

## Doing the Math: Discovering Infinity Transitioning Monograph Standing Orders from Print to Online and Deriving a Variable Formula for Success

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# Doing the Math: Discovering Infinity Transitioning Monograph Standing Orders from Print to Online and Deriving a Variable Formula for Success

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## Abstract

In 2016, University of British Columbia Science Library liaisons met with the Math faculty to consider the value of switching their beloved print monograph series to online format. Arguments of greater discoverability, findability, and access won the faculty members, and they voted in acceptance of the change. In retrospect, persuading the Math faculty of the value in switching from print to online format was an easy win. The tough part came in transforming this pledge to reality. We describe the factors making this transformation difficult, the options of purchasing the monographic series as e-books (available to us as of 2018), and the next steps we plan to take.

## The Background

As with most academic institutions, the pursuit of online collection options at the University of British Columbia Library has been a logical and ubiquitous objective, notably within our STEM disciplines. Contemporary electronic publishing provides access to more content to a broader range of users while meeting the institutional demands to transform library space from housing low-use physical collections into innovative arenas for study, learning, and instruction. The UBC Library established an e-preferred monographs acquisitions policy in 2013 and

since then has seen steady growth in our e-book collections across disciplines with increasing emphasis on perpetual access purchases.

## The Situation

In 2016, Science Library liaisons met with the Math faculty to consider the value of switching their beloved print monograph series to online format. Although stalwart defenders of the importance of print resources and physical proximity to their collections, faculty members were won over by arguments

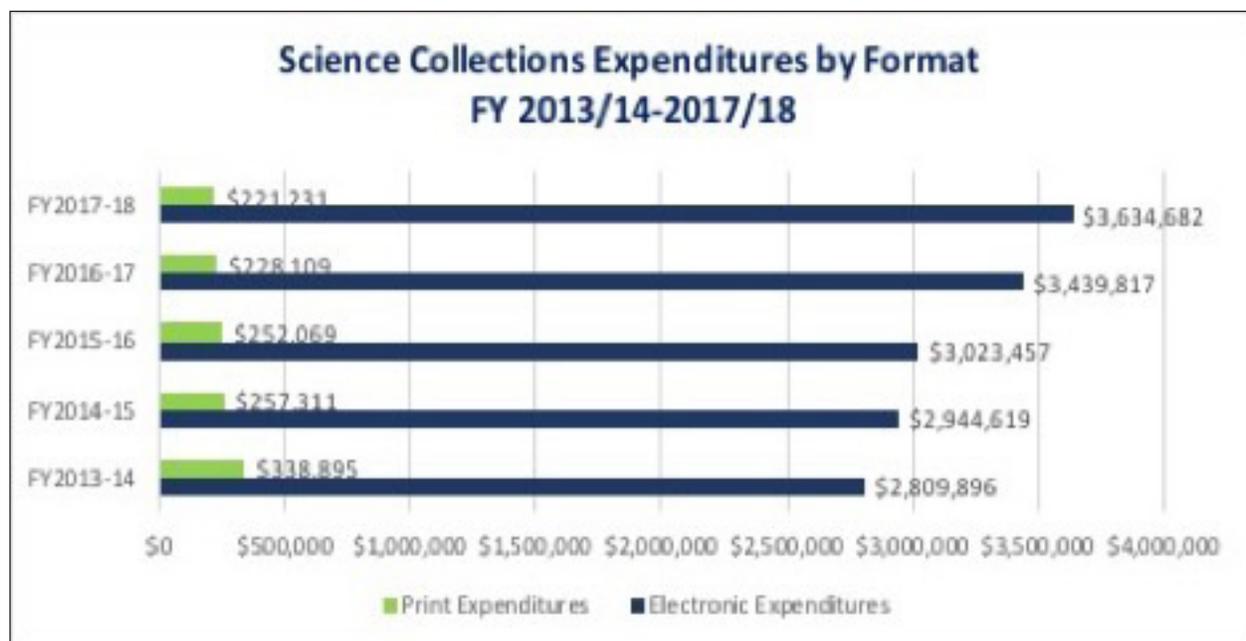


Figure 1. Collections expenditures by format (2014–2018a).

	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018
Total items (incl. e-books)	7,499,976	7,810,610 4%	7,978,857 2%	7,849,334 -2%	7,937,963 1%
Physical volumes	5,656,948	5,625,284 -1%	5,652,996 0%	5,538,133 -2%	5,530,002 0%
E-books	1,843,028	2,185,326 19%	2,325,861 6%	2,244,866 -3%	2,407,961 7%

Figure 2. Number of items by format (2014–2018).

of greater discoverability, findability, and access and voted in acceptance of the change.

