

Evolution of a Collaborative Solution for Academic Libraries:

The Victorian Academic Digital Library (VADL)

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Abstract

The CAVALmember libraries believe that the major issue confronting libraries at the start of the New Millennium is collection development. These Libraries have been committed to the achievement of VADL for the past twelve months. VADL will be a Digital Library which will be shared and yet reflect the interests of each of the discipline interests of the member universities. VADL has established a range of research into the shape and extent of existing collections within Victoria. This paper highlights the path taken by these libraries, how their response differs from the American experience and how collaboration can be achieved through a new service model.

What is VADL?

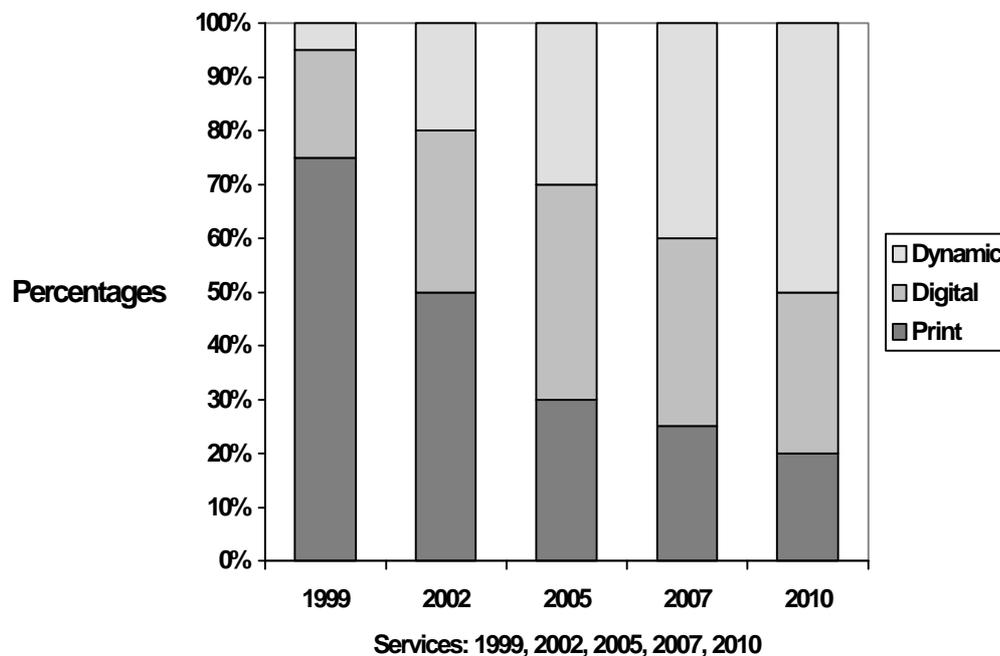
VADL seems to roll off one's tongue easily. It is yet another initialism. It is regional. It is supposedly digital only but it is also analogue. It is a model development for Australia. VADL has certain targets but has no known outcomes. So VADL is, all in all, many things. VADL is the Victorian Academic Digital Library.

VADL encapsulates two essential directions. Firstly, it is collaborative. Secondly, it is content-rich.

This paper seeks to describe what each of these directions has come to mean and what the current thinking is that they will mean.

What is the world we will be living in?

In developing VADL, we worked on envisaging how information would be delivered over the next ten years. In this we worked with some colleagues (MacCallum, 1999) to determine the mix of media in which information is delivered now and into the future. We saw three main streams in which information is and will be delivered. This was not meant to include all technological conduits but only the generic lines. The three lines identified are print, digital and dynamic. Print has been the dominant form of information delivery in our lifetime. A huge repository of information and knowledge is stored in this form currently in libraries across the country. A number of informal analyses were used to arrive at the split of material arriving in academic libraries generally. It is clearly the case that most of the material arriving



in the academic libraries at this time is still print. The forests are still contributing hugely to the presentation of ideas onto our library shelves. The estimate for VADL was that around 75% of materials are currently being delivered in print form while only 20% are in digital format and the remaining 5% are dynamic or web-based. Through the work of the

consultants, VADL estimated that in 10 years the delivery of material would be sharply different with 50% delivered via the web, 30% in digital form and 20% remaining in print.

