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Sherle Abramson-Bluhm, "120 to 12: Reducing Days to Shelf with Vendor Services, Catalog on Receipt, and Automated Bibliographic Overlay Process" (2013). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference*.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284315243>

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120 to 12: Reducing Days to Shelf with Vendor Services, Catalog on Receipt, and Automated Bibliographic Overlay Process

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The History

Prior to 2007, the University of Michigan acquired and processed materials, mostly print, via two divisions: the Acquisitions and Serials Division, with 38 FTE, and the Monograph Cataloging Division, 36 FTE, primarily focusing on English and Western European language materials. These units were entirely separate, each with their own Division Head. Acquisitions and Serials purchased all the monographs (as well as CDs, DVDs, CD-ROMs, and other nonprint items), purchased and cataloged print serials, acquired electronic serials, and oversaw licensing and access issues. The Monograph Cataloging Division, while providing access to some monographic electronic resources, focused on the print and individually cataloged every item received. This included inscribing acquisitions data, providing full bibliographic records, and assigning classification or accession numbers, as required. Materials for which there was no available record to begin copy cataloging were assigned a location identifier, with a record containing minimal bibliographic data, and shelved in a nonpublic area. This location was referred to as the "Managed Backlog." The ISBNs of these materials were searched for periodically in the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) in hopes of discovering a fuller record. Once fully cataloged, all materials were sent for physical processing: stamps, spine labels, and bookplates. Due to the multistaged workflow, the detailed level of cataloging, and the managed backlog, the average time for a book, from out of the box to the shelf, was over 120 days. A snapshot of days to shelf in 2006 showed the quickest turnaround to be 41 days and the longest to be 228. At this time, the managed backlog was comprised of approximately 9,000 titles, and the working queue of materials was estimated at 3,000 titles. It was also believed that the number of undiscoverable items in the Special Collections Library was over 30,000 items. Over 70,000 items per year were introduced into the workflow. To assist library

patrons in retrieving materials from the backlog or queue, a service was in place called the In-Process Locator. The staff member in this position was tasked with finding the requested items. While requests were satisfied over 90% of the time, with over 70% within 24 hours, the workload was not insignificant: in 2005 there were 1,833 requests; in 2006 there were 2,394 requests; and in 2007 there were 1,193 requests.

The Change

After an internal study of workflows, in conjunction with a report presented by R2 Consulting in August 2006, a major reorganization was implemented. The Acquisitions and Serials Division and the Monograph Cataloging Division were combined and restructured to allow for reallocation of resources to the severely undersupported electronic resources. This new Technical Services Division consisted of Print Acquisitions (monographic and serial, order and receiving) Section, Print Cataloging Section, and an Electronic Resources Section that included Acquisitions, Cataloging, Access, and Database Management. Fiscal Management was the fourth section developed, handling invoices for all material types. All existing staff members were offered positions in the new structure, attempting to satisfy as many requests for areas of interest as possible. Only one person chose to leave rather than adapt to the new structure and intended workflows.

Doing more with the same number of staff required a change in mindset and the incorporation of processes and procedures not previously utilized by The University of Michigan Library. A significant change involved the solicitation of a request for proposal (RFP) to establish a single English language vendor which would allow for the consolidation of all firm and autoship purchases, as well as all standing orders. This was intended to streamline ordering, decrease selection time for subject specialists, and

reduce the possibility of duplication so that shelf-ready processing could be implemented. Shelf-ready processing would eliminate the central review of autoship materials because there could be no rejection. This required that all profiles be reviewed in detail, finely tuned, and adjusted, as needed. Acquiring the mainstream materials with a consolidated vendor supports online selection and vendor database ordering. Vendor-supplied bibliographic records are loaded overnight with order data included to generate an order in the library system, eliminating duplicate data entry. Shelf ready accelerates arrival, and inscription of each item was eliminated. These materials go straight to the stacks office for shelving. One trade-off, accepting the vendor-supplied records, put an end to the historic tradition of unique call numbers.

