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Biz of Acq-Selecting and Processing Electronic Resources: How to Plug Libraries into the Workflow

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Biz of Acq — Selecting and Processing Electronic Resources: How to Plug Librarians into the Workflow

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Column Editor's Note: *Electronic resources take up more and more of our time and attention as acquisitions librarians. Because of their particular nature as digital entities, and because of the complex acquisitions arrangements they often require, electronic products are forcing librarians to rethink and reform procedures for selection and integration of materials into the collection. In this month's column, Rob Withers, Electronic Information Services Librarian at Miami University, draws on a new survey of librarians, as well as recent library science literature, to describe how libraries are adapting acquisitions and collection development processes to the digital age. —RR*

Libraries have been adding a growing number of electronic resources to their collections, and the availability of resources over the Internet has fueled this proliferation. In his 1996 article, **Gene Allen** notes that librarians

he surveyed predicted that 10 years from the date of his survey, expenditures for electronic resources would be anywhere from 5% to 25% of their budget.¹ Online products do not "play by the rules" set for selecting, ordering, and processing library materials because: Technical prowess may be needed to assess the feasibility of a product in a particular environment; The library does not receive physical copies to inspect and process; Electronic resources may be bundled together with dozens or even hundreds of products; Online products may be purchased by a consortium, rather than by a single institution.²

Adding electronic resources to the collection therefore poses a number of ques-

tions to those involved with acquisitions: Who should be involved in evaluating resources prior to order placement? How are electronic resources paid for? How are they inspected and checked in when they become available? Who is notified after they have been received? What changes in job descriptions are needed to ensure the ability to select, order, and process these materials?

To answer these questions, this column will rely on a survey of existing literature concerned with processing electronic resources. In addition, responses to a questionnaire posted to **AcqNet-L** and **Collddev-L** will help to explore the ways that libraries are coping with the challenges posed by the addition of electronic resources, particularly Internet resources, to their collections.

Selecting and Ordering

In an article on electronic resources, one librarian stated: "Selections: they're not just for collection development librarians any more."³ Responses to a survey posted to **Collddev-L** and **AcqNet-L** support her statement. A majority of respondents (89%) indicated that collection development librarians selected electronic resources. However, 84% of respondents indicated that other types of librarians could also select items. 72% reported that reference librarians could select, 44% reported that electronic resources librarians could select, 16% reported that systems librarians could make selection decisions, and 17% of institutions reported that selection decisions could be made by other positions. Smaller libraries at which no position dedicated exclusively to collection develop-

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through technology, and there has been a concern that rights-holders may use some form of anti-copying technology to prevent even legally-permitted copying.

An important change is the provision for compensation to rights-holders when a copy is made for the purposes of private copying, and illustration for teaching and scientific research. Libraries are now also able to make copies of items for the purposes of archiving and conservation purposes. In the initial proposal, libraries would be in breach of copyright for these activities.

There are quite a number of detailed changes in other articles, but in the main these do not have a substantive impact on libraries and information services. One final addition to the Amended Proposal is the establishment of a **Contact Committee**, set up with representatives of the competent authorities of the Member States, to monitor progress with the

implementation of the Directive, provide a forum for the exchange of information, and to examine development in the sector. This approach is similar to the mechanism set up under the **Data Protection Directive** and is very much to be welcomed.

Timetable for implementation

Every six months a Member State in rotation takes the responsibility of acting as the President of the European Commission, and currently it is Finland, which was keen to have pushed through the directive as part of its commitment to information society developments. Approval of the Directive will have to be made by the **Council of Ministers** of each Member State responsible for what is called the **Internal Market**. A **Council Working Party** was set up earlier in the year to work through amendments suggested by the Parliament and other groups.

At a meeting in September, discussion was mainly focused on **Article 6** and it seems that libraries and other user groups' concerns were taken on board by almost all national experts,

so that a favourable new wording of Article 6 is likely to be proposed. The next meeting of the working party on the Directive was held on 28-29 October in Helsinki, and under discussion were the evolution of conditions of contracts and licenses concerning digital use, technological protection systems and rights management information, liability and the institution of blocking illegal distribution of protected works, and the question of applicable law in the digital environment.

A status report will be presented at the **Internal Market Council** on 7 December. It seems now that the Finnish presidency will not be able to reach a political agreement or common position in this year and that the dossier will move on to the Portuguese presidency, though little change in direction or commitment is likely. The Portuguese presidency plans to reach a political agreement/common position in March 2000. This means that it is likely that the Directive will have to be implemented by Member States in 2003.

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ment existed were most likely to report selections made by someone other than a collection development librarian. Some larger university and public libraries mentioned that assistant directors participated in selection decisions, as well.

