From Digits to Diagrams: Using Infographics to Inform Database Retention and Cancellation Decisions

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DATABASE RELATIONSHIPS – MARCH 2013 – SAMPLE

BACKGROUND

Ithaca College librarians used an infographic displaying the relationships among databases to make retention and cancellation decisions for the 2013-14 fiscal year. The diagram was created to help librarians more easily understand how cancelling one database would affect subscriptions to other databases. A modified sample of that illustration is presented here.

INFORMATION GATHERING & DESIGN PROCESS

Information about the Ithaca College Library's 2012-13 database subscriptions and freely-available databases was gathered from hard copy invoices, emails, spreadsheets, staff, and publisher, provider, and consortia websites. Adobe Illustrator was used to create the infographic because of the program’s ability to batch change the styles of objects and because it is industry standard vector graphics software, which allows graphics to be resized without distortion or loss of detail.

Fee-based subscription databases are identified by a green circle with a white dollar sign inside. Both the color green and the dollar symbol are common visual indicators of money. No-fee access is represented by the same symbol with a variation of the standard vector graphics software, which allows graphics to be resized without distortion or loss of detail.

Database packages are placed on the left side of the diagram and are separated from fee-based, direct-from-vendor subscriptions in order to make it easier for librarians to see which database subscriptions directly impact access to other databases. Because this was the most important information, it was placed at the top. Most databases that are not connected to any others (which tended to be those directly licensed from the vendor) are on the right side of the infographic because cancelling them would have the least impact on the cancellation of other databases. Fee-free available databases are toward the bottom because cutting access to these resources would not benefit the Library financially.

The infographic eased collection development decision-making regarding electronic database subscriptions for the 2013-14 fiscal year because fewer sources had to be consulted to find out how cancelling one database would affect the others. The diagram made it apparent to librarians that in some cases it was not possible to cancel a database subscription without cancelling an entire package. This tool will continue to benefit us in future years as long as it is updated as changes occur.

Use of this resource contributed to the librarians' ability to prepare for a flat-funded electronic resources budget by making it easier to identify potential cost savings. Along with the diagram, cost and usage data for the subscription databases, holdings overlap information, and faculty input informed the following decisions resulting in a cost savings of approximately $15,000:

- Cancelling Biography in Context (Gale)
- Cancelling Marquis Who's Who

CONCLUSION

As a result of creating this database infographic, it became clear that some information resided only in the memories of long-time staff and was not documented. The librarians also learned that the cost-per-search statistics that have been collected in previous years are misleading because they do not account for the bundled nature of some products. Future iterations of the diagram will include number of simultaneous users, total price of the database or package, if the fee paid is a content or access fee, and cost per search. The addition of this information will ease future decision making as all relevant information will be in the same place. Repercussions of cancelling a database, such as access fees for perpetual access ebooks on the platform of the cancelled database, will also be added. The diagram serves an additional purpose of making it easier for the electronic resources librarian to keep track of these connections. The infographic is expected to retain its value should the library need to plan for flat funding or budget reduction in the future.

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