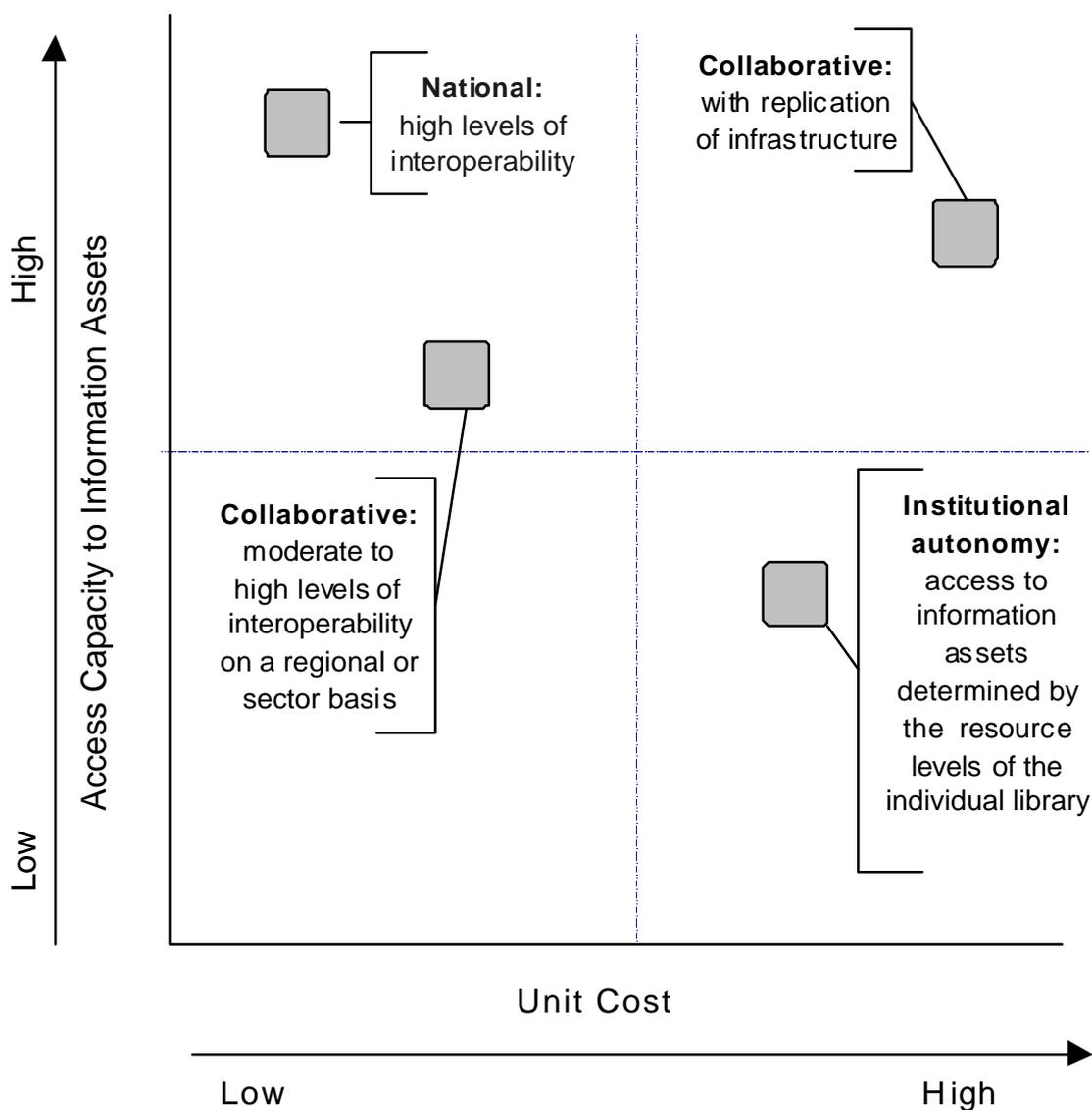
My professional suspicion is not that the projections are wrong but that they will be arrived at much earlier. This is based on my experience of the rates of change. Our capacity to predict the future is generally rather poor and under-estimated. Regardless of whether any of these predictions are correct or wildly wrong, it is crucial to plan for a different pattern for the delivery of information both to and through and perhaps around our libraries. We cannot assume that libraries will remain the cornerstone for the access and delivery of information. The central role and power of libraries has been significantly eroded over the past 10 to 15 years. Perhaps that situation will be redressed but it most certainly will not be to that which was in existence before.

