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ATG Special Report — Why Do Reference Librarians Purchase Print or Online Reference Sources?

by **Carol A. Singer** (Reference and Instruction Librarian, Bowling Green State University) <singerca@bgsu.edu>

Few reference librarians would deny that library collections are transitioning from paper to online resources. In some academic libraries, the paper reference collection has been downsized due to a greater reliance on electronic resources. In March 2008, I surveyed the head of reference from each **OhioLINK** library that might have a general reference desk in order to discover whether print ready reference collections, a subset of the reference collection, were disappearing from college and university libraries. The survey was sent to the person administratively in charge of reference services, as identified on the library Website. In cases where this person could not be identified on the Website, the library's email reference service was contacted to request the name and email address of the appropriate person.

OhioLINK libraries were chosen because this provided a cross section of types and sizes of academic libraries. At the time of the survey, **OhioLINK** was a consortium of eighty-six college and university libraries, plus the State Library of Ohio. Members included sixteen universities, twenty-three community or technical colleges, and forty-seven private colleges. At that time, **OhioLINK** made available thousands of electronic resources, including more than 25,000 electronic books. Many member libraries also purchased additional electronic resources, but all had access to a wide array of digital sources, some of which might replace paper ready reference materials.

Each head of reference services was sent an email with a link to a survey about the past, present and future of print ready reference collections. Responses were received from a variety of types and sizes of colleges and universities. Of the ninety-six reference heads who received the email, fifty-four (56.3%) responded. Five of these libraries (9.3%) had no general reference desk. Of the remaining forty-nine libraries, twelve (24.5%) had no print ready reference collection. When asked, the heads of reference of these libraries replied that they did not regret not having a print ready reference collection. They were asked, "Why don't you have a print ready reference collection?" Most answered that they didn't feel the need for a print ready reference collection, with two also indicating they relied primarily on electronic resources.

Thirty-seven heads of reference responded that they had a print ready reference collection near the reference desk. As expected, most (68%) of these print collections were smaller and less used (73%) than they had been five years earlier.

More than eighty percent of these libraries had replaced at least one print ready reference resource with an electronic version. When asked why they had decided to do this, they gave the following reasons:

- The electronic version is available 24/7 (59.5%)
- User demand is for electronic access (56.8%)
- The electronic version is more current (48.6%)
- The electronic version is easier to use (40.5%)
- We saved space by using the electronic version (40.5%)
- The electronic version is quicker to use (37.8%)
- Electronic resources are useful for answering questions via email, IM, chat, etc. (29.7%)
- The electronic version has increased features or content (24.3%)
- The electronic version is cheaper than the print (13.5%)
- We decided to replace print with electronic as a policy (13.5%)
- The print version is no longer available (8.1%)

Almost eighty percent indicated they had kept at least some print ready reference sources even though these were also available electronically. The reasons given:

- The print source is easier to use (56.3%)
- The print source is faster to use (50.0%)
- User demand is for the print source (28.1%)
- Print source is cheaper (21.9%)
- Print source is more complete (6.3%)
- Kept print source as a matter of policy (6.3%)

Virtually all of the librarians who took the survey anticipated the size and use of their print ready reference collection would decrease during the next five years. One librarian wrote, "Even Stat Abs. a staple of our RR collection gets little use." Another responded, "We've already seen use of our science reference collections nearly cease. We're expecting the other subject disciplines to follow as more and more reference material is available online." 🌿

What's in a Name from page 44

databases or electronic resources as if they are branded consumer products like **Coke**, **Pepsi**, or **Dr. Pepper**. For example, our citation index, a **Thomson Reuters** database, is referred to as **Web of Science**. What is a **Web of Science**? You're guess is as good as mine. It sounds like everything except a multidisciplinary citation index. Including the term "Science" in the moniker is misleading and probably deters many of our users from exploring the database. Consequently, we have decided to refer to **Web of Science** by its previous nomenclature; **Science Citation Index**, **Social Sciences Citation Index**, and **Humanities Citation Index**.

The issue may sound trivial but it is actually quite important when it comes to marketing electronic resources to your client base — faculty, students, etc. From now on, we will think long and hard before listing a database by its vendor name. Instead of listing a database as say "**Proquest Central**," perhaps we will rename it "Really Big All-Encompassing Database" or instead of **Lexis-Nexis Academic**, we will substitute the name "Legal and Business Favorites." 🌿

Rumors from page 38

Gosh! **Another wedding!** It was **The One Big Thing** that happened this summer for **Todd Carpenter** <tcarpenter@niso.org>!! He got married in July on the eastern shore of Maryland. Below is the URL for some pictures! Congratulations, **Todd**!! <http://www.flickr.com/photos/future15/sets/72157620905653693/>

And, besides being newly married, **Charles Watkinson** <cwatkinson@purdue.edu> (see way above) was appointed **Director of the Purdue University Press** as of September 1! **Charles** was previously director of publications for the **American School of Classical Studies at Athens (Greece)** and will lead the **Purdue Press** in identifying and establishing a niche within the scholarly publication field. Together with colleagues at the **American School for Classical Studies**, **Charles** recently coordinated a \$1.2 million digital library and electronic publishing initiative funded by the **Mellon Foundation** and **European Union**. He received a Hons Archaeology and

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