Patron Driven Acquisitions: The Future of Collection Development?

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PATRON DRIVEN ACQUISITIONS: THE FUTURE OF COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT?

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ABSTRACT

Historically, libraries have been eager to make purchases based on requests by their patrons and have used various programs to acquire the desired material. Technology now allows libraries to let patrons identify books of interest and have their access needs immediately gratified. Brigham Young University recently completed a Patron Driven Acquisition (PDA) pilot in conjunction with ebrary and YBP Library Services. Eighteen thousand records were loaded into the catalog that enabled immediate access to these titles through ebrary. A purchase was triggered when a predetermined level of use was reached. This paper presents findings from the pilot in terms of types of books purchased, use rates, and interesting patterns that emerged. It addresses questions that arise out of the pilot pertaining to incorporating PDA, how it affects current notions of collection development, and considerations in implementing PDA.

INTRODUCTION

Patron driven acquisitions is a collection development tool that shifts a library's purchasing decision from a librarian 'just-in-case' decision to a patron 'just-in time' decision. It is a way for students, faculty, and staff to decide what the library buys. It is a plan where bibliographic records are added to the library's catalog and made available to patrons. As patrons discover and access them, a purchase is triggered. Adding this just-in-time element to collection development, PDA reduces the cost per use for purchased items. With PDA there are no dead ends for patrons seeking information. Purchasing on demand shifts library funds from speculative buying to buying what is wanted and with e-books there is immediate access for the patron.

PILOT PROGRAM

At the end of 2009, Brigham Young University, an institution with over 30,000 students, partnered with ebrary & YBP Library Services for a PDA pilot program. For our PDA, we wanted the use and the discovery of the ebrary books to be seamless to patrons and the purchasing and processing to be behind the scenes. We did not want our patrons to be aware that the titles they were using were not yet owned by the library. We also did not want the universe of over 50,000 ebrary PDA titles available for purchase so before loading the bibliographic records into our catalog, we customized the list of titles.

To customize the list, we first eliminated the overlap of titles in ebrary's Academic Complete subscription collection. We then narrowed our list by excluding publishers like Springer whose publications we were already purchasing through YBP. We also excluded other publishers that did not support our collection development policy such as Capstone, CIMA, Cliff Notes, For Dummies Books, and Howell Book House. Next we removed from the list, books in certain

categories/subjects like computers, travel (Frommers), and parts of law. We established a price threshold of $250.00 but later lowered it to $150.00. To finish customizing our list, we had YBP run ebrary's list against our holdings for both print and electronic books published since 2000 and removed the duplicates titles. In the end we trimmed our list to about 18,000 titles.

We sent ebrary a deposit and in mid December, loaded the records from our customized list into the catalog. In order to manage the records and so that they would not be sent to OCLC, we loaded them into our catalog using a holding place we called the On-Demand library. Once the records were in the catalog and patrons began discovering them, ebrary started sending weekly notifications showing the triggered titles and the titles their accounting department had changed to purchase status. When we received notification that titles were purchased, we changed the home location in the catalog, updated the bib records by adding a 583 field (ebrary pda|c20091215|5UPB), and added staff notes noting the purchase price. We used the weekly notifications to keep track of our spending.

Our deposit account lasted nine months, a long time compared to other pilot participants. One of the reasons for this difference could be that we started the pilot right before the holidays and at the end of the semester, so few books were purchased in the first two months of the pilot. Purchasing picked up during the following months as students returned to school and continued with their studies. In January we purchased 27 titles, in February we purchased 89, and in March 108. A second reason the deposit account lasted a long time was that purchases stopped for a time in mid April when ebrary's accounting department showed we had spent out deposit. Once the accounting discrepancies were corrected, purchasing began again. In July the reports showed we purchased 72 more books, books that had been triggered earlier but now showed purchased. A third reason for the longevity of the pilot could be the result of de-duping the list of available titles and of setting a price threshold.

The pilot program showed some very interesting patterns as to what our patrons were using. The books they accessed were published by a variety of publishers. John Wiley & Sons, Taylor & Francis, Elsevier Inc. and Cambridge University Press were the top four but others included Guilford Publications, Palgrave Macmillan, Duke University Press, Emerald Group, Sage Publications, Oxford University Press, Princeton University Press, and McGraw Hill. Also of interest were the prices of purchased books which ranged from $8.99-$220.00 with the average purchase price being $77.00.

Although nearly two-thirds of the 325 books purchased during the pilot program were in the social sciences, there was interest across all disciplines. In the social sciences, we purchased 201 books. Sixty-one of those books were business/economics titles and 50 were psychology titles. These subjects had the most purchases but we also purchased books in philosophy, history, education, political science, history, and family studies. Twenty-one percent of the books purchased were in the sciences (69 titles). Medical books were the most popular but we also purchased general science books, technology, and home economics books. Seventeen percent of the books purchased were in the humanities (55 titles) and included books in the visual and performing arts, literature, and languages.

Another interesting thing we learned by participating in the pilot program was the way our patrons were using the material. Patrons seemed to be viewing and reading the material online without copying or printing very much. The PDA reports showed that there was some copying and printing done so we knew patrons could have done it if they had wanted to, but they chose not to. For example the book *Principles and Practice of Stress Management* (3rd ed.) had 1417 usage views, 312 of them unique views but only 4 pages were copied and none were printed.

