Developing a Policy for Kindle and iPod Content: One's Library Experience

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Purchasing Books Directly from Vendors Through OCLC —

Now that some publishers and book vendors have their own OCLC symbols, it is possible to purchase books through OCLC. A leader in this trend is Better World Books, Inc., based in Mishawaka, IN and using the OCLC symbol “QUICK.” Better World Books collects its inventory through book drives and donations from colleges, universities, libraries, and thrift stores. Items borrowed from Better World Books may be purchased by the borrowing library or by the patron, and profits go toward “non-profit literacy programs” (Better World Books, http://www.betterworldbooks.com/).

eBooks — Another new trend to watch is the practice of loading entire eBook collections from one or more vendors into a library’s catalog but only purchasing those that are selected and used by the library’s patrons (Cassell, 139). A twist on this approach is using the library’s Amazon account to download new titles — which are notoriously difficult to borrow through ILL — to a Kindle or similar device for checkout to the patron (Oder, http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6666004.html). Only the requested title is loaded onto the device, and once the Kindle is returned to the library, that title is removed.

All of these are interesting and still-developing areas of collection development, and I suspect more will be written on each idea in future years.

Conclusion

Many libraries love purchase-on-demand because it is cheaper and usually faster than, or just as fast as, traditional ILL. Local resources may be put to better use rather than investing time and money on union catalogs and other databases (Hulsey, 77), and items purchased by demand of the patron tend to circulate more often than items purchased through other means (Ward, 103). In addition, interdisciplinary titles that may be missed by subject bibliographers are frequently requested through purchase-on-demand programs, making for a more well-rounded collection overall. (Anderson et al., 8)

Many patrons love these programs because it provides them a voice in what their libraries collect. The traditional collection development model does not include graduate students. But because graduate students are generally heavy users of ILL, purchase-on-demand programs allow this important group of researchers to influence a library’s collection (Anderson et al., 9). Patrons may also be able to keep purchased material for longer than is normally allowed for borrowed items, and speedy turnaround time is also popular. Whether the program is implemented simply or a hybrid or specialized approach is adopted, purchase-on-demand is yet another tool for libraries trying to please patrons in today’s customer-centered environment.
Developing a Policy...
from page 47

nership with the EKU First Year Program, whose purpose is to orient new students to campus. Part of that orientation includes the EKU Read Project, in which freshmen read a selected book and then, during their first semester of college, become engaged in the academic life of learning and scholarship through discussion of the book. The library and the First Year Program decided that the 2009 book, The Glass Castle by Jeannette Walls, should be made available to students as an eBook on a Kindle and as an audio book on an iPod in addition to print copies of the book. The First Year Program purchased four Kindles and eight iPods, and the library agreed to circulate the devices; each contains a copy of The Glass Castle.

Four Kindles, eight iPods, one title. Now what? The library determined that the Kindles and iPods would be housed at the main library’s circulation desk. The loan period for each device was set at two weeks. Content would be loaded and devices synced for the users by the circulation staff. The acquisitions team would be responsible for payment of each download, and a cataloging staff member would update content information to bibliographic records in the OPAC for the Kindles and the iPods respectively.

Finally there came the question of content for the Kindles and the iPods. The library decided to keep its policy for these devices as simple as possible. First, the content would be entirely determined by the user. He or she would select the titles for the Kindles and iPods. Second, lest the user become giddy at the thought of adding content to the devices, and select a number of titles, the library decided that each user would be allowed to select up to two books or magazines to download each time the Kindle or iPod was loaned to that user. Third, the content on each of the four Kindles would be identical; the content on each of the eight iPods would also be identical.

Circulation of the Kindles and iPods at the EKU Libraries became effective with the start of the new school year in August, 2009; both quickly became popular with users and have circulated constantly throughout the fall. And what titles have users chosen? For the most part, selections have consisted of titles of popular interest. For instance, by the end of the semester, all four titles of Twilight, the popular vampire saga by Stephenie Meyer, have been added to the iPods; Dan Brown’s Angels & Demons and Da Vinci Code are also a part of the iPod collection. Kindle titles include Seth Grahame Smith’s Pride and Prejudice and Zombies and John Grogan’s Marley & Me. Not all fiction is of recent publication; one Kindle title is The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. A number of non-fiction titles have been selected as well for the Kindle.

Probably the thorniest problem for the circulation staff with this modification of the policy concerns the definition of content, or, when is a selected title considered scholarly, and when is that title considered of general interest? The policy offers two examples for the circulation staff to use; both are based on selections made for the Kindle. Team of Rivals: the Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln, a non-fiction work by Doris Kearns Goodwin, paints a portrait of the Lincoln cabinet; although rich in scholarly detail, the book is written for a general audience. The title costs under $25 for the Kindle. Thus, the title meets the two criteria specified by the policy and can be added to the Kindle.

The second example is the title that brought about the modification of the original policy, the Encyclopedia of Cybercrime. The word “Encyclopedia” indicates that the title is designed for research purposes and that its content is going to be of a more scholarly slant than other non-fiction titles. The price is over the set $25 for a Kindle. This title, then, does not meet the criteria of the policy. These two titles are presented as examples to guide circulation staff. There remains the possibility that a staff member may not recognize a title as scholarly and add the requested book to the Kindle; after all, the staff member is serving users at the main desk and is also making every effort to meet a user’s needs quickly and efficiently. In other words, it is better for the user if a scholarly title does get downloaded on a Kindle or iPod if it is under the price limit, than to quibble about whether the title is scholarly or more general. Service to the user always comes first.

The remainder of the written policy for Kindle and iPod content addresses the needs of users who do indeed request a title of research interest (and recognizable as such) or is over the price limits of $25 or $35. The library cannot turn away users who make such requests. In these cases, the circulation staff informs the user of the policy for Kindle/iPod content. The staff then gathers information about the requested title and forwards that information, along with the requestor’s title, to the acquisitions team. The staff of that team then assumes responsibility for the request.

After implementation, the content policy for the Kindle and iPod is working effectively. Content for each device has consisted of fiction and non-fiction titles of general interest. Procedures are in place for more expensive titles or research titles that will meet user needs in other formats, including eBook and print. Continuous circulation of both the Kindles and iPods throughout the fall semester shows that both devices are popular with the EKU campus. Where electronic book readers and audio devices go from here is anyone’s guess. But just like print books before them, the Kindles and the iPod Touches have needed a policy so that a library user’s needs are met successfully.