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Biz of Acq — Sample Magazine Display at the Pratt Institute Library: 2003-2006

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Background

The Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in several design fields, fine arts, art history, and other disciplines. The library’s expansive, rich, unusual periodicals collection is popular with the Pratt community and is frequently used by individual students, staff, and faculty as well as classes. Librarians have taught library instruction sessions on the periodicals collections, including current, bound, and special collections. The collection includes periodicals about fine arts, art history, design, literature, current events, hard sciences, social sciences, library science (at Pratt Manhattan), and more. The Periodicals Committee consisted of all the librarians responsible for selecting materials for the library. Librarians contributed in their areas of specialty or research, with some librarians more deeply involved than others. As the chair, I worked closely with the Technical Services librarian and clerical staff on the development process can be difficult.

Project Management

The Pratt Institute Library successfully gathered patron feedback via a sample journal display and incorporated their results into their collection management decisions. I am greatly pleased to present with this article author Susan Thomas’s Poem “Relax” Art Library,” assembled entirely from patrons’ comments written into sample magazines. — MF

“Relax” Art Library

Assembled from Pratt Institute Library patrons’ comments written in the back of sample magazines.

I thought personally
I’m digging this big time
I have been waiting around
with substance and meaning

Why haven’t you already?
architecture eye candy
don’t listen to him
too many ads and corporate nah

Lesshipster crap would be great too!
would love to frequent this magazine
if you know what’s good
seriously, from different countries

More fire, blaze it up!!
the best Japanese magazines
today’s anarchists
smash layout
so “relax” art library

Upstairs. fabulous
the word strange is a helpful reference
and great all in one breath
yes, I say I have always loved this one.

For general interest and inspiration
To examine design specimens
To read about emerging artists, designers, and writers
To be informed about current trends in
the avant-garde of creative fields
To be informed about current affairs
To become exposed to independent periodicals publishing, including magazines as well as zines.

The Sample Magazine Display

One of the goals of the Periodicals Committee was to create more opportunities for patrons to contribute to collection development. Several years ago, many of the subscriptions beyond art, architecture, and design were straight out of the print Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature, Social Sciences Index, and Humanities Index. They were not necessarily the best periodicals for the PIL community in the 21st Century. Thus, a great deal of work was done to select more relevant, important, and unique titles. The committee came up with a plan to acquire sample periodicals, display them, and ask patrons to write comments about why the library should (or should not) subscribe or regularly purchase a magazine. The committee read the comments and considered them during the course of its selection process. The committee thought long and hard about the collection and decided early on that a title need not be indexed or available via subscription to be selected for regular acquisition.

When we became aware of a new or established magazine of potential interest to the library community and curricula, we attempted to acquire a sample from the publisher or purchased an issue from a bookstore. Sometimes patrons would bring sample issues of favorite magazines, and those would be added to the display. In addition, a notebook was kept on display. In it patrons wrote the names of publications they thought the library should subscribe.

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scribe to or otherwise acquire. Acquisition as well as subscription is mentioned because the library had to purchase several titles regularly from bookstores because subscriptions did not exist (Gum, a design magazine), a credit card was required for subscription (Tate, etc., a UK art magazine), or EBSCO could not provide or could no longer provide (Arquine, a Spanish architecture magazine). In some cases the Library made bookstore purchases until EBSCO was finally able to provide a subscription. Examples included Marmalade (UK design magazine), 032c (German art magazine), and Bidoun (U.S. published magazine about art and culture in the Middle East).

In 2001 and 2002, the Dean of Libraries approved a budget of a few hundred dollars so that librarians could purchase sample periodicals. The money came from petty cash in increments of no more than $25. Librarians visited bookstores, made purchases, and were reimbursed. During those years, samples were not displayed but were studied by librarians only. Beginning in 2003, samples were put on display. Later, the budget was $400 — later increased to $600 — and was expanded to officially include sample magazines and bookstore purchases of regularly acquired magazines that did not offer subscriptions, including zines. Most purchases were made at St. Mark’s Bookshop and Spoonbill & Sugartown Bookstore in New York. If unavailable at a bookstore where the PIL had an account, materials were purchased with petty cash. Without such a budget and such flexibility, the project would have been much weaker since the library would have had to rely on free samples (usually available only from well-established journals, not independent art and design publishers) and donations.

