November 2001

Library Acquisitions: Change and the Need for Communication Among Libraries, Distributors and Publishers

Jeanne Harrell

Texas A&M University, jeanneh@tamu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Harrell, Jeanne (2001) "Library Acquisitions: Change and the Need for Communication Among Libraries, Distributors and Publishers," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 13: Iss. 5, Article 14.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3214>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

may lose their niche markets. After all, small publishers are generally reliant upon niche markets; this is how they can afford to buy and print small-run books, because they already have a loyal target market, primed to receive such materials.

Pay per View Articles

Online services that charge for a given desired article have existed for some years, and are therefore not new. However, this is being discussed more frequently as a solution to expensive online subscriptions. For instance, some of the Physical Sciences online databases are extravagantly priced for fulltext access. Plans are being offered that allow a patron to see the abstracts of articles, then choose to view the fulltext for a fee. Libraries can also provide the same service by paying on behalf of the student or patron. In institutions where the requests for such detailed articles are uncommon, the pay per view method could be an ideal solution. \$10 each for ten searches in a month is only \$100; a far cheaper choice than \$1000 per month. Obviously this would be a disastrous choice for a library with constant requests for such materials.

The fear in many libraries is that pay per view article viewing could become standard in more databases. Rather than providing broad coverage of many subjects with total access to the whole campus, the companies may decide to charge everyone by the articles viewed. Even if cheaper than the current system, it could wreak havoc on budgets. How would a library ever know how much money to set aside? Most likely, each database company would require a large deposit, and take money out upon use; but this could lead to unanticipated demand and cost overruns and leave libraries without access until the new budget year.

One reason to worry that pay per view articles will become more common is the recent court decision in favor of writers. Publishers had claimed that an electronic version of an article is no different than the print version, while writers wanted another commission payment for the electronic use of their work. It remains to be seen whether publishers will simply take off their older articles to avoid paying a second fee to the writers, or if they will start charging to view those articles, so as to pay the writers' commissions.

Electronic Books

Electronic books are not yet widespread in the public or private sectors, and cannot be labeled a success story, thus far. A recent article said that less than five percent of new monographs are being printed in electronic format. If so, then students and faculty can certainly not rely upon an all "digital library" at the present time, nor hope for it to be accomplished in the very near future. Then, if someday all new books are available in electronic format, will out-of-print books be digitized for research also? The electronic publishing industry has a long way to go before it can claim a significant place in the book market. Recent strides in

miniaturization, for the creation of handheld e-book readers, are a good start. However, the public has not yet shown that it prefers electronic books to the old-fashioned print style.

One New England state recently announced that it would purchase laptop computers for all of its students. Many large universities and colleges now include a laptop computer in student tuition fees. While the idea is catching on, and shows great promise, do not forget that laptops are still a dream for most states and public schools. Until more people (or governments) are able to afford laptop computers and e-book readers, libraries cannot fully embrace the collection of such materials. They just are not useful to a majority of patrons, yet.

One niche market, in which electronic books do seem to be taking hold, is the academic textbook market. The production of CD-ROMs is cheaper and faster than the production of traditional hardcover texts, and upgrades or updates can be sent via email to buyers easily. Some professors have also begun customizing textbooks, or adding their own class notes for the use of the students, electronically. If electronic

books and their production come to be accepted, libraries will have to think carefully about the ramifications. Copyright laws may have to change. Will publishers disable the print keys on the computers that are reading the e-book? At least with a printed volume, a photocopy can be made of a page; that may change with electronic books. The least of our problems will be supply issues, if electronic books become the standard.

Conclusion

Changes have come to libraries, publishers, and jobbers in recent years. These changes have been driven both by changing technologies and by economics. In spite of the painful nature of change, I suspect that all three groups will continue to survive. The relationships between the three cannot dramatically collapse because there is still demand for all of the groups. Despite the Internet, libraries are still necessary. Despite credit cards and online bookstores, jobbers continue to provide useful services. And despite price increases and the desire to cut out the middleman, publishers will continue to use jobbers to get books to the libraries.