Australia is in a unique position, largely shaped, as it has been by geography and small populations. The dual factors of distance and a small but geographically disparate population have inevitably shaped the policies and cooperative spirit amongst major libraries in this country. Trends in collection development therefore have drawn on the British and American experiences but have not reflected either. The British experience has been one with a largely central-focus. This can be seen in the reliance on the British Library's large facility at Boston Spa. The American experience has seen a variety of responses within different states and also within the libraries with very different levels of resource to our own. There have been more examples within the American experience, which have related to developments in Australia. The real differences have been the high levels of top-sliced funding available in individual states and the availability of philanthropic funding to assist developments. Australian developments have been largely organic growing out of regional and special groupings. Examples of this are subject collecting programs with the NSW University Librarians, and the Metropolitan Public Librarians subject specialization scheme.

VADL Planning

VADL has a number of advantages in terms of the environment into which it was born. The VADL concept was developed in late 1999 for the CAVAL Board and was accepted by them. In the process of being brought to the Board it had the advantage of being analysed and discussed by the CAVAL Council. CAVAL as a company is owned by the Victorian Vice-Chancellors but is firmly bedded in the culture of the Victorian academic libraries. This is of enormous advantage in that staff at each of the libraries are used to working together, and bring to this exercise a great deal of expertise and interest in how they can improve the service for their joint customers... the students and staff of the Victorian Universities.

The advantages of collaboration can be identified in the following graph, which examines the comparison of unit cost and rates of access to information. Logically the single institution can achieve low access to information for high unit costs while national deals can achieve low unit cost but with high rates of access.



Serials Management Information Tool (SMIT)

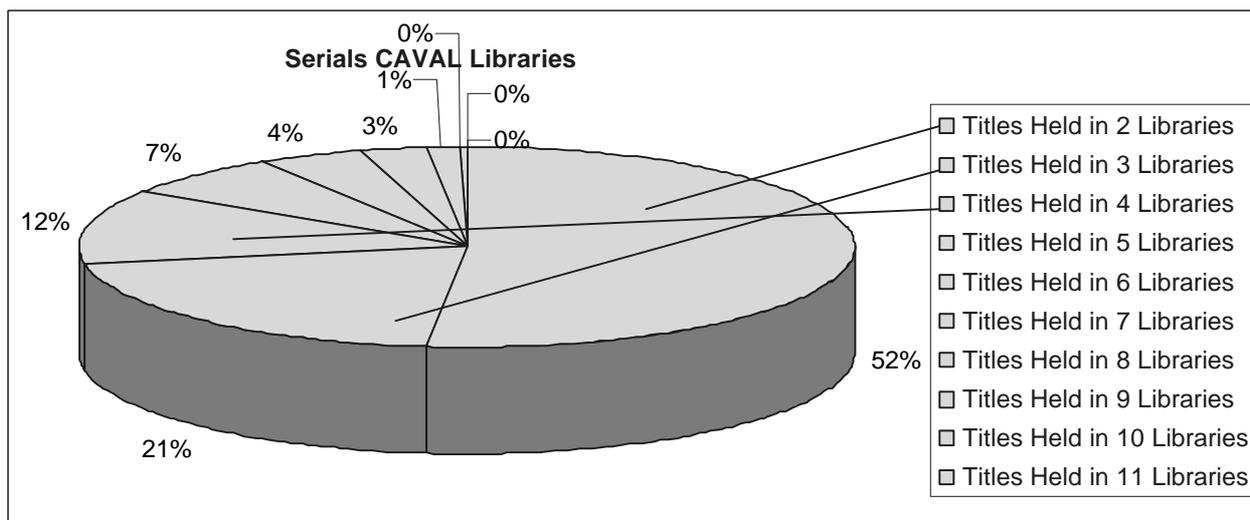
It was recognised very earlier in this process that we needed better data to be able to make effective and informed decisions. This is a significant piece of research. Overall research in Australia has been underfunded and largely ignored. ACLIS used to fund research and the National Library continues to assist this and other projects, as it is able. It is unfortunate that this is not recognised as being important enough in our national agendas. In addition, SMIT has as an objective to improve the quality of the national bibliographic record for serials. The National Library of Australia has been very helpful in allowing runs of data to be gained from the KINETICA database. SMIT has been a more difficult project to bring to an informed conclusion. This has been for a variety of reasons, which I do not intend to go into at this point of time. Suffice it to say that there are well over 240,000 serial records in the academic libraries of Victoria and it has been extremely difficult to manipulate them for management information. This project has moved away from full MARC records to flat file formats for ease and simplicity of use. We have also moved from large servers to the humble but well

powered PC as the working computer. A real difficulty in this whole project has been the very wide range of library practice in describing serial holdings, as well as divergent practices in handling electronic serial subscriptions. Both of these sets of practices have made the use of machine readable files very difficult indeed. This has been because the data is largely not machine readable. The holdings are dealt with differently and even titles have variations which do not ensure matching except through the use of the ISBN.

