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From Field of Dreams to the Godfather: Collection Development Today

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Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

From Field of Dreams to the Godfather: Collection Development Today

by **Curt Holleman** (SMU, Dallas, Texas) <chollem@mail.smu.edu>

I want to begin in the days of yesteryear when we actually thought that our mission in life was to build collections for all time. Do you remember the time when directors of libraries actually boasted about volume counts? As in, "We are the seventh biggest library in the ARL." Or, "We now have 3,245,971 volumes in our libraries." Do you hear much of that anymore? Maybe when the library passes a threshold, like its three millionth volume, or its five millionth volume. More often you hear the sentiment: "I just wish that we could outlaw volume counts." I have heard directors of small libraries say this, and I have heard collection development librarians at major libraries say the same thing. Why? Because we no longer see ourselves as building lasting collections. Instead we want credit for our new document delivery initiatives, and we certainly want credit for our fulltext electronic journals online.

I have named the good old days after the movie, **Field of Dreams**. In the movie, the hero, relying on the mantra, "Build it, and they will come," builds a baseball field in the middle of Iowa. When I saw the movie, the audience was moved to tears of rapture, followed by loud sniffing, when this baseball field in the middle of nowhere magically fills with people at the end of the movie. I was not so moved, but, then, I had not yet thought about the analogy with library collections. If I had, I would have been sobbing for joy along with my fellow moviegoers.

"Build it, and they will come." In a world like that, what did collection development librarians think about? They thought about collection evaluation, and they developed a tool called the **ARL/RLG Conspectus** so that every library could evaluate any of thousands of subject areas of theirs on a scale from one to five, minimal to comprehensive. They thought about balance; they tried to collect materials

from the political left and the political right so that their readers could see all sides. They thought a lot about approval plans; how to obtain easily the books that they wanted both from the United States and from around the world.

My personal favorite from the old days was the topic of fund allocation: it engaged the best minds in collection development, and in its heyday we saw thousands of crazy allocation formulas flying around. It no longer seems to be a very popular topic. Finding the best allo-

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If Rumors Were Horses

The fabulous **Adrian W. Alexander** has been named Executive Director, **Big 12 Plus Libraries Consortium**, Linda Hall Library, 5109 Cherry Street, Kansas, MO 64110-2498. His phone number is 816-926-8765, and fax number is 816-926-8790. Adrian's email is <alexandera@ihl.lib.mo.us>. Congratulations Adrian!

Information Quest, Dawson's great innovative source for periodicals information, is merging operations in Westwood, Mass. with **Faxon's Information Services Group**. This means that **Information Quest** is beyond the development stage and is into the marketing and sales mode, under the direction of our own **Dan Tonkery**. **David Cheatham** is Director of Research and Development for **ISG** and will report to **Vern Cain**. **Jan Peterson** is Vice

President of Publisher Relations, **Faxon ISG** and will report to **Dan Tonkery**.

We told you back in November that **Ron Akie** had been named President of **SilverPlatter Information's** U.S. region. Well, Ron has also recently been named CEO of **SilverPlatter**.

From the law-lib listserv, and **Judy Meadows**, AALL President -- The **AALL (American Association of Law Librarians)** has been closely monitoring the **Kramerbok/Barnes** and **Noble** situation and "is concerned with

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What To Look For

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cation formula today would be a little like finding the best use for a 286 computer. It would be impressive, but nobody would be very interested.

"Build it, and they will come." Is this totally outmoded advice? I don't think so. In fact, I think that **Harvard**, the **Library of Congress**, and many special collections still follow it. But most of us live in a world where this has been discredited in favor of concepts like: access over ownership; just-in-time, not just-in-case; and "People don't read anymore; they hate having to find stuff in libraries. Give them online journals; that's what they like."

For a time, document delivery seemed to be the answer. Beginning about five or ten years ago, library directors started to take pride in building up their interlibrary loan staffs at the expense of collections. There was a facetious definition of a collection development librarian: the collection development librarian is a librarian who would rather provide for the patron he/she never met than the one he/she has standing before him. Interlibrary loan and document delivery are most emphatically for the patron that you have met.

In our day of accountability, who could object? You are no longer buying on speculation; you are simply funding the supply of direct demands. There is no doubt that the non-collection paradigm has found its place in many small libraries and some large ones. But like all simple solutions to complex problems, the just-in-time solution seems very good for some things (like esoteric science journals) and very poor for other things (like most books). Libraries most definitely have moved toward satisfying far more of their demand in the just-in-time mode, but it no longer seems to be an ever-increasing trend that will end with the death of collections.