Library Acquisitions: Change and the Need for Communication Among Libraries, Distributors, and Publishers

by **Jeanne Harrell** (Director of Acquisitions, Texas A&M University, 5000 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-5000; Phone: 979-862-1895; Fax: 979-458-1630) <jeanneh@tamu.edu>

The title for the **21st Annual Charleston Conference** is an especially appropriate one...The Trends They Are A'Changing...We live in a world of great opportunity for libraries, publishers, and distributors of information. It is vital that all three groups continue to work closely together, sharing their concerns as well as new titles. Librarians must make their needs clear to both publishers and distributors so that changes in their purchasing strategies, such as purchasing an increasing number of titles directly, does not tilt the balance so far that vendors supplying large quantities of titles are forced to change their pricing model. Approval vendors have traditionally included many value-added services, such as printed approval forms and online access to their inventory databases for no additional cost. There now seems to be lurking a model which would build a fee into the pricing model for certain value-added services such as these. This model would shrink the buying power of libraries, so it is hoped that this change would continue to be discussed openly with librarians and publishers. It is vital that all three groups try to understand the pressures causing distributors and publishers to change pricing and supply models, and libraries to change procurement practices as they seek

to get the most for their money while trying to meet the demands of their customers.

As we seek to provide the titles required by our students and faculty, libraries are employing a wide variety of methods. The traditional large approval plan, I believe, will continue to be the most appropriate option for large academic and research libraries, but alternate methods are also appearing.

Approval plans are one situation where libraries and vendors work closely to provide the needs of library users before the need can even be expressed. Vendor representatives visit the library at the beginning of the relationship to discuss the subject areas for which books or notification forms will be sent to the library. By carefully setting up the library profile (the parameters of the materials to be sent automatically to the library), books or notification forms can save selectors/bibliographers a great deal of time. The vendor can provide cost estimates for profiles based on the previous year's titles supplied so that libraries can more accurately know what the approval plan will cost them. This is especially essential when setting up a new approval plan, so there are no surprises before the end of the fiscal year. The vendor's

continued on page 53

AFRICAN AMERICAN SLAVE NARRATIVES

An Anthology

Edited by Sterling Lecater Bland, Jr.

African American slave narratives of the 19th century recorded the atrocities of the antebellum South and provided a solid foundation for the African American literary tradition. By presenting 16 such narratives in their entirety, this reference conveniently documents this historically significant literary genre. Unlike other anthologies, which often contain excerpts from readily available narratives, this work offers complete versions of largely unavailable texts. To add to the value of this reference for the researcher and general reader alike, each narrative is accompanied by a preface, explanatory notes, and suggestions for further reading. The work begins with an introductory essay that fully contextualizes the slave narrative genre and concludes with a general bibliography.

Greenwood Press • 2001 • 1056 pages (3 Volumes)
0-313-31168-4 • \$275.00

For detailed information on these and other important new reference works from the Greenwood Publishing Group, please visit us online at www.greenwood.com

Greenwood Press is an imprint of the Greenwood Publishing Group
www.greenwood.com

88 Post Road West • P.O. Box 5007 • Westport, CT 06881-5007
TOLL-FREE: 1-800-225-5800 • Order Fax (203) 750-9790

Library Acquisitions from page 52

bibliographer assigns books to various subject profiles and simply applies the library's requirements. For example, a given library may want every book on the graduate level in a particular subject. Since the vendor is constantly reviewing publishers' lists, the appropriate books are identified by the vendor without the library selectors having to go through endless numbers of catalogs to find particular titles to be purchased.

For rush materials and situations in which few copies are available, many libraries have started purchasing materials through the use of a credit card. Even state institutions, normally the last to be able to implement cutting edge

practices, are using credit cards. Vendors/publishers must produce a receipt of payment to verify the purchase with the exact amount of the purchase stated clearly. As a result, they are experiencing a different set of demands from libraries in regards to these credit card purchases.