The magazines were typically displayed face out, next to the New Book Display. Another library could choose to display sample magazines with subscription and regularly acquired magazines, depending on the library’s layout and other factors. One reason we put the display with the New Books was to avoid the sample magazines getting mixed up with the regular magazines. A sticker was placed on each sample magazine’s cover, identifying the magazine as a sample and requesting the reader/browser to write comments in the back. “Why (not) should the Library subscribe to this magazine?” Patrons wrote on a piece of paper taped in the back. Samples were kept on display for several months — usually for about a semester.

The Outcome

I found comments written in most of the magazines. The comments in general were rather thoughtful, with the occasional, marginally useful “This sux!” or “this is great! Subscribe!” Useful comments included: “There is too much advertising in this magazine,” “architecture eye candy, blah,” “all style but no substance.” We often responded to each other’s comments, as well: “don’t listen to him.” “I agree, there aren’t enough Japanese magazines in the library.” Writers would often compare the periodical to the rest of the collection, noting that it was “unique,” “popular,” etc. One patron wrote that she gained an internship at one of the sample magazines. Someone else wrote that a part-time faculty member at Pratt was involved in the production of the magazine. Another said that she loved the new magazine so much that she ordered a subscription for herself and friends. Such comments were quite pleasant to read.

After a magazine was removed from display, I word processed all the comments and shared the results with the Periodicals Committee. Magazines that were clear “winners” were usually selected for subscription. A great example is Gastronomica: the journal of food and culture. Everyone loved that journal! Sometimes the committee selected a magazine for subscription even if the patron had not requested (or were just lacking). Overall, the committee read the comments with great interest and used them as one tool in its selection process.

Then stickers were put on the cover and the magazines were returned to display for a short time. The stickers indicated that the Library would subscribe, thank you very much for your input; or the Library would not subscribe, thank you very much for your input. In some cases, the sticker said that the magazine was still under consideration. (Since adjustments to the EBSCO order were usually made during the summer, the committee sometimes had to wait before deciding. The library couldn’t add anything unless something else was canceled or became defunct.) There was a “good faith” agreement with the library administration that the total budget for new subscriptions would not exceed the amount of money freed up by cancellations and defunct titles. Even so, the serials budget did increase every year because EBSCO increased prices. The “good faith” agreement was based on the popularity and heavy use of the periodicals collection. Good support from the college administration was key, as well.

Deselection was part of the process. The committee was not afraid to cancel titles infrequently used (based mostly on observation) or used but (now) available in a full-text database. Heavily illustrated magazines were never canceled; more likely to be canceled were seldom-used academic journals. The librarians attempted to include the discipline faculty in some of the selection and deselection; but, as most librarians will not be surprised to hear, many faculty members simply said that the library should not cancel anything in their
work a lot,” one said it had helped somewhat, and one said it had had no effect. This consensus is remarkable because the common opinion is that library staff tends to be resistant to change, making a 2.0 tool like a wiki hard to implement successfully. Only a few months after the move to the wiki, our staff unanimously preferred it to the former documentation.

As part of the survey, I also asked the ordering staff to write in their opinions of the advantages and disadvantages of the wiki. Interactivity, such as the ability to add comments and suggestions, was frequently listed as an advantage. The other benefit cited by several staff members is the clear linking within the wiki to other departments’ Websites. One respondent wrote the best thing about the Consul procedures is “having other units’ procedures ’up front’ and available.”

The main disadvantage mentioned by respondents was searching. Staff members wrote they wanted to be able to search by keyword. This is possible in Confluence, but not immediately obvious. There is a search box that searches across all “spaces” within Stanford’s installation. After an initial search, you can limit results to a particular space. The labeling I have done to link documents within the ordering space is another option for searching. The staff response on this subject shows a need for more training in Consul searching.

The Future

The consensus of the ordering staff was that a wiki platform for the unit’s procedures was beneficial to acquisitions work. Procedures are kept current and we save managerial time with a tool that allows quick and easy Web updating. Since the creation of the ordering space, I have trained the managers of the other units within our Acquisitions Department to create and populate Consul spaces. At this point, every Acquisitions unit is in the process of transitioning to the wiki, and many other groups in the Stanford Libraries are creating spaces as well. Ultimately, as we standardize the tools we use for documenting procedures across the libraries, we will enable better cross-linking between units and as a consequence, a better and broader understanding of library processes.