Materials not accompanied by vendor records, and therefore not shelf ready, require a bibliographic record to be loaded, either at the time an order is created or at arrival, in the case of autoship. These records are generally imported from OCLC and are fairly complete. The staff members in Monograph Receiving evaluate the record with book in hand while using a macro to highlight specific fields to be reviewed and decide if the record is complete. If not, the staff member will perform a quick search in OCLC for a fuller record and, if found, overlay the existing record. These receive physical processing, are labeled, and then forwarded for shelving. These are then considered to have been cataloged on receipt.

Because one of the main goals of these workflow adjustments was to have all materials discoverable and on the shelf in as little time as possible, the Technical Services Division determined a standard for what would be considered an acceptable minimal level record. This has evolved over time and includes, but is not limited to, standard number, if available, main entry, title, publication information, at least one subject (excluding literature), and classification. As long as these elements are present in the appropriate MARC fields, the record is accepted and the item receives processing, is sent to labeling, and is shelved.

Staff members in the Monograph Receiving Unit do not edit records, apply subject headings, or classify, so materials lacking minimal elements are forwarded to the Print Cataloging Unit. Staff members in this unit bring all records up to the agreed upon minimal standard. To assist in the progression of these newly acquired materials in an efficient and timely manner, a Z39.50 protocol-based method was designed to ensure that these minimal records would be upgraded when possible. This involved a systematic search and retrieval process based on detailed specifications for match points to locate records that have fuller bibliographic data and then using an automated procedure to overlay the existing minimal level record. The catalog records are upgraded while the materials remained accessible to patrons on the shelves. Records requiring this process are identified by the insertion of a precise indicator (TSZserv) in a designated field (996) of the bibliographic record. Each month, all flagged records are extracted for processing and other Z39.50-compatible bibliographic databases, such as OCLC and the Library of Congress, are searched for records that could potentially overlay. A counter in the 996 tracks the number of times a search has occurred for any given record. A limit may be established as well as a procedure for reporting these out for further manual cataloging. When a record is overlaid, the process also includes deletion of the 996 flagged field and the insertion of a new field (998) indicating the overlay has been successful (c|zoverlay), the date of overlay, and the final count. This eliminated one-by-one handling of all new materials while providing a means to identify those that required individualized treatment.

The Outcome

While the migration to this new world was time consuming and stressful, the outcome was exceptional. There is no longer a managed backlog, and the in-process queue is the quantity of materials in the workspaces of the monograph receiving staff. The average time to shelf was reduced to 12 days, frequently even less. An equivalent snapshot to the one for 2006 shows the longest turnaround was 27 days, with many at one day. Records provided by vendors were

extensively reviewed at the onset of our contractual agreement and deemed acceptable. Periodic reviews are exercised to ensure continued quality. The catalog on receipt is a success. Many fuller records, completed by peer institutions, are being found once the book is in hand; therefore, materials move more efficiently through our units. Between shelf-ready items and those completed in monographic receiving, less than 15% of these mainstream items are routed to cataloging staff. The TSZserver process has overlaid over 45,000 records of just over 57,000 flagged. Review of the records not overlaid continues, and a variety of reasons why records have not been overlaid have been discovered, including full records that should not have been flagged initially so a fuller record will never be found; foreign materials may take longer than the original 12-month review timeframe to find a fuller overlay option; much older materials—even if newly acquired—should not be flagged, but rather completed immediately; and transcription issues such as typos in records and encoding levels, a specifications for overlay, that had not been updated.

Aside from the obvious benefit to the patrons of having more materials on the shelf more quickly, the print cataloging staff members were not spending their time on mainstream materials which were being cataloged at many other institutions, but were able to turn their expertise to the Special Collections Library where items unique to the University of Michigan were undiscoverable.

