Library Stock Taking in The Present Library System

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Abstract

Stock verification is an insignificant aspect of librarianship as far as teachers, researchers and library experts are concerned. In order to keep the library materials up-to-date periodic stock verification is needed. A full library security system involves several programs. Broadly the program's goals are to assure the well being of people and to protect the collections and equipment from theft and misuse. If a library wishes to identify its true collection, all it has to do is prepare a list of all the lost and missing books and mutilated journal titles. Normally these are the items that are used commonly by the users. The main objectives of stock verification, is, to find out the actual stock of the documents available in a library and to find but: if any losses have occurred for regularization as well as taking remedial steps to contain such losses seem to he hazy in the ease of electronic publications. The paper discusses objectives and procedures regarding stock verification and responsibilities of loss, points out that the cost of stock verification often far exceed the benefits, highlights norms and procedures of stock verification, discusses some advantages and various methods and procedures of physical verification, put forth precautionary measures to be taken against loss and mutilation of library documents, analyses the issue of responsibility of loss and ways of resolving the conflict of responsibility, presents the procedure for write-off of reasonable loss, finally concludes by stressing the need for rational and updated rules and procedures about stock verification.

Key Words

stock, shelf, books, electronic, resources, books, procedures, security, preventive measures, barcode.

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Introduction

Origin

In olden days, the books in libraries were kept locked in almirahs and they were preserved and not issued; consequently the chances of their loss were very few. With the advancement of time and library movement, the concept of keeping the books/documents locked was changed; the documents were kept unlocked in the library to make them available to the readers. But this open access system has led to some problems, such as misplacement and mutilation of books, disturbed order of the books on the shelves and theft of the books and other reading materials in the library. So, it became necessary to prepare an inventory of books/ reading materials in the library. Thus, stock verification came into existence for libraries.

Meaning and definition

The term stock verification is also denoted by other terms as 'stock taking', 'stock checking', 'stock inspection', 'inventory taking', etc. The term stock verification refers to the process of checking as to what is in stock in relation to what there was. The emphasis is being put more on finding which items are missing than on how much the loss is calculated in rupees. In library context, it is the periodic verification of books and other reading materials of the library. It may be an insignificant aspect of librarianship as far as teachers, researchers and library experts are concerned. But in practice, stock verification is considered a sensitive, controversial and unwanted activity. Practicing librarians are often worried over the process of library stock verification and its results and implications. [1]

The spirit and philosophy of librarianship towards books as emotion filled animate beings dissipates when books are subjected to stock verification. As such some consider stock verification as one of the occupational hazards. The other hazards include mutilation of documents and loss in transit of supplies. Stock

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verification is often done like a ritual without clear identification of aims and objectives and hence a host of confusion surrounds stock verification. If the objectives and procedures of physical verification and responsibilities about loss of documents are clearly enumerated, the process becomes plain and simple.

Stock verification needs extra staff, extra time, money and service in a library. Whether to take up such an activity or not, if taken up at what frequency and is it for entire collection or for a sample collection, etc. are mostly decided by the parent organization and the rules governed by it. For example, in case of Government of India (1983, 1984) organizations complete annual physical verification of books has to be done by a library having not more than 20,000 volumes and not fewer than two library qualified staff. However, complete physical verification has to be done at intervals of not more than three years in case of libraries having up to 20,000 volumes with only one library qualified staff as well as libraries having more than 20,000 volumes but not more than 50,000 volumes. Further, only a sample physical verification at intervals of not more than five years is needed in case of libraries having more than 50,000 volumes. If such sample verification reveals unusual or unreasonable shortages, complete verification shall be done. What type of documents need to be counted for the above purpose is not enumerated but it can be assumed to be books and bound volumes of journals ignoring the ephemeral and gray literature and microforms[2]

Need and Significance

The main objectives of stock verification, namely, to find out the actual stock of the documents available in a library and to find but: if any losses have occurred for regularization as well as taking remedial steps to contain such losses seem to he hazy in the ease of electronic publications. There are other additional benefits of stock verification. They are:

1. Periodic stock verification and write-off of resultant loss helps to reduce unnecessary escalation in book value of assets.

2. Physical verification also helps in replacing relevant, useful and on demand documents with new copies wherever lost or mutilated.