SMIT has an overall objective to assist in the creation of the Digital Library in Victoria. But what should the collection consist of? It was decided that the material which is duplicated across the existing collections might suggest the first naturally defined collection. SMIT therefore has been defining the duplicate collection. The table below highlights the numbers of serial titles which are held in the CAVAL member libraries and the extent to which they are duplicated.

Serials in CAVAL Libraries	
Titles Held in 1 Library	198,090
Titles Held in 2 Libraries	24,213
Titles Held in 3 Libraries	9,736
Titles Held in 4 Libraries	5,533
Titles Held in 5 Libraries	3,356
Titles Held in 6 Libraries	2,100
Titles Held in 7 Libraries	1,261
Titles Held in 8 Libraries	583
Titles Held in 9 Libraries	145
Titles Held in 10 Libraries	29
Titles Held in 11 Libraries	7
TOTAL Duplicates	46,963
GRAND TOTAL	245,053

The extent of the duplication is enormous. The chart below indicates the extent of the duplication with just under half the serials being held in three libraries or more.



The next stage was to reduce the list to those which were paid duplicate subscriptions. In other words, to eliminate from our further consideration those titles which were unique. This, along with other analyses, was achieved with the inclusion of the ULRICH's serial database. A subscription to the ULRICH's electronic database was negotiated. This enabled the holdings from the above analyses to be compared to the whole literature, as represented by the ULRICH's database. This reduced the list to a much smaller and more manageable file. When the duplicate serials were filtered through the ULRICH's data, it became clear that there were only 3,964 titles which were current and paid for. We also obtained information about which aggregators they are available through and whether they are in digital format. In other words, of the 245,000 titles in Victorian academic libraries, nearly 47,000 were duplicated across the system but slightly less than 4,000 were paid for. Of these, it was apparent that 1,953 titles or roughly half were available in electronic format. This is a good point of departure for a RFI process. The VADL committee is currently thinking these outcomes through to determine future directions. These will be reported in the presentation at the VALA conference.

The availability of the ULRICH's data will enable further hypotheses to be explored. Not only might the CAVAL libraries wish to obtain all the paid duplicate serials subscriptions in digital form, but they may also wish to focus on a particular subject area. There is a great interest in academic planning environments in creating bi-technology precincts. To be able to support such precincts with digital serials across a number of institutions would bring enormous advantages. To be able to acquire as a consortium in digital form only those serials which cost more than USD \$2,000 might also be another approach.

Model Licence

Another aspect of VADL has been the development of a Model Licence by which the CAVAL Libraries could put forward a model contract to deal with subscriptions. This work was facilitated by John Cox who has international experience with licences. After some analysis of the CAVAL needs, an initial version of the Model Licence was produced. This then went through four or five revisions across the members of the VADL committee as well as the experienced practitioners in the CAVAL Working Group on Digital Licences. The

resulting document is quite powerful in that it is pertinent to the needs of the CAVAL members but also balanced with the legitimate needs of the publisher community.

An Example of VADL Collaboration

One of the most powerful examples of VADL collaboration has been the creation of the NetLibrary consortium. In this consortium, members have contributed financially as much as they are able. They have selected titles in the NetLibrary collection relative to the number of dollars they have contributed. That is, a library contributing \$50,000 would obviously select far more titles for the VADL collection than a library contributing \$10,000. Having achieved a certain number of titles in the VADL NetLibrary collection through this process, all titles are then shared in terms of access. Consistent with other whole of publisher licence deals, it has been found in the CAVAL NetLibrary pilot that the users have as much or more use from titles which had been selected by others in the consortium. In other words, there is a challenge for librarians, as collection development managers, to look at consortium deals as offering greater scope to their users to access resources. This is because we are clearly not able to predict totally the materials which a particular clientele will want to access.

Acknowledge the past to open the future:

VADL has been a rich and varied experience. It has drawn colleagues into thinking about their operations in quite different ways invariably with strong outcomes for the libraries and their users. VADL would not have been a success without the work and intellectual input of a large number of dedicated, thoughtful and committed librarians in CAVAL member libraries.

It is clear from this development that collaboration has a strong future.

Reference

MacCallum, Ian, McConchie, Brenda, Quinn, Sherrey and Whittaker, Jan, (1999), *Building the Victorian Academic Digital Library: a report*, CAVAL, Melbourne.