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Biz of Acq

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Managing Organizational Change through Collection Restructure

How do you manage change within your institution? More importantly, do you have strategies for the implementation of new ideas, or the imposition of changes to your budget, your workflow, your personnel, in short your environment? Change within your organization is not only possible, it is certain given the times in which we live; and the way in which you respond to those changes has come to be a measure of your professional abilities.

These were just some of the questions that three colleagues and I set out to answer as we developed an educational program entitled: Restructuring Library Collections: Practical Solutions to Changing Circumstances. This program was submitted to and finally presented at the 86th annual meeting of the American Association of Law Libraries this past July in Boston, Massachusetts.

We wanted to provide practical information and the benefit of experience to librarians who were facing some sort of project dealing with major changes in their budgets, physical space, patron population, or a loss of personnel. We also wanted to reach out to a variety of institutional settings, for while each library is a unique entity, we suspected that certain elements of the management of institutional change could be applied to almost any setting. Each speaker then would address his/her specific experience and focus on those methods which proved successful and those that failed. The idea was to provide a buffet of methods and information that the audience could appropriate to their own needs.

I began the program with a presentation of how we, at the law library of the University of Cincinnati, had responded to three major problems: a budgetary cutback, a loss of staff, and a fundamental shift in the patron population the library was designed to serve. In short, our budget was cut a total of 23 percent, we lost two positions from a staff of fourteen, and we were forced to shift our focus from practicing attorneys to the research needs of faculty and students at the college of law.

We began with a process of environmental scanning to verify our hypothesis, and to bring all available information into our collection review. Our Innovative Interfaces integrated system was used to first generate "decision packages" containing elements such as cost, rate of supplementation, and number of copies. These elements were combined into a two-stage review process centered first on the vendor/publisher and then on subject categories. The decision packages were then submitted to a two-level system of decision making units. Those familiar with the basic concepts of zero-based budgeting will recognize the above mentioned terms as we appropriated the concepts of decision packages and organizational units into our program.

The organizational units in this case were the Bibliographic Selection Com-
mittee, a standing library committee that makes all decisions concerning collection development and maintenance and a faculty liaison system which, in this case provided invaluable feedback from the faculty and student population. Both organizational units were already in place at the time of the crisis and were appropriated into the collection restructure with great ease and success.

Among the various strategies developed by the organizational units was a fully developed marketing program used to sell the idea to the patron population. This assertive outreach to the patron resulted in minimal resistance and in fact turned the entire collection restructure into an educational experience to the library's benefit. All financial and organizational goals were met and the library has emerged as a more cohesive organization with an actively involved patron population. In fact the principles of collection evaluation and restructure have become ongoing aspects of the library's institutional life, allowing the organization to absorb another wave of budgetary reductions with ease.

Our second speaker was Penny Schroeder, the acquisitions librarian at the Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C. Ms. Schroeder outlined her experience with a major serials downsizing project in a general academic library. In addition, she advised the audience to focus on the special interest groups and develop programs to educate and bring their input/acceptance into the process. Also it is crucial to develop a formula of basic serials cost principles that can be applied across the board. Ms. Schroeder reminded the audience that much good can result from refining a serials collection, and the process should be applied as an ongoing procedure rather than waiting until a crisis forces the institution to react. As she discussed the various strategies of cancellation, Ms. Schroeder advised that "part of the balancing act involved in restructuring is to curtail the seductive temptation to be penny-wise but pound foolish." To prevent this phenomenon, we need to be able to determine the effectiveness of a title with usage studies, faculty evaluation, and any online feedback your particular system may be able to generate. Like all the other speakers, Ms. Schroeder stressed the value of communication with all individuals and groups affected by such a program. Two of those groups include the vendors and the support staff. Vendors can provide valuable price information. Including support staff can insure proper records management and protect the internal fabric of your organization. Staff members need to be informed and reassured that their presence and input is valuable to your decision-making process.

Our third speaker, Barbara Silbersack, librarian for the law firm of Thompson, Hine and Flory of Cincinnati, Ohio discussed the issues involved in combining two libraries into one location and then downsizing that library into an even smaller location over a two-year period. Difficulties included a lack of knowledge of the personalities for the incoming firm. Ms. Silbersack focused on the opportunities afforded by such situations and the need to establish clear objectives for your program. You will need to secure the full support of your administration and show a willingness to use alternate formats and outside resources such as other library collections in your area. To meet the challenge of budgetary cutbacks, Ms. Silbersack's collection restructure focused on those materials that required some sort of updating and therefore were a source of ongoing cost. One well-known technique involved initially purchasing the title without establishing a standing order for the updates and then in a designated time, simply repurchasing the set. With the current cost and frequency of supplementation, the "write-for-order" program as it is called can lead to significant savings. As with any program of this type, careful record-keeping insures the program's success. In surveying your patron population, Ms. Silbersack warns against the reliance on written surveys as your sole means of information-gathering and recommends individual interviews with patrons in order to gather necessary anecdotal evidence. In depth knowledge of the politics of an organization and the ability to negotiate are always crucial in being able to effect this type of change in your organization.

The final speaker was Ms. Lorraine Kulpa, librarian at the firm of Baker and McKenzie in Chicago, Illinois. Ms. Kulpa has taken advantage of a move by her firm to a new location to begin to shift her patrons away from printed to electronic resources. Beginning with a detailed inventory of her collection and available shelf space, Ms. Kulpa downsized her collection based on use studies gathered during an earlier reclassification of the collection to Library of Congress schedules. The objective of the restructure was to create a "streamlined working library" that was capable of meeting new requirements for library space, limitations on hardcopy storage, and a focus on access rather than ownership. Ms. Kulpa acknowledged that this trend may eventually lead to the establishment of a virtual library environment that will render the traditional library as we know it obsolete. Once she had convinced herself that this was the proper goal for her program, the next challenge was to convince the "tradition bound" and "non-technically oriented" patrons that their needs could be met successfully using non-traditional resources. To this end the librarian must be able to commit a great deal of time to patron education and enter into flat-fee contracts with online vendors while being able to hold the line on printing costs. Ms. Kulpa's strategy illustrates one of the emerging roles for the librarian in the electronic environment — that of contract negotiator for online access. In some cases, the information necessary to replace hardcopy information is simply not available at this time. The notable example of this is the lack of online materials in foreign and international law; however, Ms. Kulpa feels that it is a matter of time before such information will appear in an online format. In any program as ambitious as this one, politics plays a critical role, but as Ms. Kulpa stated: "This is a battle I must win."

In conclusion, several themes seem to have presented themselves throughout the presentation and appear applicable to all collection restructuring programs. They are:

1. The need to establish clear goals and objectives for any such project.
2. The need to establish a methodology for environmental, patron and collection evaluation in order to gather the data necessary to make informed decisions.
3. The need to establish methods of quantification and a schedule of reporting the results.
4. The need to recognize the role of organizational politics and address these issues through effective communication strategies and educational programs. The goal of communication should be enhanced understanding and cooperation from all parties involved.
5. The need to establish collection restructuring as an ongoing part of the collection management process.