3. Stock verification is the time to introduce new ways of arrangement of stack, modified or new lending system and other procedures.

4. If a library calls back all issued out documents for stock verification purpose, it can provide an opportunity for its users to browse the entire collection after verification. This very much counters the otherwise bias of less useful books lying on shelves all through the year.

5. Stock verification helps to review the precautionary measures already taken in preventing loss and mutilation as well as to identify any deficiencies in the existing procedure of maintenance of library and vigilance.

6. Stock verification helps to identify of damaged and worn-out documents for repair or rebinding, keeping shelf list and other records up-to-date, rearrangement and cleaning of stack, better acquaintance of collection and popular documents by library staff, etc. through the year.

7. Stock verification helps to review the precautionary measures already taken in preventing loss and mutilation as well as to identify any deficiencies in the existing procedure of maintenance of library and vigilance.

8. It also provides an opportunity for its users to browse the entire collection after verification. Generally, the reading material in most of the libraries is referred to the books. But, due to advancement of information technology (IT), the physical media of publications has shifted from printed books to the field of non-book/non-printed material. The more popular form of publishing is electronic publishing which is the application of a computer-aided process by which publishers find, capture, shape, store, and update information to disseminate it to a chosen audience. It is felt that the Internet is not a satisfactory platform for publishing full text of documents, but Compact Disk-Read Only Memory (CD-ROM) is an appropriate medium for publishing the documents.

Books are also available on floppy disks, CDs and Digital Versatile Disks (DVDs, which look alike CDs but have a very large storing capacity of about 17 GB for double-sided version), although distribution by floppy disk is decreasing due to the convenience and growing popularity of CD-ROM.[3]

Above all, stock verification helps as a way of identifying and discarding obsolete volumes. Normally in an active collection of a well organized library, loss of on-demand books are only noticed in day to day working. Other incidental benefits of stock verification include identification of damaged and worn-out documents for repair or rebinding, keeping shelf list and other records up-to-date, rearrangement and cleaning of stack, better acquaintance of collection and popular documents by library staff, etc.

Now the question is whether stock verification is necessary in the present era of information technology. The answer is yes. Because by stock verification one can find out which are all the books that are lost and can make necessary arrangements to replace them .Even in the present era of IT, it is important because it is not possible to get all the information stored in old books /journals/documentary sources through net. Of course almost all the information we get in the digitized form. Still for few things, like conference proceedings, reports etc, we should rely only on books and refer them whenever necessary. Therefore books are as important as digitized E-resource & the need of identifying the lost books and replacing the same is very much needed. Moreover stock verification has few benefits in implementing new security methods and improving the existing library services so as to minimize the loss of books.

Methods of Stock verification

There are number of methods followed for stock verification.

The crudest method is to numerically count the number of documents and it practically does not serve any purpose except to know the number of documents lost. The old and fairly crude method is to physically check and tally documents on shelves with accession register. This method is not only cumbersome and time consuming but also requires the entire register to be kept while checking. It may also lead to spoiling the register with tick marks. However, with the advent of new ways of reproduction of accession register now the original register can still be saved. Another accession number based scheme which also has the disadvantage of keeping the entire register (or its surrogate) is to have prewriting/typed/printed cards carrying accession numbers in blocks of 100 numbers while physically checking the documents on shelves. In both these methods the simultaneous working of number of batches depends on availability of number of copies of accession register or its surrogate and if more than one copy of accession register is used the results of checking needs to be consolidated from different copies/batches. All these not only make it cumbersome but also lead to waste of time and efforts. It is also possible now with the proliferation of personal computers to just key-in all accession numbers as and when checked to consolidate the loss in terms of missing accession numbers. [4]

Computerized stock verification

Stock-verification is a problematic library operation which has both advantages and disadvantages. The serious disadvantage is the suspension of library services during this process which deprives library users from the reading facilities for weeks if not for months. To overcome this disadvantage, a computer-assisted stock-verification system was conceived and applied by using dBase III Plus which proved much advantageous and cost effective in comparison with other existing methods of stock-verification. Its first phase involves recording of accession numbers and location codes/call numbers of documents from their sequences on the shelves. It has been proved that the first phase of this work of recording of 50,000 documents can easily be accomplished by putting in 200 man hours

