

Library Portal: A Tool for Web-enabled Information Services

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ABSTRACT

In the modern digital information environment, a well-defined mechanism is needed to organise, store, and access information. A library portal is highly beneficial for this as well as for web-enabled information services. Most of the libraries are adding e-resources to their collection. The utility of these e-resources will be limited in the absence of a functional website that facilitates the users to exploit these to the maximum extent. Web portals are the tools that enhance access to the e-resources by providing visibility to these. This paper highlights the role of a library portal for various user services. An attempt has been made to explain the portal of Technical Information Resource Centre of Naval Physical and Oceanographic Laboratory of Defense Research and Development Organisation and the services provided through this portal.

Keywords: Digital library, library portal, knowledge management, LibSys, e-resources

1. INTRODUCTION

A library portal serves as an integrated interface to a wide variety of digital resources and web-based library services. Web portals are also important tools for users to access and utilise library and information services over a network. An informative home page provides the users helpful information about the library, its collection, and services. In addition, library portals also host links to important internet resources useful for the parent organisation.

The dynamic linking capability of the web has provided users unrestricted access to information, and to librarians an effective

method to organise the contents. It has thus become mandatory for libraries to develop their portals to provide users access to their resources.

2. LIBRARY PORTAL

A portal is a single-user interface for accessing wide variety of electronic resources, both within and outside the library¹. The importance of any web portal lies in the currency of information provided, its ability to locate information of high relevance, and provision of a powerful search engine with instant access to full text. The portal technology has enabled librarians to shift to a more proactive, user-centred, and service-oriented

model of library. Web page of a library is not only excellent medium for publicising the library activities, but also a mechanism for accessing its resources and services.

Users need a ready database of documents (or catalogue) that they can access remotely, so that search and retrieval time is reduced². The library portal should provide details mainly in three areas, viz., about library, its collection, and services. The users need a platform to communicate with the librarians to suggest or reserve a document from their workplace rather than coming to the library.

Library portals are the websites which solve this problem by providing access to all relevant e-resources at one point.

3. DESIGNING A GOOD WEB PAGE

Good web pages incorporate basic principles of good design, organisation, and writing. Website positioning, searching, and also the provision of help features are the three factors to be considered³ for good designing.

3.1 Library Website Positioning

Library website positioning ensures direct and obvious links from the institution's main homepage to the library homepage. Subsequently, the library home page immediate links users to relevant and subject-specific contents. The library homepage also limits the number of mouse clicks a user needs to get to full-text access. Depending on the size of organisation and structure of library, three or four clicks are ideal between the institution's homepage and full text access.

3.2 Library Website Searching

Library website searching allows searches on metadata or keywords associated with the journals. It offers options for restricting a search, and specially includes drop-down menus. It also offers comprehensive searchable lists of online resources and provides an A-Z and subject-area list.

3.3 Library Website Help Features

Library website help features include a list of library staff with their telephone numbers and e-mail addresses; provides well-structured frequently asked questions and step-by-step guides as part of website; incorporates subject-specific help features; and provides appropriate guides for all levels of users.

4. PORTAL CONTENTS

A library portal can be made up of three types of contents⁴, viz., information about the library-staff directory, floor plan, library rules, etc.; electronic versions of the traditional library services: Alert services, electronic SDI, virtual reference service, online document delivery service, request for purchases, etc.; and access to library content: Online catalogue, full-text e-journals, e-books and other e-documents, institutional repositories, free accessible internet resources, etc.

5. WEB-ENABLED LIBRARY SERVICES

With the explosive growth of web today, libraries in their old concepts are no more in existence. These have to adopt new technologies and should provide web-enabled services. Following are a series of services that libraries can provide using their portal:

- ✘ Connection to the users with the best materials and services
- ✘ Convenient, fast and personalised services accessible to all
- ✘ Traditional OPAC service to be convert to web OPAC
- ✘ Access to full-text resources from remote places
- ✘ Access to subject gateways of different topics relevant to the parent organisation
- ✘ Facility to users to suggest/reserve the documents from their desktop
- ✘ Posting of overdue details

- ✘ Provision of alert services like new additions, conference, etc.
- ✘ Digital reference service by means of 'virtual reference desk' or 'ask a librarian'
- ✘ Online inter-library loan service
- ✘ Electronic SDI services
- ✘ Web-based user education/virtual library tours
- ✘ Integrated push-based services

To meet the changing needs and expectations of users, libraries can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their services and propagate their services and facilities to the users.

