November 2001

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Recommended Citation

Bustion, Marifran (2001) "Choices for Libraries, Publishers and Vendors," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 13: Iss. 5, Article 12.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3212>

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Choices for Libraries, Publishers, and Vendors

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Over the past several years, the decision-making process libraries use while purchasing materials has become increasingly complex. As recently as 10-15 years ago, the typical medium sized academic library began taking advantage of approval plans to purchase core collections of monographs, implementing standing orders to ensure receipt of complete runs of series, contracting with subscription vendors to coordinate and manage journal subscriptions, and purchasing other monographs and serials directly from publishers. The internal processing has often been highly dependent on paper files, whether for purchasing, receipt, or payment, and utilized a complex management system with several staff members placing orders and monitoring receipt and payment. The formats ordered were usually print, microfiche, sound recordings, and videos. Libraries usually have negotiated services and discounts directly with vendors.

Today, libraries have even more decisions to make. Although many of the decisions include a cost factor, many also consider other factors, such as service—from the publisher or vendor to the library and from the library to the user. Libraries must decide whether to buy print or electronic; from whom to buy, e.g., publisher, vendor, or aggregator; or whether to purchase as a single institution or through cooperative arrangements with consortia or networks.

Libraries today often have a choice of purchasing print or electronic format or both. Often, especially with print subscriptions, the electronic format is available with little or no additional cost, but this availability is often only possible if the print subscription is retained. In some cases, the electronic format is a digitized version of the print; in others, it offers vastly different access to data or information. In still other cases, there is only an electronic format. When the library is interested in only one format, and both are offered, if print is the desired format, the decision is easily made—the URL is not activated. If the library wants both formats, several factors listed below should be considered in the decision:

1. Does the library have the current and future technology to support the electronic format?
2. Does the library have the physical space to support continuing print subscriptions or print monographs?
3. Is the library interested in making available the most current publishing formats?
4. What does the library's customer base want?
5. Does the library have the financial support to make innovative purchases, or is it doomed to maintain its status quo of print and microform holdings?
6. Does the library have staff to process additional formats?

7. Does the library have the decision-making process in place to make these decisions?

Concurrently, many libraries are struggling to decide whether to cancel the print of dual format subscriptions. Some concerns with this decision are whether there is perpetual access with the electronic version if it is cancelled; whether access will continue to be available as technology changes; whether the technology will be available when users need access, during such problems as system crashes, power outages; etc. Even deciding which electronic format, such as CD-ROM or Web, can cause frustration with each having different cost options and user ease.

Publishers have certainly long been a major source for libraries to purchase materials, but over the years book and serials vendors have offered benefits for libraries in discounts, services and management reports provided, and more efficient use of processing staff. Although not always acknowledged by library staff as outsourcing, libraries have been dependent on both monograph and serials vendors to provide consolidated services for ordering, receiving, and paying for both of the products they offer. This relationship between libraries and vendors, though, is partly dependent on a relationship between publishers and vendors. Publishers have given vendors discounts for monographs and serials; these have then been distributed to libraries in the form of discounts for purchasing monographs or lower service charges from serials vendors. As discounts from publishers have decreased or stopped altogether, discounts to libraries have decreased and service charges increased.

Although for decades libraries have purchased most of their materials as single institutions, consortia have formed with varying purposes. Some have been informal agreements providing member users equal borrowing privileges. Others have been more formal, with outcomes such as shared databases and agreements with vendors for same discount or service charges. With the advent of electronic formats and their high costs, many institutions have been compelled to find ways to cut costs or increase buying power. One action, even for those already in long-standing agreements or consortia, was to align themselves with other libraries and consortia to negotiate more acceptable arrangements for cost and use of electronic formats. The outcomes have varied, but in many cases, costs have been lowered and terms for use were made more acceptable.

Choices in the internal processing, such as whether to monitor the process manually or use state of the art, or other, technology, have often been dictated by institutional re-

quirements, such as the financial system used, or by technology, such as the library's integrated library system (ILS). These factors have greatly impacted the library's decisions. For example, although some institutions have allowed electronic payments to be made, other institutions have continued to make payments solely by cutting paper checks. Many of these institutions have also insisted on having paper copies of invoices and payment requests with an authorized signature before cutting checks. These requirements have slowed down payment processing considerably. As institutions have allowed electronic payments and electronic payment requests, the process has bypassed several steps in library processing, allowing checks or electronic payments to be made within a much more reasonable time frame. The acquisitions modules in nearly every ILS have long provided the least effective processing of the system. These systems have at times not provided accurate math, e.g., adding and subtracting funds incorrectly; often have had such complex designs that library staff are discouraged from making changes, such as converting from one subscription vendor to another, or worse, even from changing the location of items; and have not provided efficient mechanisms for collection development and other reports.

