December 1999

Biz of Acq-Selecting and Processing Electronic Resources: How to Plug Libraries into the Workflow

Rob Withers  
*Miami University Libraries, rwithers@lib.muohio.edu*

Sandra K. Paul  
*SKP Associates, SKPAssoc@cwixmail.com*

Albert Simmonds  
*SKP Associates, awsimmo@ibm.net*

Rob Richards  
*University of Colorado Law Library, rrichard@stripe.colorado.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation

Withers, Rob; Paul, Sandra K.; Simmonds, Albert; and Richards, Rob (1999) "Biz of Acq-Selecting and Processing Electronic Resources: How to Plug Libraries into the Workflow," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 11: Iss. 6, Article 32.  
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3889

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
Biz of Acq — Selecting and Processing Electronic Resources: How to Plug Librarians into the Workflow

by Rob Withers (Electronic Information Services Librarian, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio 45056) <rwithers@lib.muohio.edu>

Column Editor: Rob Richards (Technical Services Librarian, University of Colorado Law Library) <rrichard@stripe.colorado.edu>

Column Editor's Note: Electronic resources take up more and more of our time and attention as acquisitions librarians. Because of their particular nature as digital entities, and because of the complex acquisitions arrangements they often require, electronic products are forcing librarians to rethink and reform procedures for selection and integration of materials into the collection. In this month’s column, Rob Withers, Electronic Information Services Librarian at Miami University, draws on a new survey of librarians, as well as recent library science literature, to describe how libraries are adapting acquisitions and collection development processes to the digital age. —RR

Libraries have been adding a growing number of electronic resources to their collections and the availability of resources over the Internet has fueled this proliferation. In his 1996 article, Gene Allen notes that librarians he surveyed predicted that 10 years from the date of his survey, expenditures for electronic resources would be anywhere from 5% to 25% of their budget.1 Online products do not “play by the rules” set for selecting, ordering and processing library materials because: Technical prowess may be needed to assess the feasibility of a product in a particular environment; The library does not receive physical copies to inspect and process; Electronic resources may be bundled together with dozens or even hundreds of products; Online products may be purchased by a consortium, rather than by a single institution.2

Adding electronic resources to the collection therefore poses a number of questions to those involved with acquisitions: Who should be involved in evaluating resources prior to order placement? How are electronic resources paid for? How are they inspected and checked in when they become available? Who is notified after they have been received? What changes in job descriptions are needed to ensure the ability to select, order, and process these materials?

To answer these questions, this column will rely on a survey of existing literature concerned with processing electronic resources. In addition, responses to a questionnaire posted to AcqNet-L and Coldev-L will help to explore the ways that libraries are coping with the challenges posed by the addition of electronic resources, particularly Internet resources, to their collections.

Selecting and Ordering

In an article on electronic resources, one librarian stated: “Selections: they’re not just for collection development librarians any more.” Responses to a survey posted to Coldev-L and AcqNet-L support her statement. A majority of respondents (89%) indicated that collection development librarians selected electronic resources. However, 84% of respondents indicated that other types of librarians could also select items. 72% reported that reference librarians could select, 44% that electronic resources librarians could select, 16% reported that systems librarians could make selection decisions, and 17% of institutions reported that selection decisions could be made by other positions. Smaller libraries at which no position dedicated exclusively to collection development

International Dateline
from page 79

through technology, and there has been a concern that rights-holders may use some form of anti-copying technology to prevent even legally-permitted copying.

An important change is the provision for compensation to rights-holders when a copy is made for the purposes of private copying, and illustration for teaching and scientific research. Libraries are now also able to make copies of items for the purposes of archiving and conservation purposes. In the initial proposal, libraries would be in breach of copyright for these activities.

There are quite a number of detailed changes in other articles, but in the main these do not have a substantive impact on libraries and information services. One final addition to the Amended Proposal is the establishment of a Contact Committee, set up with representatives of the competent authorities of the Member States, to monitor progress with the implementation of the Directive, provide a forum for the exchange of information, and to examine development in the sector. This approach is similar to the mechanism set up under the Data Protection Directive and is very much to be welcomed.

Timetable for implementation

Every six months a Member State in rotation takes the responsibility of acting as the President of the European Commission, and currently it is Finland, which was keen to have pushed through the directive as part of its commitment to information society developments. Approval of the Directive will have to be made by the Council of Ministers of each Member State responsible for what is called the Internal Market. A Council Working Party was set up earlier in the year to work through amendments suggested by the Parliament and other groups.

At a meeting in September, discussion was mainly focused on Article 6 and it seems that libraries and other user groups’ concerns were taken on board by almost all national experts, so that a favourable new wording of Article 6 is likely to be proposed. The next meeting of the working party on the Directive was held on 28-29 October in Helsinki, and under discussion were the evolution of conditions of contracts and licenses concerning digital use, technological protection systems and rights management information, liability and the institution of blocking illegal distribution of protected works, and the question of applicable law in the digital environment.

