And They Were There -- Reports of Meetings -- 8th Annual Mid-South E-Resource Symposium

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a conversation with the Physics-Astronomy Department. Why are they not using the collection here? What resources do they need instead?

While having complete runs of series is preferred, we discovered that too many series had parts that were never used. Cancelling low use standing orders and unblocking the series within our approval profile has allowed the selectors to purchase only the most relevant titles.

When we moved into our new library ten years ago, we created a very pleasant newspaper reading room to accommodate the heavy usage that we had in the old library. Today the paper usage has plummeted. Our holdings have decreased to a few local and popular dailies as the Internet has replaced the paper newspaper.

2) Have a list of possible cancellations in advance. Since many of the teaching faculty are not readily available during the spring or summer, it is essential to discuss the possibilities earlier in the year (though email has made it easier to stay in touch). While paper journals have been an obvious target, we have also reviewed library cancellations. The cost of interlibrary loan versus ownership should be considered.

3) Wish lists. While we have been able to support most of our faculty’s individual book requests, we have not always had the funds to initiate the annual expense of journal subscriptions or electronic resources. Separate databases have been created for these formats. We ask that the faculty prioritize their requests. This allows us to add titles as additional money becomes available. Past interlibrary loan requests is almost always required before a new subscription is considered.

4) Keep with the new technologies/trends in the profession. It is important to periodically check to see if your vendors are giving you the best possible financial deal by comparing the rates of their competition, either formally with a RFP (if required by your state) or informally via sales visits. Is it time to outsource functions of technical services?

Having a tighter budget does have a positive side: it has forced us to become better managers of our library’s resources. Anyone can spend money; only the creative can manage it successfully and keep your clientele happy.

Here’s hoping that your budget news was good this year and may your favorite football team have a successful season.
As I See It! — Abstracting and Indexing Services — The Ostriches of Information

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W ork as a consultant in scholarly communications follows many paths, and uncovers many perspectives. A recent assignment has prompted me to consider the longer term future of abstracting and indexing (A&I) services. My interest has been reinforced by the recent publication of two reports, one concerned with faculty use of the library as a portal, and the other on the routes by which readers navigate to scholarly content.

It seems to me that A&I services face a difficult and uncertain future. There are three reasons for this:

- ‘The Google effect’: the increasing use of Google or Google Scholar, and other general search engines;
- The discernible trend in scholars by-passing the library to find the information they require; and
- A&I services’ own business models, which are wholly focussed on the library market.

In a study published in September 2008, Simon Inger and Tracy Gardner reported on a survey of readers’ behaviour in starting their research (Inger S & Gardner T, How Readers Navigate to Scholarly Content, www.sic.ox14.com/howreadersnavigateotoscholarlycontent.pdf, 2008). It revealed that usage of both generalist search engines and A & I services has increased, largely at the expense of library Web pages and OPACs. Where readers begin research with a literature survey, and search for journal articles on a specific subject, both A&I services and general search engines have become more popular than library or publisher Web pages.

A&I services provide a single stop for the key literature in any discipline, but no A&I service covers everything in the discipline. Most of them do not take the reader to interdisciplinary material that may well add insight to their research, while the generalist search engines may well do so.

Is this trend away from the OPAC and library Web pages significant? A report published by Ithaka in August 2008 pulled together two 2006 surveys, one of US faculty and the other of librarians (Schenfeld R. & Housewright R., Ithaka’s 2006 Studies of Key Stakeholders in the Digital Transformation in Higher Education, www.ithaka.org/research/faculty-and-librarian-surveys, 2008). It reported that the profile and perceived relevance of the library have declined. There are considerable variations in faculty perception by discipline, but the general trend is that the perception of the library as the gateway to information has fallen, even though librarians still regard this role as very important. Faculty believe that their reliance on the library as the gateway will continue to fall. As a result, the library is becoming invisible. Libraries face a considerable challenge in marketing their relevance to their users. Researchers, especially in the sciences and in economics, look to other digital sources of information, and are by-passing the library.

If academic libraries are being by-passed by the very faculty that they serve, how are A&I services reacting? Well, most of them are doggedly adhering to the tried and tested mechanism of institutional pricing for academic libraries. They are not offering any alternative pricing schemes to reach markets outside the university and research library markets with which they are familiar. While they continue to pursue their core library markets, they ignore other users out there that might be prepared to pay for direct access if the price was right:

- There are professionals who operate outside universities who need access to published professional and research information. Many of them operate in small organizations — SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) in Europe, SMBs in the United States. In the USA, there are 24.1 million firms employing fewer than ten people, of which 19.5 million have no employees other than the owners (www.census.gov/epcd/www/smallbus.html). In the UK, there are 4.4 million such firms, out of a total of 4.7 million firms of all sizes (www.berr.gov.uk); they include consultants like me. In both countries, it is the small firms that drive innovation and competition.
- There are also junior and community colleges (in the UK we call this sector ‘Further Education’). While these institutions are primarily involved in teaching vocational courses, some provide entry into the university sector, and many of their teaching staff might well have recourse to A&I services to locate relevant content in disciplines such as education, healthcare, basic engineering, business studies etc... But they cannot afford to justify high prices predicated on intensive usage in a university environment.

There are no pricing schemes for these ‘light users’. A&I vendors do not offer small institution rates, or ‘pay-per-session’, or short term access for less than a year. As a result, A&I vendors are ignoring — and losing — a range of customers that would find their products useful but only at a price that realistically represents value for money for them. Most vendors simply have not developed business models or mechanisms that would enable online purchase by individuals or small firms.

Yet e-commerce systems and PayPal are commonplace. Access and authentication controls are highly developed. Book and journal publishers can sell any individual an eBook or a journal subscription at an individual (rather than an institutional) subscription price. Why not other information products?

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Scriptions, elimination of claiming, and moving from Standing Orders to approvals.

On a personal note, attending the 8th Annual Mid-South E-Resource Symposium at Mississippi State University was more than just a professional development opportunity for me; it was a homecoming. I was the Serials Librarian at MSU for two years, and I helped plan the 2nd and 3rd annual symposiums (which, back then, were called E-Resource Workshops).

Fresh out of graduate school, the Serials Librarian position at MSU was my first professional job, and it was there, under the tutelage of the Serials Coordinator, Maria Collins, that I first learned about the world of serials and electronic resources. (Yes, the same Maria Collins that was one of the speakers at this year’s symposium. We had a nice reunion.) MSU is where I met my husband, John, who was the evening Circulation Supervisor at Mitchell Memorial Library at the time. Going back to Starkville for this year’s symposium was a little like going home, for both John and me. We were able to introduce all of our MSU friends and colleagues to our son, Cullen, and we were able to catch up with a lot of familiar and friendly faces.

I would personally like to thank all of the faculty and staff at the Mississippi State University Libraries who have had a hand in planning these symposiums over the years and who keep this program going year after year. They are doing good things down there in Mississippi, and I encourage Against the Grain readers to keep an eye on this highly worthwhile workshop in the coming years. 🖤

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