Introduction

Information centers and libraries, irrespective of the sector, are typically viewed as overheads by their management, which is an extremely risky position for them to be in today. For survival and success, it is imperative to get senior management to shift its focus from expenditure to the value of the information services provided. Outsourcing in library and information services, is nothing new. For up to a century, libraries have contracted out routine task such as the preparation of catalogue cards, labeling of books or cleaning and maintenance of buildings. But delivery of the complete service by an outside contracted organization - also known as externalization - is a recent phenomenon.

Why Outsourcing?

Outsourcing is allowing another person or organization to provide a service or part of a service previously carried out inside the LIS/organization, usually on a contractual basis.

Definitions of "outsourcing" vary widely, ranging from the simple-getting someone else to do your work for you-to the complex-the acquisition of services from external service providers. Basically
defined, outsourcing is the transfer of an internal service or function to an outside vendor. Outsourcing is a new name for the old practice of "contracting out" for services that organizations chose not to provide internally with their own staff. Whatever the definition, outsourcing has become a standard practice in both the corporate and the not-for-profit worlds.

First a cost cutting measure, outsourcing exploded in the 1990s and became identified as a method of spinning off unnecessary work in order to focus the organization on its primary goals. Processes and functions identified as not central to the enterprise are contracted out to other firms that specialize in providing those products or services, in theory enabling the contracting organization to concentrate its resources on the core business.

Libraries have followed the general business trend. Routine non-library services, like janitorial services and photocopying, have long been procured through contracts with outside vendors.

Outsourcing is a topic of interest to most librarians in all types of libraries. The library literature reflects a continuing discussion of outsourcing of such routine library operations as collection development, materials selection, materials processing, cataloging, and management.