6. TIRC PORTAL OF NPOL

Technical Information Resource Centre (TIRC) portal of NPOL is a hyperlink-based portal application. TIRC is a special library that is providing information service to scientists, technical officers, and staff of the Laboratory as per their information needs. The portal provides full-text databases, online journals, e-books, web OPAC, and knowledge repository of the NPOL. Home page is a set of .asp

files and HTML files. To make the web pages attractive, animations using Macromedia Flash have been added. A Window and a Linux-based as well as a networked-access storage server are being used for holding full-text databases of the journals subscribed by TIRC.

7. HOME PAGE OF TIRC PORTAL

Home page is the first page of the NPOL portal (Fig. 1). Using the home page the library users can access all resources from their workplace using desktops. Links have also been provided to intranet and e-mail and digital library facility of NPOL from the home page. It comprises a main menu linked to the following services:

- ✘ Digital library
- ✘ e-journals
- ✘ Databases
- ✘ Knowledge acquisition and management
- ✘ Course materials on Continuing Education Programme (CEPs)
- ✘ Conference alerts

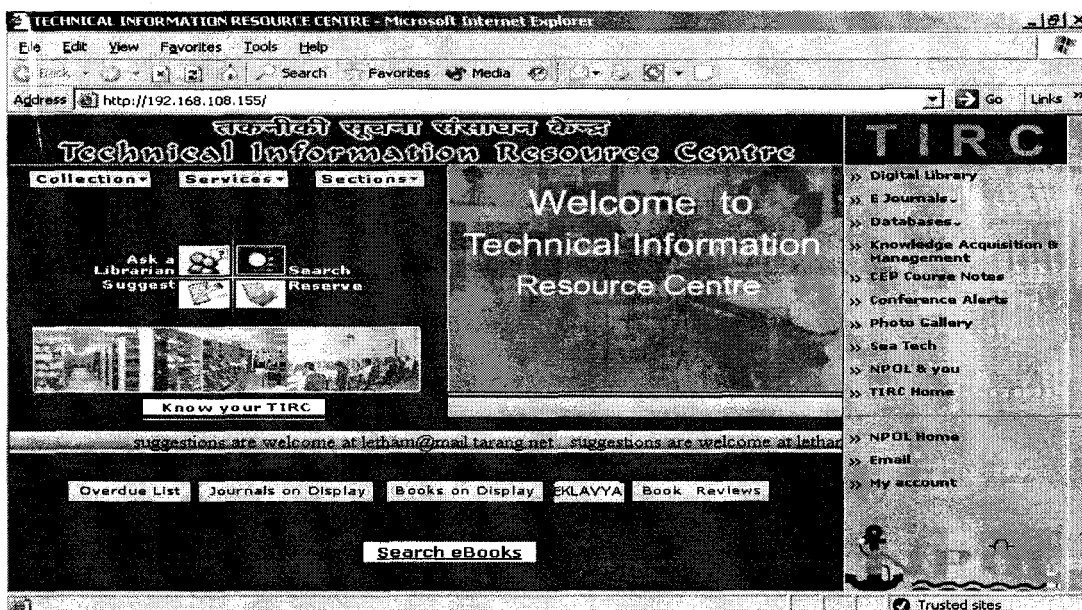


Figure 1. Home page of TIRC portal

- ✘ Photo gallery
- ✘ *Sea Tech*—A technical in-house journal of NPOL
- ✘ NPOL and you

NPOL is subscribing to many online journals. Portal has provision for accessing these by the link 'e-journal'. Details on international as well as national conferences have also been provided on the subjects of interest to NPOL staff. Photo gallery comprises photographs taken for various events held at NPOL. pdf files of '*Sea Tech*' can be at '*Sea Tech*'. NPOL and you is a guide for the fresh entrants to NPOL in a pdf format. In addition, link has also been provided to NPOL's intranet and e-mail facilities. 'My account' provides the user a list of documents subscribed by them.

The Home page allows access to the entire collection of books, reports, standards, patents, etc, and also various sections under TIRC. 'Ask a Librarian' and other three links to search a document (web OPAC search) allows users to suggest a document for purchase or reserve a document if it is issued. All these links leads to LibSys main menu. 'Know your TIRC' leads the user to TIRC staff details, rules of TIRC, Library Committee

and also various forms pertaining to TIRC. Various alerts like 'overdue list', 'journals on display' and 'books on display' for the benefit of the users. Besides, link to a virtual classroom facility run by NPOL for the IIT has been provided through *Eklavya*. A monthly time table for this has been displayed in the home page. Book reviews for the new books procured by TIRC is another facility being provided to the users.