Libraries have participated in major changes, both internally and externally. There have been great improvements in technology, pressures and requirements from libraries' home institutions, and changes in format from paper to electronic. For example, online ordering and electronic payments have greatly increased efficiencies in much of the acquisitions processing. At the same time, libraries' collections budgets have continued to have less buying power each year because budgets, even with increases, have not been greater than the high inflation rates in the publishing world. With these changes, library staff have actively considered options in accessing material, particularly with buying monographs and serials.

A staple in purchasing print monographs has been the approval plan. Publishers have discounted materials to vendors; vendors have then passed these discounts to libraries; vendors have negotiated with publishers to allow returns of reviewed, but unwanted books; collection development librarians have depended on having a core collection with minimal personal selecting. Some of these cooperative arrangements have begun to change. For example, as publishers have stopped or decreased discounts or

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have not allowed full coverage of their materials, vendors have suggested that these publishers be excluded from approval plans and even that libraries not purchase those publishers' materials through the vendor. Some publishers have continued or begun not to offer any or most of their materials through vendors. While the publishers' decisions seem to be based on cost saving or cost effectiveness, the results have caused libraries to consider changes not only in local processing, but also arrangements with vendors and publishers. Because of consolidated processing, most library staff have preferred working with a few vendors rather than directly with numerous publishers. But, as publishers have changed their agreements and therefore their relationships with vendors, staff have now begun considering optional approaches to ordering.

As staff have questioned their processing effectiveness, they have considered how processing could be streamlined, be more cost effective, and still provide selectors options in collection management. One consideration has been to negotiate directly with those publishers who no longer meet basic approval plan requirements and bypass vendors. Since such a major change with internal processing should not be made without serious thought, staff must consider at least some of the following:

1. Will vendors or publishers offer the most complete coverage of publishers?
2. Should approval plans be used for "core collection" purchasing or should they be relied on for collecting more comprehensively?
3. Are discounts available only from vendors or can they be negotiated with publishers?
4. How is staff processing time affected if the acquisitions process encompasses dealing directly with more publishers?
5. What types of management reports can be obtained from publishers and vendors and are they in formats that can be coordinated so libraries can get specific information from publishers but incorporate these data with similar data from vendors and other publishers? The concern here is how can libraries continue to use management reports from vendors and publishers to assist in collection management decisions.

Approval plans have comprised a varying percentage of libraries' monograph collections, but for many libraries, staff have also used the

same vendors for firm orders and approvals. For example, if the major domestic plan has been with Vendor A, staff have relied on that vendor's database to confirm whether the order is already marked as an approval book. Efficient processing has demanded the order be placed with the first vendor searched that can handle the request. For every additional database searched, efficient processing and valuable staff time has decreased. Ethically, libraries must place orders from approval slips with the vendor that supplied the slips. Only if the items are unavailable with that vendor may the library place the orders elsewhere. Because of the ease in setting up and monitoring slip plans, libraries have often then been unable to take advantage of the services and discounts of other vendors, both small and large.

Selectors have become increasingly vocal in their demands for service, such as fulfillment rates, speed, and coverage, often requesting complete coverage of identified publishers. With options such as those offered by **Amazon.com**, selectors either want similar services from vendors or they want acquisitions staff to order from **Amazon.com**. One aspect in particular they like is links to books on related subjects. If staff were to order directly from these sources, there would need to be intense coordination between acquisitions staff and selectors to ensure requested items were ordered. Another of the primary reasons for using **Amazon.com** has been the fulfillment speed. Although not all items have been as available as promised, the proportion of items delivered quickly has surpassed that of book dealers used for years. Selectors, although conscious of cost and budgets, have long been more interested in how quickly material has been available for users than nearly any other factor. Because ordering through a service such as **Amazon.com** is in many ways similar to using a vendor, staff processing time would not increase.

