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Patron-Driven Acquisition: What Do We Know about Our Patrons?

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Abstract

This paper describes how Utrecht University Library is trying to reach a sustainable and efficient PDA model, offering more e-books to our users.

PDA e-books were made available in the catalog. We developed an efficient back office process for updates, deletions and financial administration. We did pilot programs to test PDA as an acquisition model. During the pilot anonymized user data was collected of patrons and their use of PDA e-books.

Due to heavy usage and too fast depletion of budget we had to adjust our PDA model. The collected data helped to understand the development of costs and to decide about the changes in the PDA model. After a year PDA pilot, we developed a predictable PDA model. However, for a sustainable model there are still challenges, not only due to dilemmas on restricting the PDA profile, but also due to publishers raising STL prices.

Introduction

In 2010 Utrecht University Library started buying e-books. A few packages at first, but in 2011 we started to order e-books separately at EBL. Next, Evidence Based Selection packages were acquired.

In order to build a good collection more efficiently, we started with PDA program pilots.

Goal of PDA Pilots

All pilots related to collection management in the last few years have been based on the same principles: 1. Develop a good book collection, 2. Respond to the needs of our users better (buy just-in-time), 3. Develop more efficient workflows for both front office and back office, 4. Develop a financially sustainable acquisition model.

We didn't want to spend less on books but spend less on librarians. This implies that we prefer unmediated PDA.

Broad Pilot 2013–2014

After a small pilot with specific PDA profiles by subject which didn't work out, we decided to conduct a broad pilot that lasted one year, paid for with the general library budget.

The budget was \$41,000 per teaching period. For a whole year this was \$164,000.

We didn't make a selection by subject, but decided to select these publishers from which Utrecht University Library buys publications on a regular basis. The list of publishers was compiled by asking all subject specialists to submit their top 10 publishers, complemented with EBL publishers from which we had bought books over the past year. Next, publishers with which we had already entered into agreements were excluded, such as Cambridge and Wiley.

Further restrictions were:

- Publication year: 2012–2013–2014.
- Language: only English.
- Exclude publishers with > 15% STL (for one day).
- STL price max. 30 dollars
- Listprice max. 280 dollars.
- Max. 3 books per 24 hours.
- 3 STLs, 4th STL was Auto Purchase

Catalog

By mid-August 2013 35,000 titles were imported into our catalog. Each week EBL

additions, deletions and updates were processed. Titles purchased by subject specialists and gifts were automatically and immediately removed from the PDA profile in the EBL platform. This way the number of available PDA titles in the catalog and on the EBL platform fluctuated weekly, increasing to 48,000 titles by the end of May 2014.

Users

The basic principle was that we did not want the user to notice the difference between owned titles and PDA titles. At the same time we wanted to collect more data about the users to gain more insight into the use of (PDA) e-books. This way, we hoped to come to a sustainable model or at least control the costs as best we could. We were also interested in the ways in which faculty members from different faculties used e-books and the subjects they chose.

That is why we asked all users to complete a questionnaire the first time they borrowed an EBL

e-book. EBL has an option to do so: the Patron Information Gathering Tool. Users were asked two questions: first, to which user category do they belong: student (master or bachelor), staff, or another category; second, to which faculty or department do they belong.

Each user got a token from EBL. This token is used in the EBL usage reports. This token was linked to data about category and faculty of the user as soon as he or she used a book. These anonymized data helped us to find out more about the use, divided into user and faculty categories.

Progress of the Pilot

From the start we suspected that the budget would be too limited in relation to the number of titles. These predictions came true just before Christmas, during the second teaching period. The budget for this period would be used up three weeks too early. Luckily it turned out that there was still \$36,000 of funding available.

Figure 1. Development of costs during the PDA pilot.

Different Approach

In the course of teaching period 3 this situation seemed to repeat itself. Based on the costs curve it was obvious that we were not going to make it with the planned budgets per teaching period.

One option for managing the costs was to change to mediated PDA. Evaluating the results so far we concluded that PDA was efficient for the library

because it saves subject specialists time and answered the needs of the users. Furthermore, the used titles were of the same academic level as the subject librarian would have chosen. And, compared with e-books bought by the library, purchased PDA titles were browsed more per title, more titles had loans and there were more loans per title (Table 1). So we concluded that the selection of useful books can be entrusted to our patrons.

	# Titles purchased	# Titles browsed	# Browsers per title	# Titles with loans after purchase	# Loans per title
Auto Purchase	547	547	12,0	447	7,8
Ebook	1074	1044	4,8	375	5,8

Table 1. Use of AutoPurchased PDA e-books and e-books bought by the library (Ebook).

We decided to continue with unmediated PDA and try to find another way to stay within the budget.

We then looked at the publishers who were included in the profile. Taylor & Francis (T&F) had ten times as many STLs as the number 2 on the list of popular publishers in the EBL reports. T&F titles represented half of the available PDA e-books. It became clear to us that a large well-used publisher should not be part of our PDA profile. In this case another purchasing model, such as Evidence Based Selection, may be more profitable and the costs more predictable. PDA, we decided, can best be used for the group of smaller and new publishers.

We also decided to adjust our PDA goals. From considering PDA as a tool for collection development, we changed our view to making books available for our patrons. We decided to focus less on purchases and more on borrowing.

While maintaining a maximum STL percentage of 15% we decided (in week 13) to switch to Auto Purchase at the 9th STL. In Figure 2 you can see that since then, hardly a book was bought in the PDA.

Unfortunately we were not able to see if these two choices alone would lead to a sustainable PDA.

Just before we removed Taylor & Francis from our PDA profile, this publisher together with a number of other publishers was automatically removed from the profile because they had drastically raised their STL percentages to above 15%.

