

## **Patron Initiated, Web-based Document Delivery in Germany**

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### **Introduction**

In January 2000 OCLC issued a press release ([www.oclc.org/oclc/press/20000121.htm](http://www.oclc.org/oclc/press/20000121.htm)) saying that they had agreed to begin a pilot project with the Big 12 Plus Libraries. The project is designed to test the utility of a library user-initiated, web-based interlibrary loan service in a large consortium environment. The service would allow library users to search bibliographic records and request library materials directly using a web interface.

In the fall of 1998, I lived in Germany and researched their document delivery systems, both at an individual university and in a consortium environment. I came away with the conclusion that it was a very successful system, one that was patron-based and simple to use. Patrons can order what they want without going into a library, communicate that request by any method of transmission possible, receive the item quickly, and have it delivered right to their home or business. Web-based ordering is a large part of the delivery system, and is growing exponentially.

I will begin by describing the university library I visited in Tübingen, Germany, then outline the four types of document delivery services provided, and end with some comments on issues that might be worthy of consideration by libraries in the United States as we embark on projects such as those at the Big 12 Plus Libraries.

### **Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen**

One of the oldest universities in Europe, Eberhard-Karls-Universität in Tübingen, Germany was founded in 1477. The library was begun at the same time, although its services were only available to professors and scholars. Gradually its role changed to a central library for all constituencies of the university and the town of Tübingen. The library survived World War II without damage, and in contrast to other German libraries has a large collection of both new and old (often rare) books. Today the main library holds over 3 million volumes and subscribes to over 10,000 current journals. Additionally there are over thirty branch/departmental libraries, some quite substantial, which are not included in these figures.

Like other institutions, Tübingen has a defined role in Germany's cooperative collection development program. The federal Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) ([www.dfg.de/](http://www.dfg.de/)) began a collecting program for Germany in the 1920s. This program of "Special Collections" is commonly referred to as the SSG-S (Sondersammelgebietsforderung) and allotted subject collecting responsibilities to certain universities, usually based on the original strength of their collections. Tübingen's areas have traditionally been: Religious Studies, Theology, South Asia/Indology, the Ancient Near East, and Medieval/Modern Middle East. In 1969 a new collecting area was added, Criminology. Tübingen's collecting strengths are widely recognized in Germany and elsewhere. For example, Tübingen's collection in Theology and Religious Studies numbers over 500,000 volumes, second only to the collection at the Library of Congress.

Although the SSG-S program was temporarily halted during World War II, it began again after the war since so many books in Germany had been destroyed. There was also an increased recognition that not every library could collect everything. The SSG-S program started up again in Bonn in 1949, and today there are over one hundred subjects areas covered by the program. Since reunification a special effort has been made once again to include the former East German libraries.

Each library is responsible for comprehensive collection development in its SSG-S subject area, including serials, special conference proceedings, and even ephemeral literature. Each is also responsible for the processing and housing of the volumes within its SSG-S collecting area. The German government funds the SSG-S acquisition program. Typically, for example at Tübingen, 75 percent of the monies are federal while 25 percent come from the university. Additionally, each library is responsible for purchasing monographs in its subject area in the German language or originally published in Germany. The SSG-S program purchases all other language materials in the collecting area.

### **Traditional Interlibrary Loan**

The Tübingen library participates in four types of interlibrary loan (ILL) and document delivery services. As with libraries in the United States, Tübingen offers traditional interlibrary loan services. University faculty and students request material through the library's Interlibrary Loan Department and those materials are borrowed by the library from other libraries. Tübingen students pay approximately \$1.75 for each ILL request. Turnaround time is several weeks, depending on the time of the school year. Outside patrons requesting items from Tübingen must go through their local or regional library in order to borrow materials.

With a staff of four in ILL, Tübingen averages close to 30,000 ILL transactions (both borrowing and lending) per year. At peak times, other library staff contribute time to assist ILL staff in tasks such as verification. For traditional ILL services, there are a few striking differences between the United States and Germany. The closed stacks, which most German university libraries employ, are more convenient for ILL retrieval of materials. There are also computers next to the OPAC stations from which students can place ILL orders electronically instead of filling out paper forms.