For domestic purchases, use of the credit card has been quite liberating. The credit card approach has worked well in securing rush titles for professor's classroom and research needs. The credit card has also been quite successful in dealing with out of print materials that would be almost impossible to obtain if the normal prepayment process were necessary. While some major publishers would send a rush book and be willing to wait for payment, rare book suppliers would hold books until prepayment

could be processed, often requiring a month for the payment process to work its way through the state procedures. Of course, that would not be acceptable to many suppliers when other institutions and individuals can pay for a title more quickly. Many small publishers have refused to do business with some state libraries because of the severe delay in receipt of payments. Using the credit card, this payment takes a matter of minutes, and a book can be on its way to the library in less than a day. With electronic access to various databases and individual serial titles becoming more popular and library customers depending on the electronic access more heavily, the credit card has also been used to prevent the imminent disruption of service due to payment delays using the traditional paper workflow methods. For example, a subscription may be ending on August 31. The payment for the renewal may not be able to reach the vendor by the end of the subscription, so a credit card payment can be processed so that service will not be interrupted.

Use of the credit card has been less successful with foreign vendors and publishers. Texas A&M University Libraries attempted to use the credit card approach for difficult to obtain foreign titles, both monographs and serials (especially backfile missing issues), but found that the exchange rate used for the billing was determined by the date the distributor/publisher submitted the billing which often differed from the order/payment data used in the automated acquisitions system. This discrepancy, which

continued on page 54

AUTHOR'S BIO

Jeanne Harrell is currently the Director of Acquisitions at **Texas A&M University Libraries** in College Station, Texas. Her first professional library position was as cataloger at the University of Tulsa in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Her undergraduate degrees are Elementary Education and English. She taught school for four years and fell in love with libraries at Baylor while her husband was working on his Masters' degree. She began as Head of the Labelling Department at Baylor University in 1972, and gradually worked her way through an MLS at the University of Oklahoma while working full-time as a staff member at the University of Tulsa. Her job experiences include: Cataloging, Cataloging Training (dated now), Acquisitions, Serials, Electronic Resources, Automated Library Systems (OCLC, LIAS, NOTIS, VOYAGER).

Her hobbies include spectator sports, especially football and basketball, and reading mystery novels by Braun, Grafton, and Evanovich. She has a son, age 26, who has a degree in journalism and works in the Sports Information Office at Texas A&M. She also has a daughter, age 16, a junior in high school, who keeps Jeanne and her family busy with drill team activities.

Library Acquisitions from page 53

was detected at the time the monthly statement was received, necessitated additional steps to correct the payment information in the automated system in addition to changes in the printed log which tracks credit card transactions. Since each occurrence had to be documented carefully for auditing purposes, it became more trouble than it was worth. As a result, use of the credit card for foreign purchases requiring currency conversion to US dollars is used only in emergencies.

Tracking these credit card purchases can be quite time-consuming because the purchases must be documented carefully for auditing purposes. Staff in Acquisitions, library business offices, and university fiscal offices are all involved in verifying that the purchase was authorized, that the funds were paid to the correct vendor/publisher for the correct amount, and that the acquisition was received and expended correctly on the library's automated acquisitions system. Each transaction requires initials of the staff performing the task, and the department head must verify that all documentation is complete and correct. Since transactions can carry over from month to month, this is quite a laborious task. For example, a title is ordered on September 28. The book arrives on October 4, but the Mastercard bill does not arrive until the end of October. The log for September and October are required to document the transaction. The transaction becomes even more complex and lengthy in its final resolution if the publication is delayed for any reason, or if it is damaged in some way and must be returned for credit.

Since the limit on the credit card and the complexity of record keeping would not likely allow a library to send all of its rush orders as credit card orders, many libraries, including **Texas A&M University Libraries**, are choosing to go directly to the publishers to expedite the delivery of a title. One snag in this particular scenario has been an increase of late of publishers who will not take orders directly from library acquisitions staff, but insist that the title be ordered through a vendor. Perhaps the publishers prefer to deal with fewer sets of purchasing requirements, since every library seems to have its own set of restrictions and documentation requirements. Perhaps the publishers are tired of dealing with slow pay issues when selling to certain libraries, especially state institutions. In most cases, libraries would prefer to purchase titles from vendors to take advantage of discounts offered by vendors, either through approval plan umbrellas or through state contracts. However, it is difficult to explain to a professor that it is not possible to obtain the book she needs for class in three days because the publisher will not sell the title directly to the library, thereby causing a delay of at least two days in most cases since the vendor may not necessarily have the book on hand to ship to the library.