As staff rely more on companies such as **Amazon.com**, vendors and publishers need to consider how to refine their technology and assume a responsibility for understanding how libraries want to use their databases. If vendors are unable to provide services, such as providing complete publisher coverage, subject searching, or quick fulfillment rates, they either need to provide them or communicate to selectors their inabilities. Selectors have indicated no loyalty to vendors, especially as the perceived lack of services and communication deteriorates. Because selectors spend much

effort in identifying materials to buy, perusing publisher catalogs, vendor and publisher databases, utility databases, and other sources, they need to have a clear understanding of the services provided and will have a stronger say in how acquisitions staff make order decisions.

As with book vendors, another fundamental aid to acquisitions processing has been serials vendors, as they provide services that also have greatly consolidated processing for libraries, such as ordering, claiming, and invoicing. Now that electronic journals have become a primary source, both as free with print and as additional costs, these consolidated services can be a great help to libraries struggling with processing electronic resources. It has become very laborious, and dependent on resources not planned or budgeted, for library staff to identify and process electronic journals. Problems staff have encountered with electronic journals include, but are not limited to, negotiating license agreements; identifying and maintaining the URL correct for the individual library; and selecting, creating, and maintaining appropriate bibliographic records. These problems are further compounded when libraries are not directly involved in negotiations, such as with consortia, and may end up with multiple access to several resources, such as those included in contracts negotiated by consortia or publisher packages that may or may not include titles for which libraries already have subscriptions through the vendor. One solution libraries have been considering is to sever the subscription agreement with vendors for those titles from publishers with package arrangements or multiple electronic titles. Since these often seem to be the more lucrative subscriptions for vendors, this action may result in higher service charges for libraries from vendors. A consequence for staff is that they must work with the several publishers in addition to their vendors.

In the continuing quest for library staff to meet selectors' and library users' needs, institutions and library system vendors have been designing and implementing systems to assist staff with faster turnaround time in placing orders and processing shipments. Recent innovations have included electronic ordering and invoicing. However, payment by the institution has remained paper checks. Many institutions have begun distributing credit cards to staff, but have inflexible and low transaction limits. With higher item transaction amounts and monthly transaction limits, staff could depend more heavily on credit cards for paying invoices, rather than on the drudgery of processing paper invoices and checks. With a heavier reliance on credit card payments, invoices would be paid more quickly, benefiting libraries, vendors, and publishers.

As library budgets continue to have decreasing purchasing power and as institutions and users increase pressures to libraries to provide more collections and services, all those involved in providing these services—vendors, libraries,

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AUTHOR'S BIO

Marifran Bustion is currently Head of the Acquisitions Department in the Gelman Library at the **George Washington University** in Washington, DC 20052. Her first library job was helping her mother paste book pockets for a newly formed county library when she was 7. Her first paid library job was typing and filing catalog cards for serials catalogers at Indiana University. This included using an electronic eraser for title changes and a card platen with an IBM Selectric—those were the days! She enjoys reading murder mysteries, and is currently fascinated by Matt Ridley's "Genome."

Joys, Horrors, and the Future of Library Acquisitions

by **John M. Kistler, M.L.S.** (Acquisitions and Collection Development Librarian, West Virginia State College, 310 Grandview Pointe, Dunbar, WV 25064) <kistlerj@mail.wvsc.edu> <kistlerj@email.msn.com>

Though I have only worked in libraries for ten years, I've labored in three very different types: special, public, and academic. Each institution catered to differing audiences and used dissimilar methods for acquiring materials. Both as an Acquisitions Librarian and as a Library Director, I have experienced the many challenges posed by the rapid changes of modern librarianship.

In order to understand the current pressures on libraries, it is important to examine how different acquisition styles help or harm library collections. And in order to assess the evolving nature of the relationship among publishers, distributors and libraries, it is also necessary to examine what is the impact of changing acquisition methods upon libraries, publishers and jobbers.

Current Changes

Librarians have become panicky about change, which is understandable, given the stressful computerization of libraries over the last two decades. Electronic resources have displaced the traditional use of paper indexes and reference tools, not just the "card catalog." The trauma of re-learning our own jobs, then training patrons to learn the new systems, has been acute. However, we're beginning to see an end to these initial changes.