## **DBI-Link**

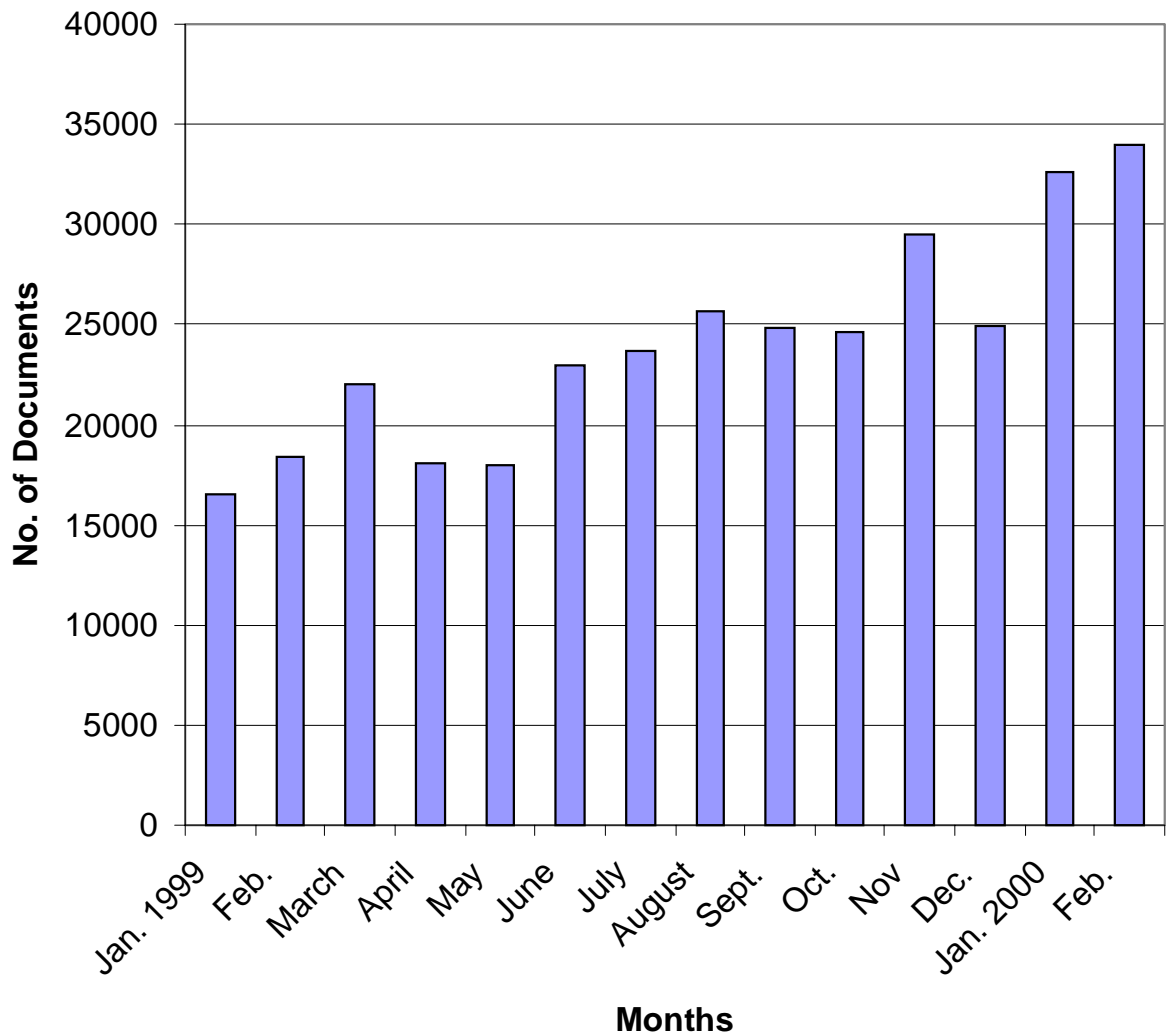
DBI-Link offers individuals the chance to search the various German union catalogues and order materials directly from the library without going through their local library with a traditional ILL request. The DBI database offers access to supraregional library catalogs with holdings from some 3,000 German libraries. Table of contents literature and index databases (such as Springer Verlag or the British Library Document Supply Center) are also available. DBI (Deutsches Bibliotheksinstitut) is located in Berlin and prior registration is required to use the DBI-Link service. Tübingen University Library is one of twenty-one libraries, which offer DBI-Link, and has participated since 1996. Patrons connect to DBI-Link and are able to place online orders for materials subsequent to a title search. Currently only periodical articles can be ordered, and delivery time is usually two days.