In June and July more publishers followed. In the end over 15 publishers were automatically removed, among which three of the four most popular publishers. As a result the number of available PDA titles was more than halved. Accordingly the number of STLs dropped, but not halved.

We were surprised by the reaction of our patrons. We expected to receive a lot of complaints from patrons missing books in the catalog. Beforehand we decided that subject specialists would immediately buy any PDA title they received complaints about.

This turned out to be a mere handful.

A possible explanation could be that patrons just use the books they can find in the catalog. Only the patrons who actively used a particular book complained when they couldn't find it anymore in the catalog after it had been removed.

Maybe some patrons found alternative titles within the PDA, because the relative number of STLs did not drop as much as the available titles.

Another explanation could be that they fell back on the print collection.

Prediction of the Use in One Year's Time

Despite the fact that one of the advantage of a digital library is that you can consult it 24/7 without having to visit the library building, you

can see a clear connection with the number of visitors in the building. This is quite logical, because at the end of each teaching periods students are still using the library as a place to study and write their papers.

This way it is possible to estimate the costs over a certain period of time.

Figure 2. STLs and purchases per week. In week 23 T&F and other publishers were removed from the PDA pool.

Figure 3. Visitors in the library per week.

Use by Disciplines

When we look at the usage by the members of different faculties, Humanities' large share becomes clear. The share of Humanities titles in the PDA pool was constantly around 38%, even though some publishers which are important for Humanities were removed from the PDA profile due to the high STL prices. There are relatively

more humanities patrons and they do relatively more transactions. We see that this is consistent with their share of borrowed material from the print collection.

We noticed that the shares of transactions vary from one week to the next. The average share for Humanities is 53%, but one week this may be 40% and the other week may be 60%. A relationship with student activity is obvious.

Figure 4. PDA transactions per week.

Who Uses Which Books

The assumption faculties make is that students only read the books that have been bought for their faculties, belonging to their discipline. Based on this assumption some faculties refuse to pay for titles outside their field of interest. Our usage

statistics show that the situation is not as simple as that.

The next graph shows the use by faculty members of "faculty subjects." Almost all subjects are used by members of all faculties.

Faculty	% Patrons	% PDA titles on faculty subjects	% Transactions	% Costs
Geosciences	9%	0,4%	7%	7%
Humanities	43%	37,6%	53%	51%
Law, Economics & Governance	12%	14,4%	12%	14%
Medicine	3%	4,5%	2%	2%
Science	6%	9,6%	4%	4%
Social and Behavioural Sciences	11%	21,6%	8%	8%
Veterinary Medicine	1%	0,9%	1%	1%
Others	13%		14%	13%

Table 2. Shares of patrons, available titles, transactions, and costs per faculty.

Figure 5. Use of "faculty subjects" by "faculty members."

During the presentation in Charleston we discussed the possibility that there would be a difference between different user groups: bachelor students would use more books from other faculties while master students and staff

would be more focused on their own subject. But that is not true. In some cases it was just the staff that is using books outside their own collection profile.

Figure 6. Percentage books used from other discipline.

What Else Did We Find Out, Using the Usage Reports from EBL?

Figure 7 shows that the different user categories not always follow the 4 teaching periods. At first sight the staff seems to use less e-books than the students. But if you compare their numbers (6500 staff) to the number of students (30,000), then their usage is considerable.

The long-standing idea that Humanities scholars read more pages of a book than other disciplines seems to be proved wrong if you look at Figures 8 and 9. However, it is possible that they look for a print book if they want to read the entire book.

The high average reading times for bachelor students from Science and Veterinary Sciences are probably caused by the fact that some books were used in a course.

Figure 7. User categories.

Figure 8: Average pages read.

Figure 9: Average reading time.

In figures 10 and 11 you can see a clear difference in the use of e-books. Bachelor students print less and read much more online-only (without

printing). Is this a development of another way people use e-books? Or Does their usage change during their scientific career? Time will tell.

Figure 10. Percentage users with pages printed.

Figure 11. Percentage of users that only read online.

Figure 12. Percentage of users with downloads.

Due to the small number of STLs in Science, it was easy to discover that the high score for the Science master students was caused by two students who downloaded a lot of e-books on several subjects.

Moving Wall

An important question in our model with a moving wall is whether "old titles" are still used and how to deal with them.

The graph below shows the titles published in 2012 which we available for the entire time of the pilot. These books were used just as often in the beginning of the pilot as the end. So "less usage" cannot be an argument to remove older titles from the PDA pool. On the other hand, to make PDA sustainable, these books might have to be removed because they are still used and therefore cost money. We don't know what to do about this yet.

Figure 13. Use of titles published in 2012 per week.

Conclusions

The titles in our PDA model, based on a number of publishers, and available in the catalog, are heavily used by our users.

At the moment we have not dealt with our model long enough to be able to reach conclusions about sustainability in the long run. But if conditions remain the same, we will be able to control the costs of the PDA sufficiently.

Gathering usage data for a whole year did tell us more about the usage during all teaching periods and help us develop a sustainable type of PDA. The number of library visits proves to be a good indication for the usage of PDA titles.

Gathering data about the users and the usage in the long run can also help to reach a sustainable model for the PDA in your own situation. What

that model entails exactly and how that fits in with the collection development strategy and the collection may differ per library.

Insights into the usage per group show how patrons are using e-books and which subjects they choose. This can lead to a different approach to collection development. Why would you spend so much time on the collection profile if it turns out that your students get their books from all possible Dewey codes?

Gathering data however offers no guarantee if the financial conditions are changed by individual publishers. The drastic raising of the STL rates by a number of publishers has severely limited the possibility to come to a sustainable PDA model. It makes the model unpredictable, and unsustainable if you don't remove these publishers, or less efficient and less interesting for patrons if you do remove these publishers.