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Negotiating with the scientific publishers

A new experience for the Italian Astronomical Libraries

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Abstract. In 2016, Italian Astronomical Libraries decided not to renew their subscriptions to electronic journals directly with the most important scientific publishers but to adhere, wherever possible, to the negotiating activities conducted by CARE, a coordinating group within the Libraries Commission, of the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI), the Italian association of state and private universities. Participating in a consortium would have meant better economic conditions for INAF and more favourable contract terms for the final user. Advantages and disadvantages of direct negotiations with the publishers or of participation in a large consortium are analyzed here.

1 Introduction

In 2002, with the merging of the twelve Italian astronomical observatories into a single institution and the birth of INAF-National Institute for Astrophysics, a centralized national astronomical Library Service was created with the aim to promote collaboration among observatory libraries. The first and the most relevant activity was the cooperative acquisition of journals, that was carried out in 2005 [1].

In the subsequent years, most of the subscriptions were made through agents by call for tender and only a small part by direct contracts with the publishers. With the disappearance of the printed version of the journals and the gradual affirmation of the online-only subscriptions, the number of journal titles included in the call for tender was reduced and the direct contracts with the publishers increased.

The opportunity to take part in an existing consortium for the purchase of electronic resources had been considered since 2006, but the applied conditions were not advantageous for research institutes focused on one discipline, as the National Institute for Astrophysics. Furthermore, the agreements proposed by the publishers forced the Institute to subscribe to multidisciplinary packages including a very high number of off-topic titles.

2 Participation in the CARE consortium

CARE¹ is a coordinating group within the Libraries Commission of the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI), the Italian association of state and private universities. CARE manages the

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¹ <http://www.cruir-isorselettroniche.it/>

negotiations with international publishers for most of the Italian academic and research libraries with the aim to have a stronger bargaining power. It works to:

- facilitate the acquisition and the management of electronic resources economically
- obtain better contractual conditions and the security in the access and preservation
- strengthen the position of the universities and research institutes against the monopoly of the international publishers
- promote the collaboration with other library consortia internationally

Initially CARE managed contracts with the publishers only for Italian universities. Only later some research institutes expressed their interest in taking part in this consortium. INAF was one of them and, even if there were no well-established previous experiences, our Institute decided to participate in CARE and to accept possible uncertainties and risks.

At the end of 2016, Italian Astronomical Libraries, after a long period of information gathering and analysis, decided not to renew their subscriptions to electronic journals directly with the most important scientific publishers but to adhere, wherever possible, to the negotiating activities conducted by CARE.

3 INAF subscriptions

In 2017, INAF subscribed to more than 800 journals², as well as some databases, and the subscriptions were managed in three different ways:

1. through direct contracts with the following publishers for the e-journals and databases: ASP, EDP, IOP, OSA, SPIE. It was a solution adopted for the publishers not in negotiation with CARE and for those negotiated by CARE but with unfavourable terms and conditions
2. through CARE consortium: AAAAScience, Annual Reviews, Elsevier, IEEE, Nature, Springer, Wiley. These online-only subscriptions were negotiated by CARE with terms and conditions favourable for INAF
3. through an agent selected by a tendering procedure: this solution was chosen especially for subscriptions including print editions.

In comparison with 2016, the renewal of some subscriptions through CARE brought immediate advantages such as the increase of subscribed titles and cost containment. For some publishers, for example Annual Reviews and Springer, both aspects were particularly relevant (see Fig. 1).

4 Pros and cons

An evaluation of the favourable and negative aspects of INAF's participation in CARE contracts can be made after one year experience.

The positive features that emerged from the work done can be summarize as follows:

- greater bargaining power with the publishers
- same economic conditions but acquisition of more resources (Springer, Annual Reviews)

²<http://www.beniculturali.inaf.it/eng/libraries/online-journals-and-resources/>

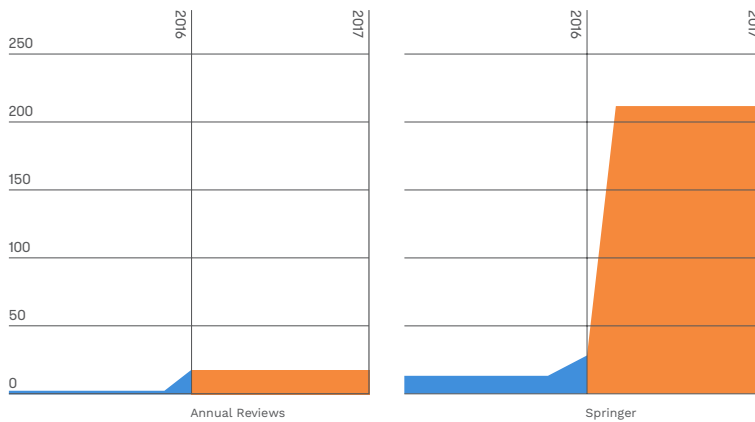


Figure 1. Increase of subscribed titles

- same economic conditions with lower price increase for the years ahead
- administrative (invoicing and VAT fulfillment) simplification: INAF has to pay only a debit note to CRUI.

On the other hand, the following critical issues need to be considered:

- "big-deal" negotiations with multidisciplinary scientific and technological publishers. Astronomy is too specific a matter (e.g. CRUI signed a big contract with IOP, but the package does not contain *The Astrophysical Journal* and *The Astronomical Journal*)
- acquisitions of single titles and not thematic packages. Some publishers offer this possibility but in most cases the economic conditions (subscription and price increase) are the same as with the direct contracts (to be considered also the fee for CRUI)
- payment of a small fee to CRUI.

5 Conclusion

The cooperation between academic and research libraries is fundamental not only for the cost containment and a better organization of the e-resources, but also to confront the aggressive policies of the scientific commercial publishing. However, the particular specificity of the astronomical libraries, which is mainly focused on a single discipline, does not permit adherence to the big contracts (covering a too large range of titles).

Reference

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