There is a charge for everything ordered through DBI-Link. Patrons are alerted to this fact and reminded that they can use the regular Interlibrary Loan service, which is slower but much cheaper. I have given the costs in the German currency, the Deutsche Mark (DM). For an easy and approximate exchange to U.S. dollars at the writing of this article, roughly halve the DM. For example, today 8 DM equals \$3.98. Charges for DBI-Link orders through Tübingen University Library are placed in two groupings. First, for non-commercial institutions and customers in Europe, an article costs 8 DM for mail service, 5 DM for FTP, and 10 DM for a fax delivery. For commercial institutions or customers in non-European countries the charges are: 15 DM for mail service, 15 DM for FTP, and 20 DM for a fax. These charges are for articles up to twenty pages long, after that the price is roughly \$.10 per page. There is a 1 DM charge for the transmission of each order. Charges for airmail, express delivery, or registered post are extra and not included in the base price for an article. Payments can be made through direct bank account debit, credit card, or check.

## **SUBITO**

The federal SUBITO program is located in Berlin and began in April of 1998. SUBITO is a cooperative Germany document delivery service similar to DBI-Link, but with a unified structure of charges and conditions which are not dependent on the supplying library. Charges are also cheaper, with an emphasis on electronic delivery. Articles for the first twenty pages are only 5 DM if delivered via e-mail, FTP or by scanning, whereas mail delivery costs 8 DM and fax is 10 DM. After the first twenty pages, each page is just .20 DM. Books are available by postal delivery (13 DM) or by scanning (5 DM).

SUBITO services are available to anyone on the web, and orders are placed directly by the patron. Although there is no cost differentiation for types of customers, SUBITO does track its customers. Consistently two-thirds of the orders placed are by private citizens, as opposed to one-third placed by companies or small businesses. In its first year a total of 101,756 items were delivered directly to customers. 1999 saw a dramatic increase of 164 percent, with 269,262 pieces delivered. In the first two months of 2000 SUBITO continues to grow, with 32,614 deliveries in January and 34,009 in February. (See Chart 1.) This puts SUBITO on pace to exceed 400,000 deliveries in the year 2000. SUBITO web-based orders by patrons have become very, very popular in Germany.



**Chart 1: SUBITO Document Delivery Jan. 1999-Feb. 2000**

The Tübingen University Library began participating in SUBITO in 1999, thus providing customers with one more resource for direct borrowing without using the traditional ILL library-to-library borrowing. For further information on this exciting new resource for document delivery, see [www.subito-doc.de](http://www.subito-doc.de).

### SSG-S

As mentioned earlier, the Tübingen Library has been responsible for certain collecting areas since the 1920s, based on the strengths of their collection. The SSG-S document delivery service is mainly used for the special collections of Theology, Comparative Religion, the Near East, South Asia, and Criminology. Researchers are aware of the strengths of the Tübingen collection. For twenty years the library has been promoting these special collections by maintaining a separate database so that new acquisitions can be promoted. Analytics are entered into the database for maximum indexing of journal articles and collected works. Acquisition lists are available in print, online, and on CD-ROM.

Since 1995 patrons have been able to order books and articles directly from the library. SSG-S orders are guaranteed to leave the library in less than three days. The charges for articles have been set by Tübingen at what they charge for DBI-Link orders outlined earlier, with a few higher surcharges for countries outside of Europe. Although 80 percent of the document delivery requests come from individuals within Germany, orders have been placed by customers in Europe, Asia, North and South America, and Africa.

Unlike the DBI-Link, with the SSG-S service patrons can also order monographs from Tübingen. There is a flat charge of 15 DM per item. The loan period is four weeks, plus two weeks allowed for mailing on each end. At this point Tübingen only lends books published after 1960, and presently it is restricted to Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the Benelux countries, France, Great Britain, and Scandinavia. As seen in Chart 2, monograph loans are far less than periodical articles, but requests are steadily growing.