A status report will be presented at the Internal Market Council on 7 December. It seems now that the Finnish presidency will not be able to reach a political agreement or common position in this year and that the dossier will move on to the Portuguese presidency, though little change in direction or commitment is likely. The Portuguese presidency plans to reach a political agreement/common position in March 2000. This means that it is likely that the Directive will have to be implemented by Member States in 2003.

continued on page 81

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
ment existed were most likely to report selection made by someone other than a collection development librarian. Some larger university and public libraries mentioned that assistant directors participated in selection decisions, as well.

Selection decisions undergo at least some review at all responding libraries: 30% reported that selection decisions were “sometimes” reviewed and 61% that they were “always” reviewed. The person or persons responsible for reviewing decisions vary enormously. As one person noted, the need to “worry about implementation, access, copyright, and quality control” often means that individuals with different perspectives must assess each electronic product. Of those libraries responding to the survey, 45% indicated that decisions are reviewed by a committee. At smaller libraries serving colleges and community colleges, this percentage was lower—17% and 33%, respectively, whereas 72% of larger university libraries used a committee to evaluate decisions. Of those institutions not relying on a committee, 14 required approval from a department head or director, two required approval from a systems librarian, and one required approval from an electronic resources librarian. Make-up of the committees that approve orders varies, but may include systems librarians (17%); electronic resources librarians (10%), or acquisitions librarians (2%). Of those libraries that only sometimes evaluated decisions, the primary criteria used to determine which decisions are reviewed are cost (75%), compatibility with library hardware/software (62%), and cross-disciplinary coverage (55%), and consortial purchases (58%).

Evaluating electronic products is difficult without using the product. As one librarian observes, assessing electronic products can require gauging layout, graphics, audio/video components, ease of use, and response time. She suggests that many librarians rely on thirty-day trials, and results of our survey indicate that 96% of users sometimes take advantage of trial offers. Only slightly less popular are demonstrations, which 86% of libraries used. Approximately one third of responding institutions, particularly those with less extensive collections, sometimes visit other libraries that have the product. One institution occasionally uses interlibrary loan to obtain multimedia products.

A variety of pricing structures exists for electronic resources: libraries may pay for a single item, a package of items, or a combination of print/electronic subscriptions; they may purchase individually or as members of a consortium; and they may pay for a site license, or for a product limited to a certain number of simultaneous users. The types of funds used to pay for electronic products are as varied as the purchasing options. Libraries rely on a mix of funds to pay for electronic products. Of those libraries responding to the survey, 70% had a fund or funds devoted to electronic resources. In several instances, these funds were used for all electronic products, but most libraries utilize these funds for resources which cross disciplinary boundaries or are general reference resources. Also used are serials funds for a particular discipline (37%), monographic funds for a particular discipline (33%), general serials funds (34%), and general monographic funds (23%). As one author speculated in her 1998 article, most libraries rely on electronic funds for package deals including items relevant to many fields, but ordinarily use discipline-specific funds for other resources. Two-thirds of libraries surveyed used a combination of these types of funds; 29% used a separate electronic resources fund for all purchases, and 5% relied on serials funds. Institutions relying solely on serials funds tended to be smaller, which include eight university libraries. Surprisingly, although electronic purchases are essentially serial in nature—in that they require a continuing commitment of funds—nonetheless monographic funds are widely used for such purchases.

Most libraries cannot use funds from the materials budget for software/hardware. In his study of 15 Midwestern university libraries, Norman found that only 22% of libraries could purchase hardware... continued on page 82
Most libraries have now joined Minnesota in including electronic resources in their integrated system and in their technical services workflow. However, integrating electronic resources with print resources raises new questions: How and by whom are they checked in? How is an electronic item inspected for defects? And who is notified of its arrival and expected to process it?

Some libraries opt not to “inspect” electronic resources at all: 16% indicated that they did not inspect such resources, while another 36% indicated that they only spot-checked resources. Such libraries often indicated that they expected selectors to have inspected items for defects prior to placing an order, or that they were informed of problems by feedback from public services staff or users. However, many other libraries do systematically inspect their receipts, and several libraries noted that they had a schedule for checking in materials reports. Libraries that do systematically inspect electronic receipts rely most often on selectors (55%), systems personnel (43%), reference librarians (37%), heads of collection development (35%), and electronic resources librarians (10%). By less than 10% of responding libraries were administrators, media librarians, and catalogers. Some libraries responding to the survey have firm guidelines for the inspection of materials. One library noted that a trial of the product was required before it could be ordered. Another library requires one selector to be designated as a “point person” who evaluates the product, creates information manuals for the product, provides training for other librarians, and remains the in-house expert on that product once it is available at the library.