### The Reality

Although it was known previously that the monograph series in question were published electronically, there were details of their availability that were not fully understood. Every series had a different publishing and pricing model. The majority involved delayed online publication release and higher costs ranging from 10% to 75% per volume. Unlike journals, in this publishing domain, electronic subscriptions or standing orders are not the norm for monographs. This raised questions about ensuring continuous and stable funding for materials that were no longer “serial” but rather monograph, a budget sector with less protection historically.

Contemplating the logistics of acquiring as annual electronic backfiles within our fiscal year, or monitoring approval slip plans for title by title selection quickly demonstrated that the process wasn’t adding up to a balanced equation in terms of cost or workflow efficiency. Further complicating the mix was the inclusion of some series in one of our evidence-based acquisition (EBA) plans. What should have been a welcome relief and easy win became a sober second thought as the evidence showed the e-book content was not being accessed very much, hence a challenge to the principle of purchasing based on user demand.

### The Options

Regarding the option of purchasing backfiles, seven of the monographic series in question are available as e-book backfiles. The delay in access to content

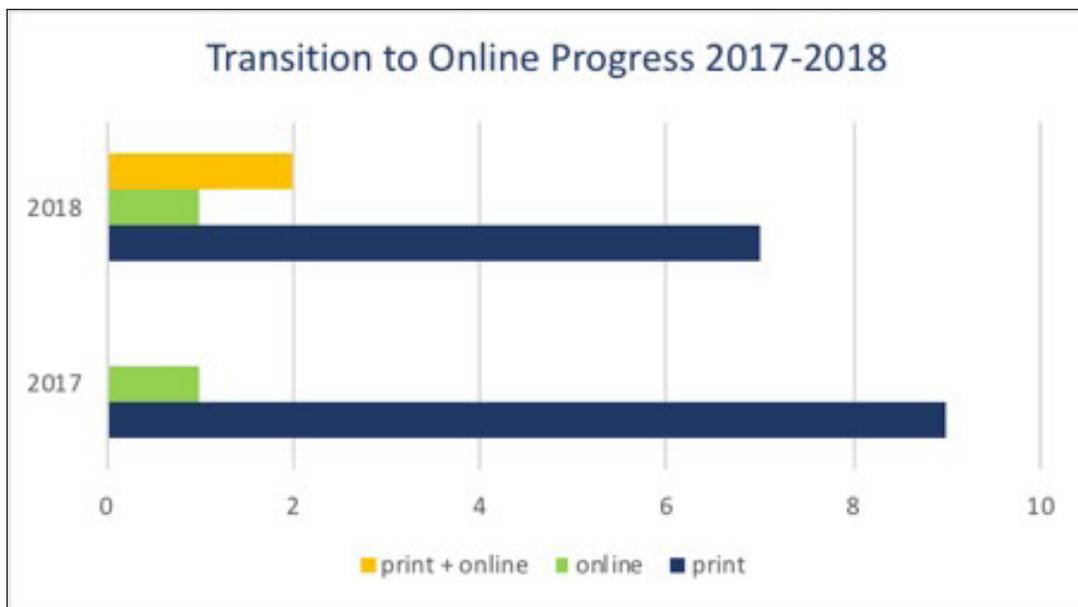


Figure 3. Transition to online progress (2017–2018).

is a concern for faculty who favor timely availability to newly published material over format. As for the option of making use of approval plans, titles from some monographic series could be purchased individually through approval plans. However, monitoring approval plan slips for title by title selection is time consuming and requires extra human resources, a practice we are seeking to stop. In the case of the overlap with our current EBA plans, two of the monographic series in question are included in one of the EBA plans, with evidence showed the e-book content was not being accessed, hence a challenge to the principle of purchasing based on user demand. The low use of the e-book content may be because it was not until recently that the two monographic series became available as part of the EBA plan, and traditional users may be unaware that the volumes are available online as well as in print at the library.

### **Next Steps**

In retrospect, persuading the Math faculty at the University of British Columbia of the value in

switching their beloved monograph series from print to online format was an easy win. The tough part came in transforming this pledge to reality. In making our case, we knew that the series in question were available electronically; what we didn't fully realize is that they become different entities when they go digital.

We are considering the logistical and financial issues in making existing e-book purchase models work for our circumstances and committed to working with publishers to develop a shared understanding of needs and approaches to providing access to these resources. We need to develop an effective and efficient workflow in managing approval plans. We will keep the status quo (print standing orders) until more efficient solutions become available (e-book standing orders, frontlists) and monitor our EBA program to evaluate discoverability and usage patterns. We plan to go back to the faculty to consult them about the time lag when going for the backfiles option.

### **References**

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