**Chart 2: SSG-S Monograph and Serial Orders**

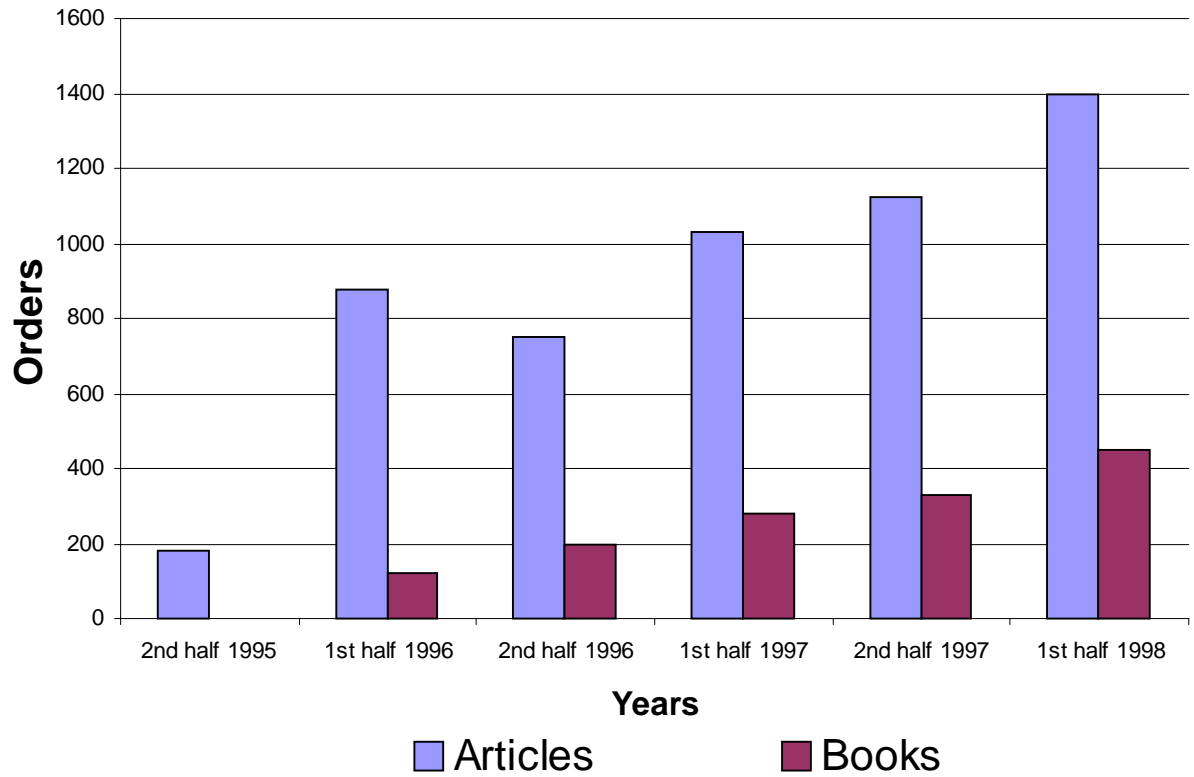
