

Acquisitions for Newbies

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Acquisitions for Newbies

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Abstract

Designed specifically for librarians new to the field of acquisitions, this preconference workshop featured an informal introduction to the basics of acquisitions librarianship from three standpoints: an acquisitions librarian, a library director with a background in acquisitions, and a regional sales manager for a key vendor to libraries for e-content and software as a solution.

The session covered a variety of issues related to the acquisition of both monographs and serials, print and e-formats, and database and backfile purchases. Discussions included similarities and differences between acquisitions and collection development (and how they can vary from library to library), ordering considerations, avoiding purchase of duplicate resources, negotiating prices and access options, licensing, selecting vendors and jobbers, what a vendor representative expects from librarians, and various services that a company's representatives can provide to assist librarians. The presenters discussed various aspects of access versus ownership of e-books and periodicals and the impact of each on space and budgets both current and future, various ways to allocate library acquisitions funds, and suggested the best times in the annual budget cycle for different types of spending decisions.

Questions and interactive conversations were a welcome part of this open, relaxed exploration of what it means to be an acquisitions librarian in an ever changing library environment.

Introduction

A statement was given that the presenters were there as individuals, not as representatives of their employers. The session began with each of the presenters introducing themselves and providing a brief explanation of their professional backgrounds. Each stated that while they may refer to their own professional experiences, participants should understand that the session was not specific to the procedures, resources, or services of either Arkansas State University or EBSCO. Instead, the presentation would be an open discussion of a variety of issues related to library acquisitions.

A brief review of terms such as firm order, standing order, discovery service, and integrated library system (ILS) led into a conversation about some similarities and differences between acquisitions, collection development, and collection management. The discussion pointed out that there are many varieties of organizational structures for academic libraries and that the

makeup of the unit(s) that perform these functions is different in almost every library.

Discussion Topics

Creibaum and Bailey introduced the topic of varying internal procedures for each library. This could involve how acquisitions funds are allocated, who actually controls those funds, who has responsibility for selecting resources, whether or not (or to what extent) a library uses their ILS acquisitions module, and the impact of local traditions, campus priorities, and individual personalities on internal procedures.

Gordon followed by addressing services a vendor's representative may be able to provide to assist acquisitions librarians in their jobs. These services may include title comparisons between resources, combined invoicing, downloadable MARC records for acquired resources, and possibly creating a custom package of titles for libraries with limited funds or a very specific content need. Gordon also mentioned the value of librarians communicating

openly with vendors about their institution and library so the vendors can look for and introduce the most appropriate resources or products to meet their needs. There may be times when a vendor representative may visit or call a library primarily to have these types of conversations. Also mentioned was the importance of building working relationships based on trust between all parties.

Discussion then moved to a variety of topics related to budgets and allocations. The need for both long and short range budget planning was emphasized, along with how budget planning concerns differ for subscriptions, single item purchases, demand-driven acquisition funds, and backfile collection purchases. There was obvious interest when it was mentioned that vendors who supply a wide range of products for libraries are often able to list multiple subscriptions on a single invoice or may be able to modify the start/end dates for database subscriptions to be payable at a more convenient time in the library's budget cycle.

The importance of tracking annual expenditures for budget planning purposes was also discussed at some length.

Creibaum and Bailey next discussed their experiences with selecting vendors and ordering resources. Different ordering considerations and/or purchasing or access arrangements can exist for different types of materials. Acquiring e-books includes the decision of whether to purchase or lease titles via demand-driven acquisition. Print book and media purchasing involves considerations beyond price and availability such as shipping charges, return policies, and the usability of the vendor's web site. All factors should be considered when choosing a vendor or jobber. Bailey addressed the importance of including customer service and response time as criteria in any bid process that may be required when selecting vendors or a subscription agent.

Creibaum mentioned that the process of avoiding placing duplicate firm orders for hard copy items was one area where a vendor may be able to help an acquisitions librarian. Some vendors can notify a library when it places an order for an item that has previously been purchased from that vendor. Also discussed was the growth of purchase or

subscription resources with licenses that make them unusable by some libraries, and the need for each institution to have an authorized person designated to read and approve each license.

Subscription issues included the value of obtaining trials before making final database purchasing decisions; options to keep, store remotely, or weed print journal volumes when online journal backfiles are acquired; and the difference between canceling and not renewing a subscription.

All three presenters covered the various steps to take when a subscription ends. These include giving sufficient notice for nonrenewal, removing the resource from a discovery service, disabling and removing links on your web site and in course management systems, deleting records in the library catalog and journal A to Z lists, and notifying reference and instruction librarians so that they can update their materials, including user guides.

Creibaum reminded attendees to carefully check all invoices for errors, as they do occur.

Gordon and Creibaum addressed options available to libraries when a price increase is more than expected or more than a library can afford. Acquisitions librarians were advised to contact their vendor's representative when this occurs as there may be alternative pricing or payment options.

Attendees were advised to consider using end of year funds for one-time purchases of either firm order items or static online content such as data sets or journal backfiles, though library personnel should be aware that there are sometimes annual hosting fees for these purchases.

Gordon closed the session by reminding attendees that there are a few unscrupulous people in the library materials business, just as in any business, and suggested librarians guard against the rare salesperson who tries to push unwanted or unneeded sales on a library. It was emphasized by all presenters that quality representatives from reputable companies want to build long-standing relationships with libraries and will not push unwanted resources on libraries once the librarians make it clear that they do not want a particular resource.