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Issues in Vendor/Library Relations -- Buying eBooks: Does Workflow Work? Part II

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be developed. Flexibility would be critical across varying subjects. But even these simple outlines show the potential power of using proven techniques to solve a growing problem. And just in time.

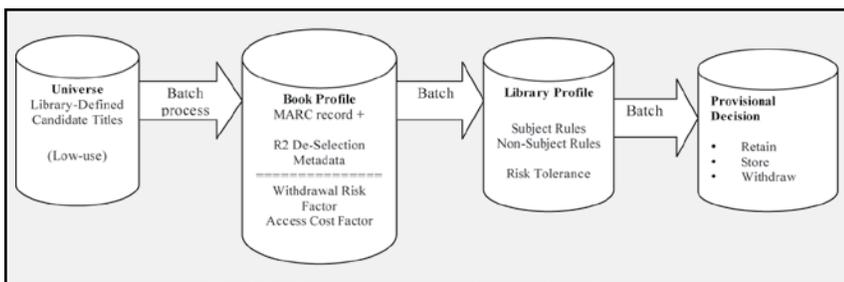| Access Cost Factor	Examples
0 – No Cost	• No such animal
1 – Low Cost	• Available via ILL or direct borrowing • Identical or substantially similar version available via Google Book Search or Internet Archive (public domain titles only)
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3 – High Cost	• Title out-of-print; available only at a premium • Title has never been digitized • Available in Special Collections only; restricted resource sharing

We envision that **WRF** and **ACF** would become elements in both content description and in the rules that operate against candidate titles. Running library-defined rules against the candidate file will result in a numeric "score" for each item. A high score would suggest high risk and/or high cost, and retention as a provisional action. A middle score would suggest storage, and a low score potential withdrawal.

The arguments that ultimately resulted in the widespread acceptance of approval plans to support selection are equally valid when applied later in the life-cycle of book content. Profiles and rules assure consistent treatment of all subject areas — and of the collection as a whole. These tools can also help assure collection integrity while pursuing even very aggressive weeding and storage targets. Finally, an approach to de-selection that is based on rules, batches, and automated support enables many titles to be handled efficiently. The end result: a high-volume, high-integrity solution to moving low-use titles out of the main library — opening additional space for users. 🌳

An implementable system would, of course, be much more refined than these examples. The **WRF** and **ACF** would be assigned independently of one another, but clearly their combined effect would need to be considered. A low-risk/high-cost item differs from a low-risk/low-cost item. Weighting of factors and additional rules would be needed. Definitions for "acceptably similar" and other terms will also need to

Please note: this article specifically addresses the weeding of monographs from circulating collections. There exist many other weeding opportunities for print serials, Government Documents, print reference collections, micro-formats and audio-visual material. These will be addressed in subsequent articles in this series. Our next article will take up the issue of "Sustainable Collections: Maintaining the Library's Carrying Capacity."

The SCS (Sustainable Collection Service) Concept

Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Buying eBooks: Does Workflow Work? Part II

by **Carolyn Morris** (Director of New Business Development, Coutts Information Services) <cmorris@couttsinfo.com>

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Choosing an eBook vendor is hard. That's because to a certain extent it requires predicting the future — the future of the business, of the vendor, even the future of the format itself. Rather than guess wrong, it can seem safer to hold off; but if decision makers are thoughtful, they can make choices now that will position their libraries well not only for today, but also for the future.

Since eBooks do not live on the library's shelves it is important, first and foremost, to build eBook collections with a company that will be around for a long time, and able in the first place to stay committed to eBooks. Though it is impossible to know for sure which companies will thrive in the future, it does make sense to examine track records and ask

questions about business models. Are eBooks a core part of the business or just a sideline? Does the company have a history of pulling the plug if profits aren't quickly forthcoming? Is the company offering a deal that seems too good to be true? Is the business model viable? In short, smart libraries will choose to work with companies that are making smart business decisions now.

