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Selecting and Acquiring eBooks: from page 26

loaded into Collection Manager. Libraries purchasing EBL titles in Collection Manager will have consolidated invoicing through Blackwell’s. Blackwell’s is also beginning to work directly with publishers to add their eBooks to Collection Manager.

In reality, eBooks are often released to eBook vendors after the print counterpart has been published, thus reducing the utility of these integration efforts. More publishers are beginning to publish eBooks and print books simultaneously, but they still may place an embargo period on eBooks sold through distributors, similar to the process of embargoing current issues of e-journals in aggregated databases. Both Blackwell’s and EBL have been working collaboratively with publishers to find mutually beneficial arrangements that facilitate the early release of eBooks.

netLibrary has developed two of its own eBook ordering tools, TitleSelect and TitleDirect. TitleSelect is simply an online ordering interface for netLibrary’s catalog of more than 70,000 eBooks, journal titles and other materials. Lists of titles can be shared among librarians before submitting an order. TitleDirect is a profiling tool that allows librarians to create eBook profiles based on subject areas, publishers and publication dates. Lists of new content matching the profile are emailed at desired intervals (every 30, 60 or 90 days). Although these tools aid librarians in navigating netLibrary’s large collection, they require separate process for eBook selection, which can be very time-consuming.

Subscription-based eBook Purchases

eBook distributors such as ebrary and Books24x7 package eBooks in databases with annual subscriptions, creating a selection and acquisitions process very similar to that employed for aggregated e-journal databases (i.e., those provided by EBSCOhost and Gale InfoTrac). Many libraries purchase subscriptions to these eBook databases using serials funds and reevaluate the subscription each year. However, the utility and convenience of these eBook databases may outweigh the concern that eBook titles within the database are duplicates of titles in the library’s print collection. Access to a collection of content that is constantly being refreshed may be the larger priority.

A growing trend among eBook vendors is to offer eBooks as part of mixed-format databases of e-content. Some vendors such as Gale and Elsevier are creating mixed-format databases that contain eBooks, e-journals, white papers and conference proceedings. ebrary’s Academic Complete collection contains maps, sheet music, journals and reports, and netLibrary has subtly changed several occurrences of the word “eBook” to “eContent” on its search interface. As mentioned previously, ebrary will be making a major announcement in January 2005, about a new development that will enable libraries to create virtual library portals of e-content. The goal in amassing a focused pool of e-content with a common search interface is to create a tool that facilitates a more seamless research experience. It is clear that the eBook marketplace will continue to change and expand at a fast pace, offering libraries new purchase models that will further complicate selection and acquisition processes.

The Cost of eBooks

Although eBook vendors are exploring new purchase models, eBooks can still deliver sticker shock. Is the cost justified by user needs and benefits such as full-text searching and anytime/anywhere access? eBooks purchased at the title level usually carry an annual access fee, and FTE-based subscriptions can be very expensive for medium to large libraries. On the other hand, eBooks can be easily and quickly made available to users, MARC records are often provided at no cost, and eBooks do not require shelf space.

Libraries have realized significant cost savings by participating in consortial eBook purchases. Consortial purchasing can work very well for subscription-based, bundled eBook packages. However, libraries participating in a shared collection built at the title level (such as netLibrary) may experience frustration at their reduced ability to tailor the collection to their own user community, and the process of building the collection can be a time-consuming effort.

Considerations for eBook Selection

Fortunately, librarians are beginning to understand more about how patrons use eBooks. Usage statistics show that eBooks are being adopted at an increasing rate. As all types of readers encounter them in the online catalog and on the Internet, the demand has increased. Students appreciate the convenience of being able to access eBooks from their homes at all hours, while professors want the ability to include links to eBooks in course packs and use them in course reserves in the place of or in conjunction with a print copy.

Some important evaluation criteria should be considered in both title-by-title selection of eBooks and evaluation of bundled eBook packages:

- **User Expectations:** It is important to acquire eBook collection(s) that best serve your users’ needs. Do you have a distance education program(s) to support? Does the faculty on your campus want to be able to use eBooks for reserves, link them in course packs, or integrate them into Web instruction software such as Blackboard and WebCT? It is important to note that eBook vendors may limit or restrict these types of use.

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