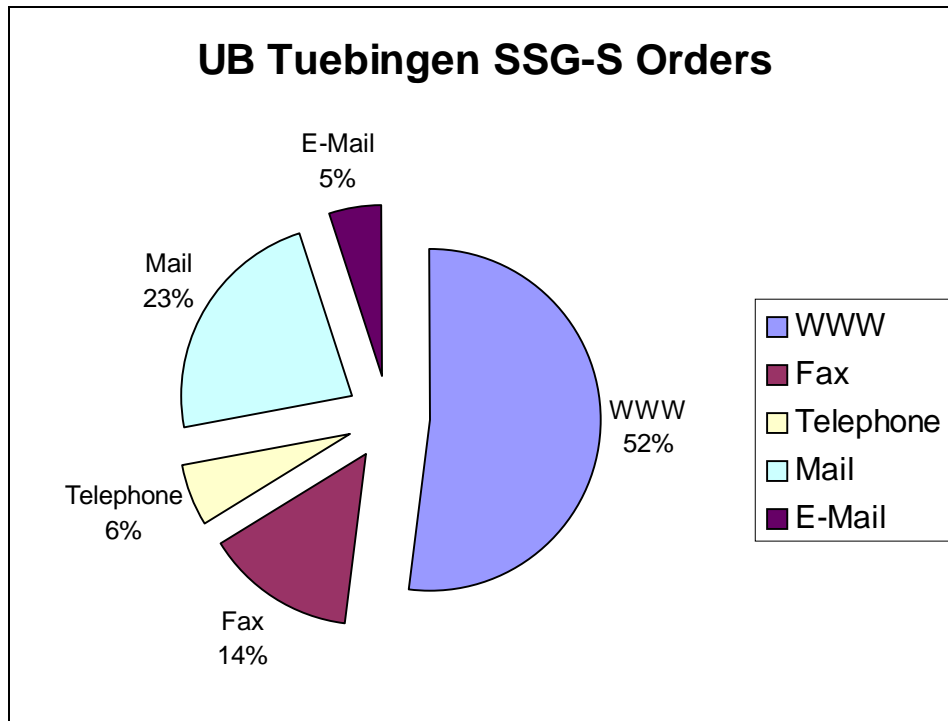
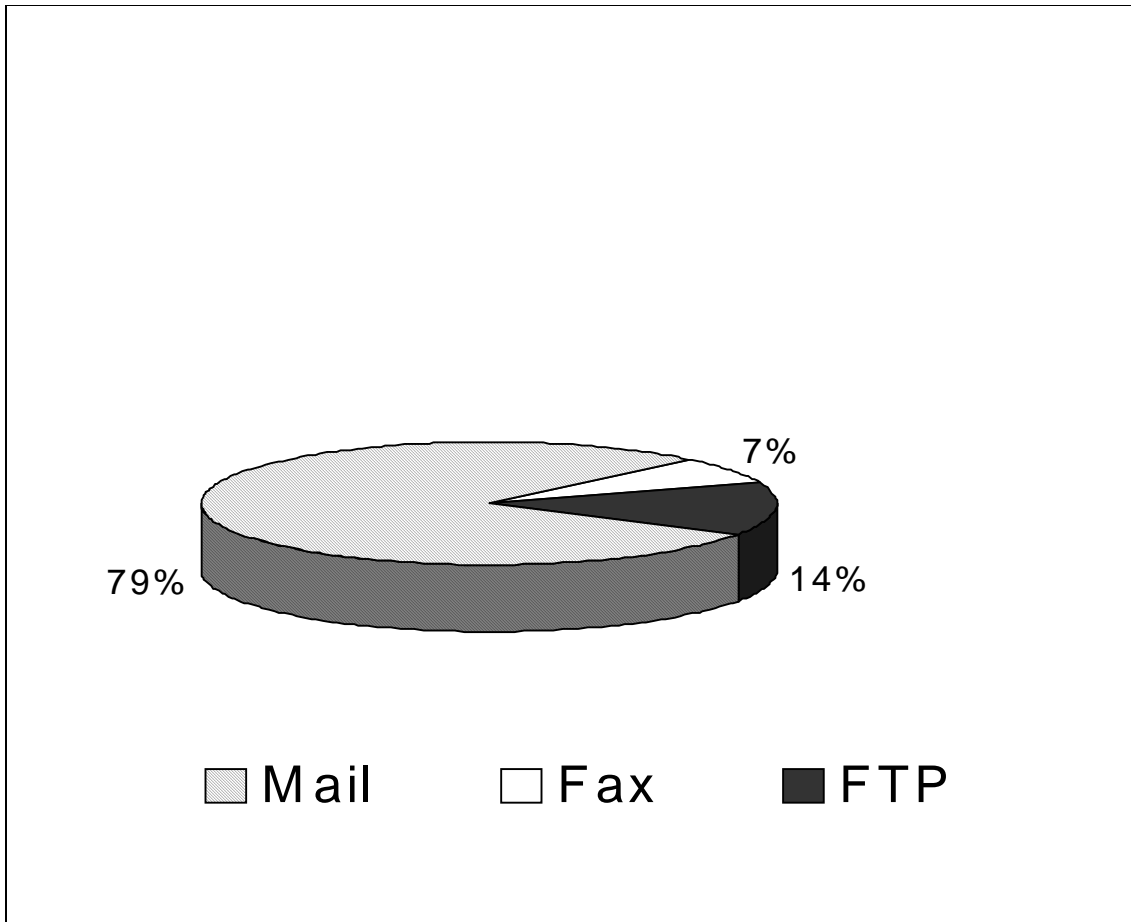