There are just two things I remember about **The Godfather**. One is a character waking up with a dead horse's head in his bed. He didn't like that. The other is **Marlon Brando's** saying, "I will make you an offer you can't refuse." If I recall, the recipient(s) of this offer didn't mind it so much that they didn't take it. I call today's world for libraries the world of **The Godfather**. We are getting offers that we cannot refuse. This is especially true of small and medium-sized libraries, and the chance to get huge databases for practically nothing is taking the luster off the document-delivery paradigm for many libraries.

I am talking about consortial deals. In fact, the most spectacular consortial deals

are not even for normal consortia. In the state of Ohio, forty institutions will receive all of **Elsevier's** periodicals electronically over a period of three years for the tidy sum of \$23 million. The state of Georgia supports a project called **Galileo** with \$9 million per year, and it sends multiple databases to libraries of every kind across the state. I don't imagine that many libraries eligible to receive these databases through the state find it in their hearts to refuse them.

In Texas, we have our own humble project called **TexShare**. Through a combination of state funding and monster discounts, we receive the two major UMI databases that normally would cost us \$30,000 to \$40,000

for a mere \$5,500. Smaller libraries get them for even less. Now you could quibble and complain, as a librarian on the Internet recently did, that UMI's **ABI/INFORM** recently removed half a dozen important fulltext titles retrospectively. And I admit, it is unsettling that the vendors who supply current fulltext articles from multiple publishers have a loss rate of perhaps five percent a year of their fulltext titles. If you depend on electronic fulltext for your access to a periodical through a major vendor, you will have to scramble any time that one of their deals with a periodical publisher falls through. Even so, I was surprised as I sat in a meeting in Austin last month and heard several small libraries reject the fantastic discount on UMI that **TexShare** offered. They truly refused the offer you can't refuse.

At **SMU** we get involved with ever-changing groups of libraries in our quest for consortial deals. One of the greatest offers ever was on **Project Muse**. **Project Muse** is an electronic database of **Johns Hopkins University Press** journals. One might question the value of having all of the Johns Hopkins journals together in one place, but it is hard to fault their electronic interface. It is a pleasure to work with.

Project Muse offers a discount on the paper journals for libraries purchasing electronic access. For us, the consortial discount was so good that we would pay less for the paper and electronic together than we were paying for the paper alone. Pay less; get more. This was a true no-brainer; it was the deal we couldn't refuse. Unfortunately, Johns Hopkins University Press now makes libraries choose either the paper discount OR the consortial discount.

We got together with another group of libraries to purchase **Academic Press's** product called **IDEAL**. **IDEAL** is perhaps typical of many consortial offers today. It is an extremely good deal for the smaller library involved in it, and more like a normal

purchase for the larger library. Basically, every library in the consortium ends up with the same electronic product, but they pay according to how many journals they were subscribing to at the start. In our consortium, we ended up with 124 journals. Some libraries had only been subscribing to two or three of them, and they are paying something like \$500 for journals that are worth more like \$100,000. This is an offer that they cannot refuse.

IDEAL has a very complicated system of discounts and add-on costs, but basically

The deals that we are getting with the new technology are indeed too good to refuse.

for us we doubled our list of **Academic Press** titles for a very small additional cost. And if we canceled enough of our print titles we actually could save money over our old total cost. Even though we are one of the larger libraries in our consortium, I thought that we had a tremendous deal, and I anxiously awaited the arrival of the product. Our access arrived, but we had not thought of everything. Even the small libraries with the fantastic deals complained about how slow the response on the Internet is. I am sure that **Academic** will fix the response rate soon.

I am supposed to tell you what you need to know today, and you are probably afraid that I am going to advise you to watch **Field of Dreams**. Return to the past. Well, not exactly.

The deals that we are getting with the new technology are indeed too good to refuse. I am not being ironic. If you are marooned somewhere without a consortium, find one. If you are already in a consortium, push it to find the best products and negotiate the best prices. The electronic world has perils indeed, and I could tell you about many more of them. But its rewards are greater than its perils, and we must take advantage of them.

My second piece of advice is: take advantage of the past. Despite predictions, paper seems to be in no hurry to leave us. **Walt Crawford** and **Michael Gorman** have demonstrated convincingly that regardless of improvements in computer displays, you will never be able to read on a computer the way you can read a book. And, they note, if you printed out everything that circulated from the **UCLA Library** in a year, the cost of the paper alone would exceed the annual cost of all of the salaries and all of the resources at the **UCLA** library.

So do not throw away those old studies of collection evaluation and fund allocation. And do not forget the old commitment to build balanced collections and fight censorship. The electronic world is not supplanting the paper world; it is making it better.

If you are marooned somewhere without a consortium, find one.