Of course, while enabling libraries to receive materials more quickly, the direct purchasing

model can also cause problems. Consolidation of orders can provide many economies of scale, especially with the use of **Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)**. EDI refers to the computer-to-computer transmission of business information between trading partners for ordering electronically. Publishers who decide that all titles must be purchased directly from them cause difficulty for libraries because library staff must process the orders separately following a different set of procedures than those used for the bulk purchases of materials from a vendor/distributor. The result is, generally, higher materials costs, higher shipping cost and an increase in overhead costs to process the materials one at a time rather than through a vendor in a bulk purchase. Thankfully, the publishers in this category are in the minority.

A new approach to purchasing monographs that could cause a paradigm shift for libraries is the increased availability of electronic books. While this is not the media of choice if you want to curl up with the printed version for leisure reading, e-books can be used quite effectively when looking for specific information and for specific research purposes. E-books also allow seven day/twenty-four hour access to books which make them popular with undergraduates. Debates are beginning on college campuses as to whether a print copy of an electronic book is needed or if the electronic version of the book will meet the needs of the library clientele just as well. Another view is that both versions should be purchased. Shrink- ing or static materials budgets in most libraries make the decision even more difficult. In the case of distance learning, the electronic book is definitely preferable to driving long distances or waiting for an interlibrary loan process to gain information that a library customer needs urgently.

Electronic books can be purchased in a variety of ways. Although the **NetLibrary** approach began with consortium purchases with a minimum number of titles that had to be purchased, the company now offers individual titles and subject collections that can be purchased directly from NetLibrary or through your favorite vendor/distributor. Even serials vendors, such as **EBSCO**, are providing access to e-books. Through services such as **Blackwell's Collection Manager**, libraries can view a screen icon that indicates that a book is available as an e-book that can be purchased the same way that they would order a print version. The standard pricing model currently is 150% of the print cost because you are purchasing perpetual access to the book. Other pricing models allow libraries to purchase designated titles at a reduced rate for temporary access. This could be quite useful for information such as computer software guides that are up-

dated frequently or travel books that could change within a few years.

If the purchase of electronic books becomes widespread, how will this affect the number of printed titles ordered? I believe there will always be a demand for print because computer access is not universally available as much as we would like to believe that free access is available to everyone in his or her local library. Literature can be read on a computer, but there is a certain esthetic value in holding the book in your hands and carrying it with you. Not everyone has a Palm Pilot or laptop, and few people would want to curl up with their Palm Pilot and a cup of hot cocoa on a cold winter evening. Perhaps a possible alternative would be a model in which publishers print on demand from an electronic copy as dictated by the number of orders for print copies coming in from vendors/distributors.

Librarians need to be sure that they consistently elicit feedback from their customers to determine the demand for electronic books. This inquiry should include questions

about what types of books customers prefer to use in an electronic format, such as research materials rather than leisure reading. This information will enable publishers and vendors to address the demands from their vantage point.

Should libraries be wary of "perpetual" access? As a librarian, I am concerned about how libraries will address the changing technologies. If perpetual access means a CD-ROM copy that cannot be formatted into the "current" technology, what recourse is there? Will the title really be available permanently or will librarians insist that an archival copy be purchased in print format? Perhaps cooperative collection development should be explored more fully to address these concerns. With tight budgets, and increasing demands from not only the serials budget, but also the swelling number of electronic offerings, will libraries be able to afford the luxury of print archives when electronic versions are so readily available? A limiting factor with certain libraries has been the fact that e-books purchased through a consortium could not be counted as additions to the volume count for statistical purposes because the title was not technically "owned" by the library. This is not true of individual purchases of electronic titles by libraries because they can be added to the volume count.

Librarians, publishers and vendors need to keep the lines of communication open so that we can all respond to the demands of our customers in the most creative ways possible. We need to be open to a variety of approaches to address the ever-changing "problems in the pipeline."

Librarians, publishers and vendors need to keep the lines of communication open so that we can all respond to the demands of our customers in the most creative ways possible. We need to be open to a variety of approaches to address the ever-changing "problems in the pipeline."