8. OTHER SERVICES OFFERED THROUGH TIRC PORTAL

The TIRC has been automated using the library software LibSys. The home page has integrated all its user-related modules (Fig. 2).

The digital library of TIRC has been developed using DSpace Linux and provides full-text search of the documents (Fig. 3). The library staff is responsible for collection development. Users can also submit digital documents to this collection. There is an e-book search facility for a collection of more than 5000 e-books. This is searchable by author, title, ISBN, keyword, etc.

Knowledge management plays a pivotal role in TIRC. From the TIRC portal, the link

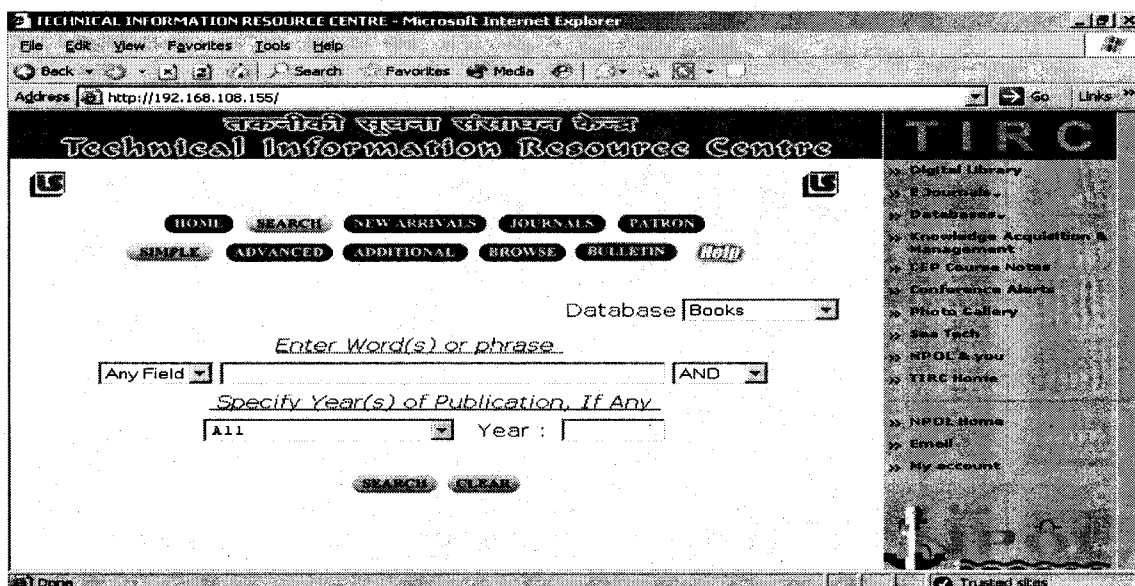


Figure 2. LibSys window of TIRC portal

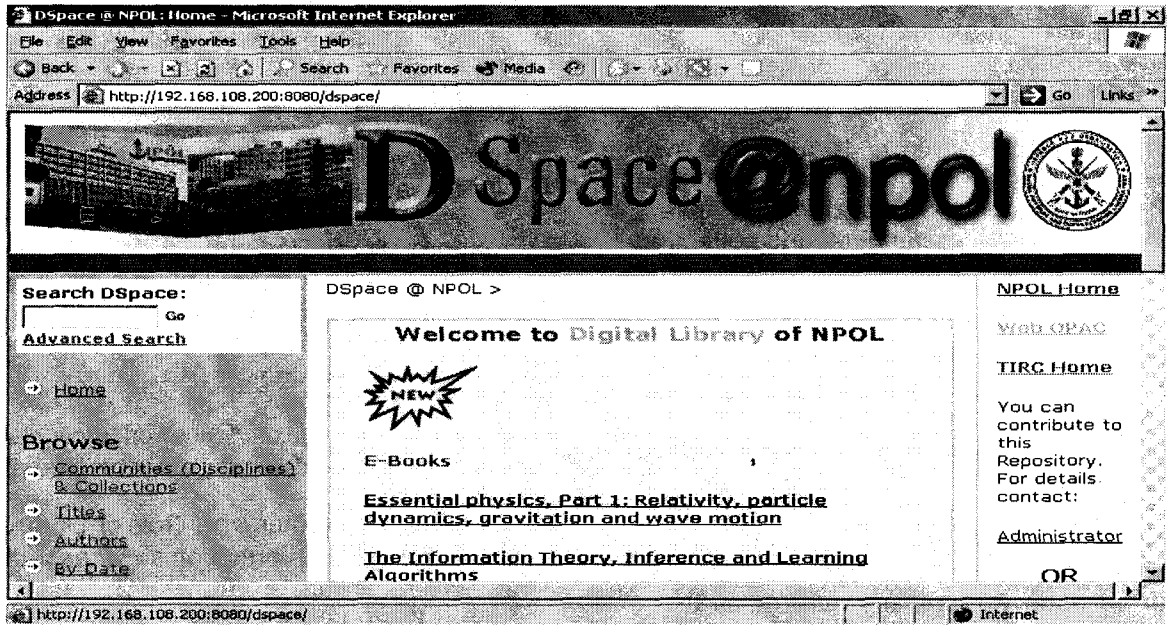


Figure 3. Digital library of NPOL

knowledge acquisition and management (Fig. 4) leads the users to short description of knowledge management and full-text links to research papers, patents and CEP course materials. To extract the tacit knowledge, TIRC conducts lectures by the experts from different subject areas. These lectures are being digitised and made available from the