Since the reorganization, the hidden and special collections that have been brought to light include:

- 1,000 items in the Parsons-Rau Collection: A collection of nineteenth-century economics materials.
- 5,000 items in the Walp Family Juvenile Collection: A collection of thousands of volumes of children's literature with manuscript notes by the authors and/or illustrators.
- 6,800 items in The Transportation History Collections: This includes thousands of

volumes on railroad history, roads and automobile travel, bicycling, bridges, ballooning, canals, and steamships.

- 800 items in the Myers Collection: Books and pamphlets from Germany's Weimar Republic and Nazi periods.
- Over 10,000 Labadie pamphlets: The Labadie Collection is one of the oldest and most comprehensive collections of radical history in the United States.
- 5,000 of the 200,000 items in a gift of sheet music: A collection consisting of American sheet music from the days of ragtime and jazz.

Meanwhile entire units were created to manage the ever increasing quantity of electronic resources.

Lessons Learned

Change is hard. Change that is successful can still have its difficulties.

When adding vendor services, make sure expectations are very clear to the vendor. Be aware of differences in terminology—what you mean and what the vendor hears may not be the same. For example, the records loaded after placing firm orders in the vendor database arrived in a MARC format. However the vendor only used the terminology “MARC Record,” when talking about the final, full record loaded at shipping. Initially, when questions were asked about the MARC records—referring to the order-level record—the vendor interpreted this to mean the later invoice-level records. This caused a great deal of confusion until terminology was agreed upon for discussion purposes. Plan to do a very thorough review of records and physical processing and continue to review periodically. When accepting shelf ready, be sure this is widely communicated. The end of unique call numbers was not made clear to the members of the stacks shelving staff, and books were being returned to acquisitions and/or cataloging due the duplication.

Cataloging on receipt requires time to train nontatalogers so they may recognize good

records. Establish standards and clearly document those. Clearly demonstrate when a record can be accepted and forwarded to labeling and, more importantly, when to apply the TSZserver flag and then forward. The criteria for flagging should be explicit and understood by all from day one. The expectation of when materials should be forwarded to cataloging staff must be clear to those forwarding and those receiving them for further work.

An absolute for this process was to define the minimal level record up front, document it, and disseminate it widely. It is also important to delineate which materials are treated via the mainstreaming process and may get a TSZserver flag and those that are not flagged and may be given brief records because that is all that is requested by a sublibrary or all that is required. All materials do not need to be treated equally. Treatment decisions need to be documented and communicated library-wide.

Create and document a plan for reviewing flagged records that are not overlaid. If a set number of searches is to occur before this review it is imperative that the plan be in place when the first records reach that review point. Delay will create a backup of unreviewed records which could become overwhelming, while a regular schedule is likely to keep it at an acceptable level of effort per month.

Be prepared to adjust criteria for flagging records or the specifications for overlay. Be prepared to adjust again.

While many library patrons will likely never notice that each catalog record has not been uniquely handled by a cataloger, staff within Technical

Services as well as in other departments may very well be aware. Have an unambiguous mechanism for reporting problems and a system for responding. Train those addressing the problems thoroughly and also offer training to those who may report issues.

It is possible that not every change is required. For example, as the University of Michigan was undergoing this process, the Library of Congress announced the cessation of series authority work. This led to the decision that all items in a monographic series should be treated as unique titles to be classified separately in the belief that a full record for every item would provide better access and the use of the call number in an accepted bibliographic record would speed the process. This led to items in series being scattered, shelved by the specific classification. Coupled with the lack of authority control on the series information in the MARC records, identifying items in a series became more complex for patrons. These items, had they been kept in their set classification and analyzed, would have benefited from increased discovery while keeping the ability to browse the shelf for volumes in a known series.

This reorganization and the changes generated in long established practice made for a difficult transition. But it is hard to argue with a reduction of the average time to shelf, the elimination of the managed backlog, the reallocation of staff for the increasing electronic information environment, and that the 220,000 (and counting) items that have been identified are being cataloged and made accessible.

Change is hard; it can also be very, very good.