The most significant new change is to the Periodicals Department of the library. Online periodicals databases are a system full of both wonders and perils. Serials librarians are beginning to feel like database managers. The electronic tools themselves are great achievements. Patrons who are accustomed to the instant gratification of computer searching greatly prefer online fulltext articles to microfilm or print searching. However, even the major online database companies have a constant gain and loss of new available titles. As a result of the skyrocketing prices of periodicals, libraries have been forced to cut print and microfilm versions to rely upon the cheaper and more popular electronic databases. While these electronic files do often contain several years' worth of articles for each title, these titles also tend to suddenly vanish. One month they are here; the next month they are gone. If the library has dropped the print and microfilm versions, they now have nothing.

This movement to e-periodicals impacts basic cooperative services, like **Interlibrary Loan (ILL)** availability. Subscribing to an electronic database version of a periodical does not allow for "fair-use" copying to share with other libraries upon request by a patron. With fewer libraries subscribing to print and microfilm

titles, fewer libraries are able to fill **ILL** requests. Thus, while providing a wide variety of previously unknown or unaffordable titles, online databases simultaneously foment conditions that reduce the security of once-steady periodical collections. It is a very pretty, felt-lined trap. The administrators love the apparent cost reductions ("we now receive 2500 fulltext periodicals for the price of 500"), but the collection changes monthly, and thus no coherent collection development plan can be followed. Whereas once the periodicals holdings list required updating once per year to show the new acquisitions, now the updates must be performed quarterly.

Online database changes are still increasing, but overall, the pace of change is slowing. Why? For two reasons. One, humans are still limited in their abilities to incorporate change, and the businesses creating our new technologies are making them more simple and user-friendly. We have survived the initial shock of installing, learning, and teaching computer use. Future changes will involve the same equipment with which we are now familiar (computers) and will be built upon extant software interfaces (**Microsoft**). Two, the economy has significantly slowed. Businesses will be spending less on research and development, and people will be spending less money on buying new products. I believe that it will be some years before the next burst of frantic activity in library technology.

However, the perception of libraries continues to be affected by the technological changes which have already occurred. An example is the naively accepted administrative belief that libraries are becoming irrelevant, and can only be kept alive by turning them into computer labs. Modern library science schools do nothing to help this trend. Even my own alma mater has changed the name of their school from "School of Library and Information Science" to plain "School of Information Science." Administrators cut back on all traditional expenditures for such things as books, periodicals, and personnel, and wish to fund only electronic resources and equipment. Reference questions are now 80 percent computer related – e.g. how do I set the margins on Word Perfect? Computer librarians or network experts are the high-demand position in libraries now; and those facilities that are too small to have one, require the current staff to meddle in electronics troubleshooting. The independent, self-sufficient library no longer exists. Practically every facility requires "linking" to an outside electronic database, cataloging system, hardware vendor, and experts whom we will never meet. Problems cannot be solved in-house, but require consultation with the electronic services providers (who may take some time to get to your problem).

Even aside from the current economic slowdown, the philosophy of "do more with less"

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and publishers—must work together to find ways to provide quality service to customers. Suggestions I have are the following:

1. Local institutions need to work with library system vendors, publishers, and book/serial vendors to coordinate electronic ordering and payment. Electronic data interchange (EDI) has had positive results for libraries and vendors for faster payment and less paperwork. Implementing an efficient electronic ordering and claiming system will make many acquisitions staff very happy. However, these systems need to set and follow standards for transacting data and agree to same or similar technology, so that library systems and book/serial publishers and vendors don't need to design separate programs for each vendor or library. (For example, there should be one design for transacting order data for all library and book vendors. Currently, each book and serial vendor must design separate programs for each library system.)
2. Local institutions need to allow electronic invoice processing and no longer require paper with authorized, hand written signatures. They also need to take advantage of electronic deposits and more flexibility for staff to use credit cards. If these steps were implemented, much paperwork would be eliminated and payments would be processed more quickly.
3. Interest groups of customers and company staff, with several areas represented, such as from the library selectors and acquisitions staff, from publisher technical, marketing, publishing, and editorial staff, from library system vendor development staff, and from vendor development and customer service staff, could be formed to identify and address singular and common needs. One approach to this could be with representation from types of companies and libraries, rather than from a specific library/company.

Some of these needs are technical, but other needs are based on communication. All staff, whether from publisher, library, or vendor need a greater understanding of the pressures and concerns of the others.