September 2003

People Profile: Rob Withers

Editor

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Recommended Citation
Editor (2003) 'People Profile: Rob Withers,' Against the Grain: Vol. 15: Iss. 4, Article 19.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4486

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Deciding what to do with titles available through an aggregator or database is more challenging. The majority of institutions leaned toward retaining subscriptions to print versions. However, some institutions indicated that availability of titles through an aggregator could impact decisions on whether to subscribe to print versions or where to house them. One larger university chose to send titles available through aggregators to storage. Several institutions indicated that the availability of materials through an aggregator might impact selection decisions, with one institution noting that they discuss the availability of titles currently available through an aggregator if faculty requested a print subscription to a title, and one institution indicating that it planned to broach plans to cancel print versions with faculty to determine their interest.

At the other end of the spectrum, 19.2% indicated that they did not end print subscriptions also available through an aggregator. The most frequent issues studied by institutions who considered ending print subscriptions were the ability to archive issues in the event that the aggregator ceased to provide access (30.8%) and completeness of content for each journal title (15.4%). Other issues included difficulty in browsing by issue through aggregator databases (7.7%) and timeliness with which new issues became available (3.8%).

Libraries which retained overlapping subscriptions to print and electronic versions noted that the print copies of collections remain browseable, and stressed the importance of browseability to their users. One respondent noted that some faculty members encouraged students to browse journal titles in a particular subject area in order to locate articles; eliminating print subscriptions might result in students overlooking potentially useful articles. Another liberal arts college noted that their user base included many traditional users, although students were increasingly using electronic journals. In some cases, only core titles were available in both formats, although some community colleges strongly believed that it was important to retain a fully-browsable journal collection.

Libraries which dropped print subscriptions noted that many students seemed comfortable (or even preoccupied with) electronic titles. One respondent observed “print journal access is rapidly becoming a non-issue... we currently have ca. 5x the number of online journals. Electronic delivery is expected.” Another respondent observed that her library received “little comment on the print titles. Most users (students in particular) prefer online journals and are pleased that we have so many—although it’s NEVER enough.” One institution explicitly noted that they viewed the cancellation of print titles duplicated electronically as an opportunity to provide funds for additional titles.

Some libraries surveyed believed that few significant changes in providing print titles are likely to occur in the near future (11.5%). One community college stated that although they believed that there would be fewer print titles, maintaining browseable access to core titles was important that remaining print titles would need to be even more prominently featured. Others noted that they did not believe that they would be increasing the number of print titles available (20%), and that print copies would be as prominently located (11.5%). One third (34.6%) indicated that online delivery would become even more popular.

Off-site storage

Like eliminating print subscriptions to titles available in electronic format, the use of storage facilities provides an opportunity to free up storage space, if not funds for new subscriptions. Approximately 40% of libraries responding to the survey had access to off-site storage, with several others mentioning on-site storage facilities or locations for older/lesser heavily-used titles separate from the main journals area. Individuals with the power to determine transfer to storage include librarians or librarians working together with faculty members (20% of responses each). Factors which contributed to decisions to transfer titles to off-site storage include the date of publication for the volume (36.4%), usage (18.2%), availability of space for print volumes (18.2%) and availability of online versions of periodicals (18.2%).

Policies for Transferring to Storage

continued on page 95

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