

## The other side of the Subito request screen

I tried to remember how many years I'd been using Subito document supply service as part of my DocDel work. I think it might be about ten! So when I booked my 'Last Hurrah' tour\* before retirement took effect, and it worked out that Vienna was on my itinerary, I asked document delivery officer, Andrea Straub, at the Vienna University of Medicine Library (<http://ub.meduniwien.ac.at/>) if I could see Subito from *the other side*.



I received an encouraging response to my request, so plans were made. On the day of my visit, Andrea, her assistant Nicole Trauninger, and library Deputy Director Karin Cepicka, gave me the warmest of welcomes...including coffee and Viennese chocolates! Not to mention their speaking English so I didn't have to flounder with my long-forgotten schoolgirl-German.

(Andrea L, Nicole R)

To me, Subito has always seemed like magic. You're dealing with university libraries and yet they deliver at speed. I put in a request one day and it would be waiting for me when I got to work the next morning. Or at certain times of the year, because our respective daylight savings dates don't coincide, those starting the day in Europe can have an article in your inbox shortly before you log off to go home – same day delivery! How can they do it, with only one service level, when here we would have to pay for express delivery within 24 hours from an Australian university? And it has to be admitted, some health libraries are also very slow.

The short answer, I discovered, is that although this is a university library, it works like most hospital/health libraries. Perhaps part of the reason is that this library in Vienna is situated in a hospital and staff see clinicians and students daily so realise the timeframes they need to work in. But this is only one Subito library so it can only be a partial explanation. Andrea did say that they too have to wait if they go outside Subito for requests. Bottom line, prompt supply happens because Subito libraries *prioritise the actual delivery of information*. A request is received and it is attended to – right then.

At the receiving end, a Subito request arrives as an email that looks very similar to the copy of the request you get when you hit submit. It's printed off, the journal is pulled, the article scanned, and it's sent. It's one smooth action, done and dusted there and then.

But ooohhh the scanner at Vienna! What a dream machine!! It's a Zeutschel OS15000.

You put the book face-up on the copier. The bed on which the book or journal sits is split and adjusts to support the two sections of the volume so that the open pages are on the same plane. A glass cover comes down and holds it all flat and steady, and away you go. No curved print on account of deep gutters,



no problem with tight binding. The image can be trimmed so you don't get a fan of page edges on your copy. Often it looks like it is from an e-journal, it's so neat and clear. I'd kill for one of those to work with!!

See <https://www.zeutschel.de/en/produkte/scanner/farbscanner/os-15000-advanced.html>

Because you're working with impersonal generic forms and because the system is so efficient, it's easy to forget that there are people behind the supply of your request, almost thinking the whole process is done by machine, by robots. But on the rare occasion that something has gone wrong (including at my end!) or if I've had a query, I always got a very human response to my email sent to a generic address. It was this that prompted me to ask to visit the Vienna University of Medicine Library. I'm afraid I took up far too much of Andrea and Nicole's time because it was like talking to well-known and trusted colleagues and, for me at least!, time flew. Our issues are all the same: problems with funding, declining requests, staffing issues, job security, e-journals and restrictions on supply, and slow supplying libraries.

It should be noted that Vienna's print collection ends at 2012. After that it's all electronic and not available for Subito delivery to Australia. This situation and problem will only become more widespread. Are the days of snail-mail and fax delivery going to re-emerge? Some GratisNet libraries have been on the receiving end of criticism because it is already their reality.

However, in a later email, Andrea said 'maybe Subito will soon find a solution for supplying e-journals after 2012'. But then she added ... 'Hopefully !!'. We can but cross our fingers and hope!



After a most enjoyable visit with Andrea and Nicole, Karin gave me a more extensive tour of the library, all the while discussing issues that are so often the same here as there.

One section of the library surprised and impressed me: a collection of children's medical books. What a great resource for staff who have to talk to children, either because they're sick themselves or because Mum or Dad, Granny or Gramps is in hospital. I think these books could also be a reminder to clinicians that even adults often need to be spoken to in simple language – medical jargon can be a foreign language to many adults of quite normal intelligence!

When you go to a conference, you usually get to visit one or more libraries during your time there. I'd like to encourage people to visit libraries when you're on holidays away from home. Also for libraries to encourage visits from colleagues. It's wonderful to learn more and share and compare the knowledge, problems, successes and experiences of your job. Best of all is putting a face and flesh-and-bones to the very real people who make it all happen on *the other side* of the computer screen.

**HUGE THANKS** to Andrea, Nicole and Karin at the Vienna University of Medicine Library for a very happy afternoon on 23 September, 2014!

Reflecting back .....

Since coming home I've thought about this more, and the slow delivery from many (not all) Australian university libraries and also from some hospital/health libraries in the Gratis network (<http://www.gratisnet.org.au>) (allowing for some health libraries only being staffed on a part-time basis). I've come to the conclusion that the crucial element is not magic but prioritising. If requests aren't dealt with as they're received, when put aside for later, 'later' becomes delayed or even too late.

Another delay in receiving an article is caused by incorrect holdings statements. Holdings will never be 100% correct but Subito libraries have a much lower error rate than any other libraries that I have dealt

with. Again, it works best where errors are fixed when discovered. If errors are added to a 'list for later', later never comes.

Slow supply also occurs when print material is held in an off-site location. Particularly thinking of GratisNet, I do wonder if libraries should list this material as available for document delivery if other libraries have on-site holdings. For those who do the right thing and follow rankings when making a request, this causes an unnecessary delay.

This is where the now-discontinued practice of advising GratisNet members of the deletion of last holdings could have been useful. Anyone who held that title off-site could then have added it to GratisNet holdings on the basis that delayed supply is better than no supply at all.

\* My travelblog is here: <https://mmctravelblog.wordpress.com/>. Well after the event I'm still writing up this trip. I got home after a brilliant ten weeks overseas and succumbed to a DVT leading to pulmonary emboli – 'lots' of blood clots in my lungs. It wasn't fun. I was very sick, in hospital for 10 days. I'm now well but on warfarin for six months.

I can only urge *everyone* to take each and every DVT precaution that airlines (and doctors) recommend. They're not covering their backsides 'just in case' – it really happens!

*Margaret Callinan, 22.01.2015 – Now retired document delivery officer*

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*Opinions expressed are my own, based on 16 years document delivery experience, first at Inner and Eastern Health, later to become Eastern Health, Box Hill VIC and then at Austin Health, Heidelberg VIC*