link 'Knowledge transfer workshops'. TIRC has also compiled various computer-based tutorials generated by NPOL scientists. These tutorials have been organised using html, and are being disseminated using the link KM tutorials. Under the link patents and research papers by NPOL staff, and reports, etc., can be accessed. TIRC is also offering

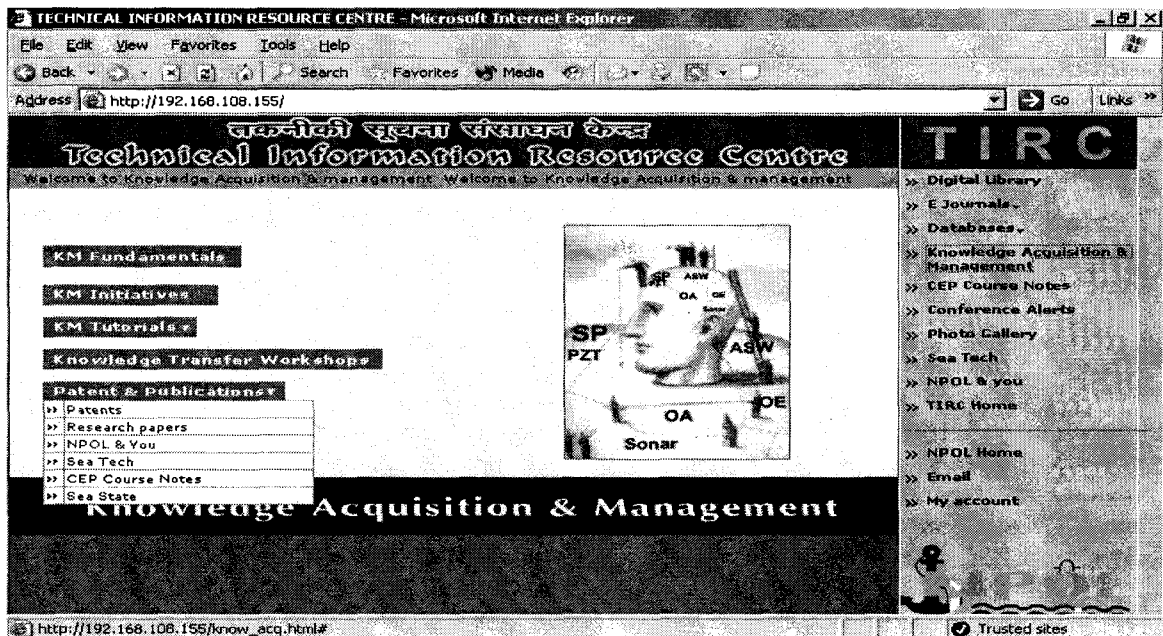


Figure 4. Knowledge management portal

selective dissemination of information (SDI) service through intranet e-mail.

9. CONCLUSION

In this dot com era, to fulfill the ever increasing requirements of users in a most efficient manner, there is a need for every library to provide its services and collection through an easy interface by developing a library portal.

In the case of DRDO laboratories the library home pages of each laboratory can be connected over a network like DRONA (DRDO's Rapid Online Network Access) so that each laboratory has access to entire DRDO's library resources. Through this effort, libraries will be able to save manpower, money and materials. Besides, resource sharing can be done without any time delay.

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