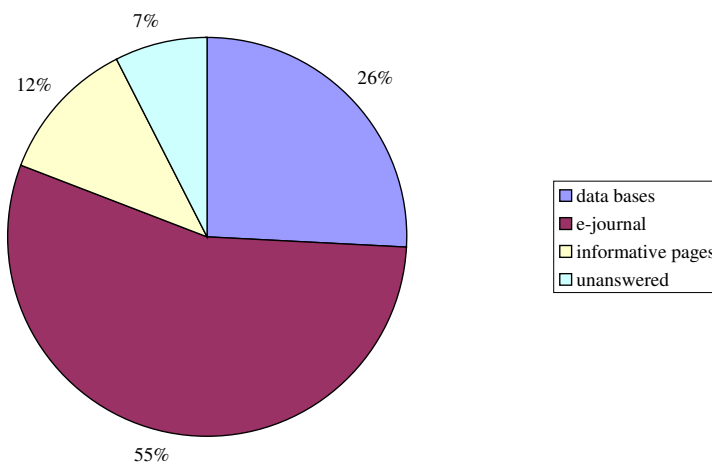- no impact
- unanswered

27%

The most used services result to be the e-journals pages (47%) followed by the ones reserved to databases (20%); for the same pages is registered the greatest interest of the users and a development is required in 81% of the cases (respectively 55% and 26%).
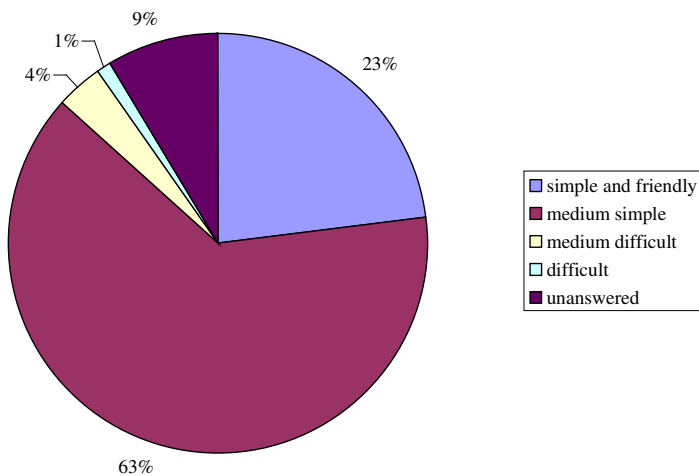
USE OF SERVICES

catalogues
data bases
e-journal
library accession list
useful links
what's new
unanswered

INTRANET - SERVICES TO BE INCREASED

data bases
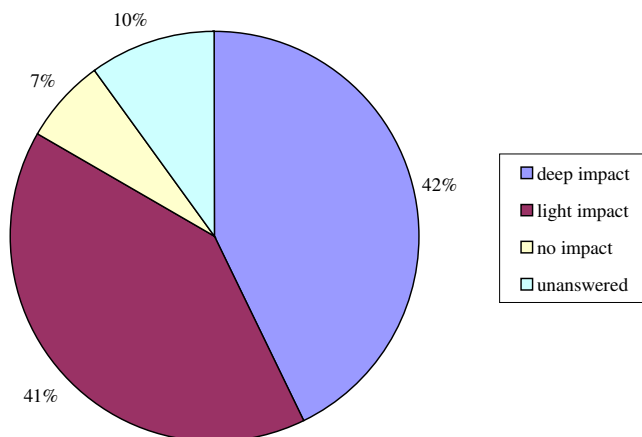e-journal
informative pages
unanswered

With regard to the structure of the site, we achieved our aim to make it friendly and accessible to everyone since it is considered easy to use in the great majority of the answers (86%).

INTRANET - EASINESS OF USE

- simple and friendly
- medium simple
- medium difficult
- difficult
- unanswered

A different situation appears on the side of technical problems with only 48% of users satisfied vs. a 42% of disappointed.

INTRANET - IMPACT OF TECHNICAL ASPECTS (CONNECTIONS, NO PC AVAILABLE, ETC.)

- deep impact
- light impact
- no impact
- unanswered

Conclusions and future implementations

The implementation of the library Intranet has fulfilled our task to reach our researchers directly on their desktops with daily updated information. The site is available 24 hours a day, and as a matter of fact prolongs library services beyond opening hours. The simple structural aspect of the site facilitates, as we hoped, accessibility to all users and encourages its use.

Pages containing links to e-journals and databases, as expected, are the most visited. They need a continuous monitoring and update with well defined charges inside the working group. Moreover, on the enlargement of these section the library will have to focus its economical efforts, strategies and policy.

A further study will be conducted on technical problems, in order to detect in which measure such difficulties might arise from local network deficiencies, or if they could be due to other factors such as a limited quantity of computers available related to the population.

The future development of the Intranet site is strictly linked to the project of a new Internet site of the ISS which is now in course of construction. With all the necessary adjustments and restrictions for non-licensed users, the general outline and selected contents of the library intranet is intended to be visible to everybody in the next version of the ISS web site.

References

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