Cataloging issues relating to electronic resources affect acquisitions because “there is no longer an assumed path to cataloging after acquisitions of a remotely accessed title, as there has been for all but a subset of print materials. There is no piece received to trigger cataloging, and not all remote resources are cataloged.” Following check-in, libraries can do exercise a number of options for making electronic resources available, and consequently, for routine materials out of the acquisitions and serials department. Close to two-thirds of responding libraries (62%) said that they cataloged electronic resources in their OPACs, but an even greater majority (93%) made their electronic resources available via library Web pages. University libraries (90%) were most likely to rely on Web pages, while only 50% of colleges and 66% of community colleges did so. Subject pages developed by users are also frequently used by 45% of all respondents; again, university libraries were more likely to use them (49%) than community colleges (33%) and colleges (20%), or other institutions. This overlap is not surprising. The University of Minnesota relies on Web pages and catalogs to provide access to electronic titles. Some librarians at that institution want to continue adding links to the Web page because users find it convenient; in addition, despite attempts to review holdings, each review still identifies items that have not been cataloged. Other

Endnotes
4 Duranaceau, 93-94.
5 Duranaceau, 94.
6 Duranaceau, 95.
Publishers: Strengthen Your Library Connection

Librarians and scholarly publishers have a unique relationship. PCG’s staff of consultants, librarians, teleresearchers, and marketing professionals brings institutions and publishers closer together in a number of ways:

► Consortia Sales
► Telephone Renewals
► Market Research
► Library Focus Groups

Call us at 800-494-6514 or 617-497-6514 or visit www.pcgplus.com for more information about our library marketing services.

Webworthy

Column Editor: Pamela M. Rose (Web Services and Library Promotion Coordinator, Health Sciences Library, University of Buffalo) <pmrose@acsu.buffalo.edu>  http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~pmrose

Web sites are selected for broad appeal, depth of information, and ease of access. Sites are organized by broad subject area and visited just prior to publication. Please let the editor know of any sites that are not accessible. Comments and suggestions welcome. Unless otherwise noted in square brackets following the description, Internet addresses were published in Science, NetWatch column edited by Jocelyn Kaiser.

Cancer

The second leading cause of death in the nation affects everything from art to finances to wills. The University of Pennsylvania Cancer Center maintains Oncolink, which offers a wealth of information to patients and their doctors, information which not only informs treatment choices, but also provides financial assistance (American Viatical Corporation which purchases Life Insurance Policies for cash), aesthetic relief (Confronting Cancer Through Art), conference information, and book reviews.  http://oncolink.upenn.edu/

Chronology

Need to know the exact time, to the fraction-of-a-second? Check the National Institutes of Standards and Technology Official U.S. Time site, where you can select a time zone, drop over to the exhibits area and find out what Daylight Saving Time is and why we use it, or wander through a complete history of time. Note that Coordinated Universal Time, one of the zones available, is continued on page 84

Biz of Acq

from page 82

librarians object to separating information by format and find the Web page list, now close to 500 items, cumbersome to maintain.15

One way of reducing the time and effort needed to maintain Web pages which list electronic resources is to export data from cataloging records and use it to dynamically generate Web pages which list electronic products. A small number of the institutions surveyed for this article (7%) do so, and another 7%, including the author’s institution, are working to develop such products. At a recent ALA discussion on electronic serials, the audience leaned towards using a combination of dynamically generated Web pages and catalog records. They felt that users would prefer to find information displayed in a grouping that might prompt use as opposed to finding individual items in the catalog.14

A wide variety of staff positions is needed to support electronic resources and maintain the means of accessing them. Not surprisingly, the survey used in this article found that a broad cross-section of library staff may be notified upon arrival of an item. The survey results indicate that those notified include the selector who ordered it (55% of libraries), the systems office (42%), head of reference (37%), head of collection development (35%), and electronic resources librarians (10%). Notified at less than 10% of responding libraries were catalogers, faculty members, media science librarians, and administrators. Two-thirds of the libraries responding to the survey indicated that they notified librarians in more than one of these categories upon receipt of electronic resources. Two libraries issued a library-wide electronic mailing.

Impact on Personnel

The explosion of electronic resources being incorporated into everyday library work has changed work routines, and, in some places, has resulted in the creation of new jobs or the re-structuring of already existing positions. Ellen Finnie Durancerne’s informal survey of postings to listservs in 1997 revealed advertisements for newly created technical services positions, including “electronic access librarian,” “Electronic Publishing and Collections Librarian,” and “Scholarly Communication Librarian.” Of those libraries responding to the survey done for this column, 35% of libraries report such changes, most often in acquisitions (10% of respondents), serials cataloging (7%), electronic resources (7%), cataloging (3%), serials acquisitions (5%), or collection development (3%). Another trend is writing new responsibilities into position descriptions. As examples of this trend, Durancerne’s 1997 study also mentions serials librarians with electronic resources added to their job descriptions, and acquisitions librarians who are asked to assume responsibility for licensing and negotiating.16