INCORPORATING PDA

The pilot program gives us a clear indication that users will select books. They do this simply by viewing the book and are unaware of the purchasing decision. We also have a clear indication that they will only select books that pertain to their research and interests (325 books purchased out of 18,000 available books). This is an argument for patron driven and not mass purchases. What we have inferred from an analysis of our e-book usage across platforms is that only a certain percentage of books are utilized. Most of our current e-books have been purchased as collections; we buy a whole collection or frontlist and make them all available. We have found, surprisingly, that use patterns look similar to our historic print usage; a smaller portion of the collection is used regularly. Consequently, we want to continue the model where larger numbers of titles are made available but only purchased when they are accessed. However, large numbers alone are not the answer. As a research library, we have tried to match our collection with research and curriculum on campus. We have used our subject librarians to define the scope, breadth, and depth of our collecting. We need their help in defining what those large numbers of titles would be.

We think it is also reasonable to expand this notion to parts of our print collection. Our own studies reflect recent discussions in the community regarding overall use of print collections in academic libraries. We have found that the books purchased in the decade from 2000 to 2010 circulated at a 50% rate. So half of the books we purchased in this decade have not circulated. Of course this circulation rate is not equal across the collection but in areas of low circulation it may be better to work towards a patron driven model. Ultimately, we would like to have these options integrated into our vendor profiles. We envision a profile that allows us to use all the same parameters that we have used historically but with the added options of areas where we receive electronic books as the default and areas where print selections will be records loaded in the catalog waiting for a purchase trigger.

Subject Selectors still have a critical role in understanding research and the curriculum and can set the breadth and scope of titles we put in the catalog. We are not prepared, nor is it feasible to turn everything over to PDA. Parameters will still need to be set and it will still be important to acquire material that is not picked up by PDA but less time will be spent on collection development. Subject librarians will continue to be important in deciding what titles to include in a PDA list. Additionally, the role of subject librarians will be expanded in order to help patrons find and navigate the myriad of available information on the network (for example, Wiki Leaks and Google books).

One challenge PDA presents is how to think of budget allocations. Historically we have taken our monographic funds and divided them up by selector. If we move to a more patron driven model, we are talking about letting the patrons play a major role in budget allocations. Taking an extreme view, we could let the users determine budget allocations. Are there concerns about this? If selectors are involved on the front end, defining the universe of books available, does it matter if the users are the ones determining the purchases? How does this comport with the library's mission of collecting and preserving significant contributions to the academy? This raises what would be an interesting study; how would a long term study of patron choices compare to purchases made individually by selectors? Of course, we could consider the records placed in the catalog to be the selections of our librarians, for indeed they are. However, only a subset of these would actually be accessed and purchased. Would we consider those titles not purchased a lost opportunity?

As PDA is a new concept, libraries are still grappling with the issue of leaving records in the catalog. If purchases have not been triggered for titles after a year, do you remove the records? After two years? How long do you leave un-purchased records in the catalog? Looking at our print model, in 10 years, 50% circulated but only 16% circulate in the first year. If we pull the records out in the first 1-2 years we take away the long tail. We would have arbitrarily decided that books are only relevant for a short time. Our print patterns have shown that books do have value, if not immediately, over time.

Ultimately, PDA would seem to have significant implications on what we think of and how we practice collection development. As mentioned, budget allocations could change drastically; even the concept of individual budget allocations. Even before patron driven arrived on the scene, it was clear that our networked environment was reshaping, and would continue to reshape collection development. Librarians have been spending more time linking to information, directing users to viable scholarly information on the ubiquitous network. Purchases have come in larger bundles and the act of ordering title by title has become a smaller piece of a librarians work. Each day seems to bring developments that will continue this trend. Future librarians will do much more with connecting and engaging information than selecting it.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PDA DECISIONS

Our discussion today is primarily focused on the selection and acquisition of e-books because, for the most part, academic libraries have already transitioned their journal subscriptions from print to electronic format. Patrons have embraced the e-journal, publishers and marketplace have accepted the transition, and libraries are benefiting from this evolution on a number of levels. With this in mind what lessons can we learn from the print to electronic journal transition and apply to monograph collection development, selection, and acquisitions?

In some ways, patron driven is the antithesis of the "big deal" which has been so prominent in journal business models. It seems to be the current model of choice for monograph purchases. Patron driven offers the big deal aspect of access to large numbers but allows for a title by title purchasing model. It may very well be that in some cases, libraries will want to purchase a whole collection, list, or archive but they need flexibility in acquisition and pricing models. After all, in the electronic arena, pricing has been something of a mystery. Initially, e-books were twice the cost of their print editions (and released up to a year later!). The two formats are now much closer in pricing but collection offerings often come with large discounts that make it difficult to gauge the price of an individual book. One might ask, "How do we reconcile the concept of patron driven individual purchases with the huge discounts of the big deal?"

The economic, political, and technological environment of libraries is requiring libraries to seek and demand more options in purchasing models and pricing considerations. Not all collections and published material will fit into a PDA process. Having a choice of purchasing models is a priority for libraries. Titles should be available for purchase for both print and electronic books through PDA, whether the model gives patrons total control or in a model where subject librarians determine the collection universe. Book providers need to integrate PDA opportunities with approval profiles. Where appropriate, libraries should take advantage of package collections as subscriptions or purchases. For subscription collections, libraries could negotiate a portion of their subscription fee to be applied to the purchase of desired titles. Other acquisitions models that give libraries more flexibility are the purchasing of interlibrary loan requests and print on demand.

SUMMARY

Clearly there are a host of unanswered questions needed to be answered about where Patron Driven Acquisition practices fit into a research library's overall acquisition program and collection development profile. What is certain however is that electronic publishing and distribution will continue to increase. This reality coupled with ever enhanced technologies will provide greater end-user acceptance and demand for e-resources and will offer more acceptable solutions and rationale for involving patrons in the selection of both print and electronic resources. Today, libraries truly have opportunities to either purchase, rent, or borrow material and have alternative ways to leverage their dollars. PDA offers libraries a choice in acquiring material and therefore has a place at BYU.