Chart 3 illustrates the fact that Tübingen accepts orders for items by any means. Web orders are the most prevalent at 52 percent, followed by mail orders (23 percent), orders by fax (14 percent), telephone (6 percent), and e-mail requests (5 percent). Chart 4 shows how patrons prefer to receive their articles. Loans of monographs are only done by mail, but overall mail delivery remains the clear frontrunner at 79 percent. Only 7 percent are delivered by fax, while FTP has grown to 14 percent. FTP delivery requests are handled by scanning the article (200 dpi), saved as one graphics file per page, which is then available at Tübingen's FTP server as a self-extracting archive file. Patrons are informed through e-mail that the article is available. Articles are held on the server for two weeks and then deleted because of copyright law.

Chart 3: SSG-S orders at Tübingen





**Chart 4: Mail/Fax/FTP orders**

Tübingen was the first university to accept credit cards for document delivery payments. Although that feature was begun in the fall of 1997, still less than 10 percent of payments were through Visa or Eurocard/Mastercard. The vast majority still prefer to pay their remittance directly to Tübingen or supply their bank account number and have an automatic debit transfer.

Revenues to the library from the SSG-S service are substantial, averaging in 1998 about 2,000 DM per month. However, tracking other costs such as staff time or equipment maintenance realistically drops the profit by at least 10 percent. When the SSG-S service began in 1995 the start up costs were high, with no revenue for the library during the initial months. However, since 1996 every month has realized a profit from SSG-S operations.

It is noteworthy that despite patrons doing their own verification and ordering, Tübingen has a very high fill rate for SSG-S requests, at least 81 percent. Library staff have been monitoring the requests not filled. The reasons an item was not delivered are similar to that of traditional ILL: the item was not found in the stacks (8 percent), item was already on loan (5 percent), at the bindery (2 percent), wrong or unclear citation (2 percent), a rare or non-circulating piece (1 percent), or the order was canceled by the patron (1 percent).

## **Conclusion**

Libraries throughout the world are expanding their ILL/document delivery services beyond traditional means by employing such services as documents-on-demand from vendors and by increasing methods of delivery to include fax or FTP. Digitizing of texts for articles is on the increase, as is the production of databases of digitized images. However, the bulk of monographic materials (apart from classics in the inclusion of such projects as Project Gutenberg) have not been part of the developments in ILL/document delivery. How can one bring these materials on par with others to include them in faster and direct delivery service?

Until the age of digitization arrives for all monographs, is it time to rethink our service to our patrons requesting books? Just as we deliver articles faster to those patrons who are willing to pay more, should we change our strategies to include monographs? I suggest that monographs could be structured in the same two-tier approach as we have embarked on for periodical articles: traditional ILL for those who go through the channels of inter-library lending, and an expedited, direct-to-the-patron loan for those who are willing to pay. Yes, it is a system rife with the perils of creating the “haves” and the “have nots,” but haven’t we already started down that path with periodical articles?

And, apart from lending monographs directly to patrons, is it time for libraries to become players in the article-on-demand industry? Is it time to consider delivery of information to anyone if the person is willing to pay? I think it is evident that in Germany patrons want this service and they are willing to pay. The SUBITO program in Germany during its first year of operation in 1998 exceeded 101,000 document deliveries, and is

projected to top 400,000 articles in the year 2000, and that is with only twenty university libraries participating in its start-up phase.

Another issue raised by my time in Germany is the library verification process inherent in American interlibrary loan departments. If one considers direct lending of books or copies of articles to patrons, is it necessary to verify the bibliographic information they supply? While the fill rate I discovered at Tübingen was quite high (81 percent), perhaps it should not come as a surprise. Since so many of their document delivery requests (52 percent) came via the web, it is obvious that this patron group is computer literate. Additionally, patrons no longer need to worry about the intricacies of searching bibliographic databases such as OCLC. The advent of web-based online catalogs and OCLC's WorldCat makes it increasingly easy for patrons to locate a citation and clearly see if an item is available. Finally, when a patron requests an item and is willing to pay for it, isn't that an additional incentive to get the citation right?

The organization of document delivery in Germany by the federal government and by large university libraries may be the direction for American libraries to take when exploring various options. It is worth reconsidering our patron bases, types of delivery of information, and the ILL verification process. We could also look to Germany, especially SUBITO, for guidance in setting up patron charges and for opening up a web-based service to all patrons whether or not they are part of the library's regular clientele such as a university's faculty and students.

Further information about the university library at Tübingen can be found at: [www.uni-tuebingen.de/ub](http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/ub). Many of their web pages have been translated into English, especially those marketing their document delivery direct order services.