Biz of Acq — The Wiki of Acq

Biz of Acq — Sample Magazine

discipline. The committee was caught between trying to do the right thing — which included explaining why a title was being canceled and conveying thoughtfulness, regret, and offers to find other libraries that subscribe — and simply conducting its business in a vacuum, inside the library and outside of the Pratt Institute community. The acquisition of full-text, multidisciplinary databases seriously improved the availability of journal articles in subjects like history, cultural studies, and literature.

At the time of the author’s departure from the PIL, the committee had nearly exhausted potential cancellations. The process of selecting new titles will become more difficult now that the collection of currently received titles has been so well tuned and shaped. It is inevitable, however, that numerous titles — even popular ones — will become defunct. Money may be freed up as a result. It is also possible that the budget will be increased due to patron satisfaction and interest in the periodicals, many of which are available exclusively in the print format.

Standards Column — Electronic Resources: Challenges and Opportunities

by Todd Carpenter (Managing Director, NISO, 1 North Charles St., Ste. 1905, Baltimore, MD 21201) <carpenter@niso.org> www.niso.org

The management of digital resources has never been an easy process. The rapid expansion of digital resources compounded with changing formats and sales models in the short life of Web-based delivery systems has particularly made the management process more complex. Further, from the very beginning, details relating to purchasing, licenses, access, and usage have been kept in ad hoc systems built by in-house teams by the individual librarian needing to organize her workflow. It is hard to recall the days when digital resources played only a minor role in library management discussions.

It is from these very humble beginnings that a fairly robust community of vendors and librarians developed an entirely new type of library system — the E-Resource Management System (ERMS). There are now several vendors providing more or less integrated ERMS services. The most dominant vendors of these systems are Ex Libris, Innovative Interfaces Inc., and Serials Solutions. There are also community-developed projects such as Colorado Alliance’s Gold Rush systems as well as open source systems, such as HERMES at Johns Hopkins University. In addition, there are likely dozens (or more) homegrown systems that librarians are using to address complex management details. Even without a formal system in place, however, nearly every library is dealing in its own way with the acquisition, license, title, integration, and usage data information that accompany digital content.

NISO held a two-day seminar in Denver during September to bring together systems vendors and a diverse cross-section of librarians who are at different stages in the process of implementing a formal ERMS. It became apparent that these systems are relatively early in their development and deployment, despite some successes. Approximately one-third of the attendees had an ERMS in production, while the balance of the participants were either just implementing one, in the process of acquiring one, or still considering whether to purchase an ERMS. During this event we also learned that only about 400 institutions have functioning systems in development or production nationwide. Among the issues that were discussed at this forum were the role of ERMS systems in the library, the ERMS relationship to and interoperability with the standard ILS: which functionalities were most critical for adoption and use; and some of the barriers to implementation that have been experienced by the attendees.

When considering the amount of funds invested in electronic resources, the anecdotal indication from the group that gathered in Denver is that not nearly enough staff resources are being dedicated to the ERMS acquisition and content-management lifecycle. Among ARL libraries, the average percentage of materials budget spending on electronic resources in 2005-06 is 42%, or nearly $3.6 million, with the highest percentage being 73%. This expense amount is up 20% from the year before. The median percentage is up 5%. Despite this growing trend, we learned that even at some of the largest institutions, where annual acquisitions investment for electronic content is in the millions of dollars, fewer than five full-time staff are responsible for the full management of electronic resources and their acquisition lifecycle. Compared to the staff resources dedicated to managing the print material acquisition and management process, the e-resource IR investments seem modest. Obviously, every institution could use more staff, but the relative investment in print compared with the growing investment in digital content will necessitate changes in staff allocation and some of the barriers to implementation that go well beyond the scope of having a system that manages these resources.

Perhaps the lack of staff resources is part of the reason that a relatively small number of the ERMS that have been purchased are up and running, or producing the anticipated results. To effectively populate, manage, and use these systems a significant time investment and significant shifts in organizational culture are required, steps that many institutions have yet to make.

One barrier to adoption that was discussed was the complexity of the problems that ERMS are trying to address, compounding the difficulty of rolling out such a system. Larger issues such as adapting workflows, restructuring staff resources to manage digital content, and systems interoperability with existing management tools were also pointed out as causes of delayed implementation. The sheer scale of the volume of data continues on page 80