Online stock verification of library resources can also be done using Barcode Scanner, Data Capturing Unit and also manually and generate various reports of books such as: missing, lost, issued, binding, transferred, condemned etc. Barcode scanners scan accession numbers of books from the bar code stickers in the books. But bar code system is yet to pickup in this

country. The most popular and fairly reliable and quick manual method is to verify stock based on shelf list. This method requires an up-to-date shelf list. All these methods presuppose closing library for verification purpose. Yet another shelf list based method which does not require closing down the library but ensures reasonably economical, quick and dependable stock checking is to have two (book) card systems. In this method two different color book cards are prepared for each document and one of them is maintained as shelf list card and the other kept in book. At the time of stock verification these two book cards are exchanged. This method allows for simultaneous working of many batches as both shelf list and documents are arranged in the same sequence and also allows for rectifying errors of stock verification at a later date.

Advantages of stock verification

1. By stock verification one can know which are all the books that are lost and can think of replacing the new copy of the same book if the lost book is in demand to users and also helps to identify the reasons for the loss of book. So that the security and other library procedures can be changed so as to prevent the loss of books.

2. While doing physical stock verification, some rare books, out of print books which are in demand will be identified .So that that those books can be kept in such a shelf where the users can browse more frequently. If a library calls back all issued out documents for stock verification purpose, it can provide an opportunity for its users to browse the entire collection after verification. This very much counters the otherwise bias of less useful books lying on shelves.

3. Stock verification is the time to introduce new ways of arrangement of stack, modified or new lending system and other procedures. Further, Stock verification gives us a rough idea about all the library books that are physically present in library stock

4. Besides other incidental benefits of stock verification include identification of damaged and worn-out documents for repair or rebinding, keeping shelf list and other records up-to-date, rearrangement and cleaning of stack,

better acquaintance of collection and popular documents by library staff, etc. Stock verification helps as a way of identifying and discarding obsolete volumes. [4]

Disadvantages of stock verification

The main problem with stock verification is disturbance to library users and the routine work in the Library and Information centre. That is in a big library where the collection is more than 50000 the library should be closed at least for 10- 15 days for the purpose of stock verification. It causes a great deal of inconvenience to users.

Often, the cost of carrying out a stock verification, particularly in special libraries with compact and comprehensive collection, far exceeds the benefits derived and even the loss discovered. Hence appears to be unnecessary exercise with no positive benefits except accounting for the stock. On the other hand this may cause inconvenience to users, disturbance to routines of library, health hazard to library staff, loss of man hours, time, money and service in a library.

Preventive measures

Generally the precautions taken for the loss of books at the time of planning a library is one exit and entrance, not allowing personal belongings inside the library and covering all windows of the building with suitable wire mesh, metal grills and nets to avoid passing books through windows. In some libraries additional precautions like a check point at exit gate with a person and/or vigilance manpower including security guard, magnetized document checking/burglar's alarm and other electronic book security system, CCTV, insurance against loss, etc. cost substantially to the organization in addition to being not fool proof. What additional precautions are to be taken depends on how much additional expenditure (ie., in addition to the cost of stock verification) the organization is willing to incur. Here two things need special mention. Firstly some of the costs like salaries of vigilance/checking staff are often invisible. Secondly, any physical check by a security guard in reputed institution may not only bring resistance from users but also makes an ugly show. Apart from intensifying

vigilance, another positive approach propounded is to liberalize services like extended library hours during examination time, liberal or subsidized Xerox service and liberal lending of books marked 'not to be issued'.

Stock Verification of Electronic Publications.

The process of creating and disseminating information via electronic means including email and via the Web is electronic publishing. Electronically published materials may originate as traditional paper publishing or may be created specifically for electronic publishing. These issues assume importance in the face of increasing digital content in libraries and in the light of various digital and virtual library projects undertaken. They include CD's databases etc. But unlike books stock verification of the e-publications is difficult to conduct due to the following reasons;

1. Software Locking

In the case of CD-ROM databases), a typical problem faced by the library is the software lock. Bibliographic databases like Inside Science of BLDSC, UK;,), and full text standards databases from Bureau of Indian Standards, International Standards Organization, American Society for Testing of Metals, British Standards Institution, American National Standards Institution, etc. are all having software lock. This makes CDs unusable after certain date. In some cases this period is just one month. Although the CD is with the subscriber, it is useless due to the software key. During stock verification although these CDs are available, they cannot be 'counted' as they are unusable. One way is weeding out such CDs leaving only active CDs (those which are usable) in the stock. But it means that no sooner the publication is subscribed, than it is being weeded out.