Content is another thing to evaluate. Currency, quality, breadth, and relevance to academic libraries all are important, and patrons benefit from having as much good content aggregated on a single platform as possible. Though some users can learn a new interface without too much effort, many, and probably most, have no understanding of the library's

digital infrastructure. Multiple platforms require repeating the same search several times to uncover all relevant resources, a fact unknown and likely of little interest to many users. The more platforms, the more likely a researcher will miss useful eBooks. The **OPAC**, of course, sometimes will allow patrons to search across all of the library's holdings, but discovery is limited to the elements of the **MARC** record. The value of a stronger search that would lead a user to more of a library's digital content is lost.

There is no way to know for sure which eBook providers will be most successful in aggregating desirable content, but there are indicators of likely future success. The quan-

tity and quality of content currently available on a provider's platform reflects the strength of its current publisher relationships. Companies with a history of working with publishers and who understand the interests of publishers are likely to do well, since publishers are more likely to offer the best opportunities to their best, most trusted partners. One publishing friend told me that he only shares "dead books" with providers he does not know well.

Since publishers are still wary of theft, it is also necessary to look for a provider that will work with both the library community and the community of publishers to secure fair use in an environment that protects copyright. Piracy does happen; and anyone hosting eBooks that does not take that seriously will have trouble attracting and keeping publishers. If it seems the permissions promised in a sales presentation are out of line with current industry standards, be aware that the vendor may face trouble in the future with departing publishers.

It's equally important that the eBook provider's business model supports a reasonable revenue stream for publishers. Otherwise, there will be little motivation for the publisher to bother providing a digital file for that vendor's platform. Like permissions, if prices seem out of line, it could be that they are.

Libraries will also want to choose an eBook provider that regularly improves the functionality of its platform to keep up with patron expectations. An aggregator that is actively working with publishers to implement and promote new technologies will be a better long term fit than one that is acting only as a repository for content. Though it is important to choose a vendor that is shaping the digital future rather than reacting to it, it is on the other h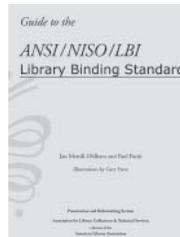and wise to ask questions about the technol-ogy involved. Specialized formats can be an obstacle to quick acquisition and ingestion of content, leading to delays in eBook availability. The more standardized the digital file, the more likely it is to work with new technologies.

Once the questions of long-term viability, access to content, and platform development have been answered satisfactorily and weighed appropriately, the library can then take into account cost, licensing terms, and workflow. Ease of selection and acquisition is an important factor for anything a library buys, of course — but only once the library has first made the right decisions about what it is that's being selected and acquired. 🍂

As I See It! — The Future of the Printed Monograph Has Arrived

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In my July column I wrote about developments in technology that will affect the monograph in the future. This encompassed not only eBooks and digital printing in small quantities, but also "Distribute and Print" processes, where the publisher sends PDF files to facilities in distant markets where small quantities, or even single copies, can be printed to fill local orders.

Not many months have passed, and distribute and print has become a reality. On December 2, 2008, the **OECD** published *OECD Insights: Sustainable Development* by transmitting a PDF file of the book from its headquarters in Paris, France, to the Australian retail bookseller **Angus & Robertson's** flagship shop in Bourke Street, one of the main shopping thoroughfares in Melbourne, Australia. It was immediately printed and bound as a paperback book in the shop using **On Demand Inc.'s Espresso Book Machine**. It was published simultaneously using the same process on all eleven **Espresso Book Machines** currently installed in North America, Egypt, and the UK as well as Australia.

The **Espresso Book Machine** is a digital printing machine that prints and binds a paperback book of a quality acceptable to most libraries in minutes from a digital file sent from the publisher. In 2007 it was described by *Time* magazine as one of the "Best Inventions of the Year." **On Demand Inc.** describes it as "just in time" technology. Regardless of the public relations hooplah, this represents a major step forward with financial, customer service and environmental implications for the scholarly publishing industry.

It can be set up in retail shops such as **Angus & Robertson** or **Blackwells** — which has recently announced its installation in some of its UK shops — or in wholesalers and library booksellers such as **DA Information Services**. **DA** is **OECD's** Australian distributor, and has been responsible for bringing the technology to Australia and working with **Angus & Robertson** to make the machine available in a retail context.