2. Subscription of Online Publications

Another major issue of stock verification arises from the subscription of online publications. These can be subscribed in two modes, online only or along with print publications. When online journals are subscribed with print publications, the library would have back volumes even after the subscription is stopped. However, when online publications only are subscribed, the library will be paying subscription charges for accessing the online journal hosted by the publisher

If the library wishes to cancel subscription to the online journal, it cannot access the back volumes of the online journal which it subscribed earlier. This also makes the back volumes unavailable for stock verification-. Unless access fee is paid to the vendor or aggregator, the back volumes of the subscribed journal are not available for the library. So, virtually the earlier CDs of such databases can be weeded out, as the latest (current), CD has all the data. Here a single CD will represent multiple volumes of the electronic publication for stock verification purpose.

It is natural to raise a question as to how library books are lost that too in research institutions where majority of the users are from higher strata of society. Mysteriously, it becomes almost impossible to pin point at any individual or set of individuals. Nor it is easy to catch red-handedly such thieves. Where they are caught also, surprisingly the legal process is so fragile that it becomes difficult to establish a theft. Any way librarian is not a police officer. While discussing various security methods it can be found that maintaining the security of library materials has changed from a minor irritant to a major problem. Many libraries have discovered that they are loosing more than one percent of their collections each year and have become more common in libraries and will probably continue and even possibly increase".

An analysis of types of books lost and the distribution of value of books lost as against the strength of collection and average cost of books acquired should provide some guidelines about type and nature of books lost the need for vigilance, the need for change in arrangement and organization of collection. Such analysis with some useful ratios like loss to use/ consultation, loss to stock (in value), loss per user per year, etc. would be quite useful. One such analysis of loss of ISRO Satellite Centre (ISAC) Library for the year 1987-88. has clearly indicated that text books and other popular books in the area of office rules, electronics, computer science, etc. costing far less than the average cost of book acquired are lost. It also

provides a ratio analysis of loss of ISAC Library. It may be observed that for every Rupee in the stock Re 0.0005 is lost in a year and for every user 0.0458 document (or 4 documents for every 100 users per year) or Rs.3.09 worth documents are lost in a year. Further, for every 1000 documents in stock on an average 3.67 documents are lost. As against Govt. of India guideline (cited earlier) of allowing 3 books for every 1000 circulated/consulted, ISAC library has lost only 0.58 document. Lastly the value of loss of ISAC library is just 80% of the incidental revenue earned in the form of nominal overdue charges levied by library.

Conclusion

Stock verification is essential to check the stock of books/non books physically present in shelves with that of book accession register. Stock verification is an insignificant aspect of librarianship as far as teachers, researchers and library experts are concerned. But in practice stock verification is considered as a sensitive, controversial and unwanted evil activity. Practicing librarians are often perturbed and worried over the process of library stock verification and its results and implications. The spirit and philosophy of librarianship towards books as emotion filled animate beings dissipates when books are subjected to stock verification.

Library stock verification is not just an unnecessary evil which brings very little benefit to the users and library staff but has some advantages. There are many ways of quickly and effectively completing stock verification depending on the organization of records, magnitude of work and availability of tools and men. There is an array of precautionary measures against loss of library documents depending on the purse of the institution. But the cost of such measures often far exceeds the saving they may provide to the library. The issue of fixing responsibility for loss of library documents has created an occupational hazard for librarianship. Rationalization and updation of rules regarding stock verification and the prescribed limits regarding write off of the loss in service oriented libraries would go long way to provide better services to users. Particularly, the guidelines should be made more explicit about type of material to be covered (i.e., only books and bound journals) for stock verification and rational about fixing the limit on the cost of the book for initiating enquiry and action. It may be reasonable to say that a book costing more than 150% of the average cost of the book acquired during the year only need to be subjected to further enquiry when it is lost. Professional bodies have a vital role to play in this regard.

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