Selection decisions undergo at least some review at all responding libraries: 30% reported that selection decisions were "sometimes" reviewed and 61% that they were "always" reviewed. The person or persons responsible for reviewing decisions vary enormously. As one person noted, the need to "worry about implementation, access, copy-right, and quality control" often means that several individuals with different perspectives must assess each electronic product.⁴ Of those libraries responding to the survey, 45% indicated that decisions are reviewed by a committee. At smaller libraries serving colleges and community colleges, this percentage was lower—17% and 33%, respectively, whereas 72% of larger university libraries used a committee to evaluate decisions. Of those institutions not relying on a committee, 14 required approval from a department head or director, one required approval from a systems librarian, and one required approval from an electronic resources librarian. Make-up of the committees that approve orders varies, but may include systems librarians (17%); electronic resources librarians (10%), or acquisitions librarians (2%). Of those libraries that only sometimes evaluated decisions, the primary criteria used to determine which decisions are reviewed are cost (75%), compatibility with library hardware/software (62%), cross-disciplinary coverage (55%), and consortial purchases (58%).

Evaluating electronic products is difficult without using the product. As one librarian observes, assessing electronic products can require gauging layout, graphics, audio/video components, ease of use, and response time. She suggests that many librarians rely on thirty-day trials, and results of our survey indicate that 96% of users sometimes take advantage of trial offers.⁵ Only slightly less popular are demonstrations, which 86% of libraries used. Approximately a third of responding institutions, particularly those with less extensive collections, sometimes visit other libraries that have the product. One institution occasionally uses interlibrary loan to obtain multimedia products.

A variety of pricing structures exists for electronic resources: libraries may pay for a single item, a package of items, or a combination of print/electronic subscriptions; they may purchase individually or as members of a consortium; and they may pay for a site license, or for a product limited to a certain number of simultaneous users.⁶ The types of funds used to pay for electronic products are as varied as the purchasing options. Libraries rely on a mix of funds to pay for electronic products. Of those libraries responding to the survey, 70% had a fund or funds devoted to electronic resources. In several instances, these funds were used for all electronic products, but most libraries utilize these funds for resources which cross disciplinary boundaries or are general reference resources. Also used are serials funds for a particular discipline (37%), monographic funds for a particular discipline (33%), general serials funds (34%), and general monographic funds (23%). As one author speculated in her 1998 article, most libraries rely on electronic funds for package deals including items relevant to many fields, but ordinarily use discipline-specific funds for other resources.⁷ Two-thirds of libraries surveyed used a combination of these types of funds; 29% used a separate electronic resources fund for all purchases, and 5% relied on serials funds. Institutions relying solely on one fund tended to be smaller, but did include eight university libraries. Surprisingly, although electronic purchases are essentially serial in nature—in that they require a continuing commitment of funds—nonetheless monographic funds are widely used for such purchases.

Most libraries cannot use funds from the materials budget for software/hardware. In his study of 15 Midwestern university libraries, Norman found that only 22% of libraries could purchase hard-

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So why, you may ask, am I filling a column in 2000 with all this information?

The reason is because the new Directive will create a framework for licence agreements for downloading and using electronic material, and even though it may be several years before the law has to be complied with, it would make good sense to start now, rather than change the agreements, and internal procedures, in a couple of years' time. If you want to monitor developments, then you need to bookmark just one Web site, and that is www.eblida.org. EBLIDA is an umbrella organisation for library, documentation and archive organisations in Europe, and also provides the Web site for the **European Fair Practices in Copyright** campaign.

Other news

The management of electronic journals is still very much a hot topic in the UK. A new email list has been set up in the UK especially for those involved in developing electronic collections of information in the UK (and beyond). Topics include collection development strategies, identifying/assessing/acquiring content, collaborative collecting at local/regional/national levels, and other topical aspects of electronic collection management. More information can be obtained from alicia.wise@kcl.ac.uk. The **UK Serials Group** ran a very successful conference on the promotion and management of electronic journals in October 1999, and some of the papers will appear in *Serials* in due course. The general view of the publishers and librarians present was that electronic journal availability and use was much greater than might have been anticipated at even this time last year. The **UKSG Annual Conference** will take place at the **University of Keele** on April 10-12, 2000. (www.uksg.org). Finally, I had hoped to be able to comment on the merger of the subscription agency activities of **Swets** and **Blackwells**, but the agreement has still not been finalised, though it is anticipated that this will take place towards the end of November.

ware/software from their materials budget.⁸ Likewise, the survey used by this article found that 21% of responding libraries could regularly do so, although several other respondents commented that they could occasionally or infrequently use the materials budget for automated equipment, and one indicated it could purchase software only, but not hardware. University libraries were less likely to be able to tap into the materials budget—only 8% could do so—while up to 50% of other libraries could.

Gene Norman's 1996 study of Midwestern universities also found that the collection development librarian, acquisitions librarian, and director or dean most frequently negotiated contracts.⁹ The survey used in this article found a greater variety: at 36% of institutions, negotiations are handled by an acquisitions librarian, 29% relied on the director, 21% relied on a collection development librarian (usually the head of collection development), 17% relied on an assistant/associate director, and 15% relied on systems librarians. Other answers included electronic resources coordinators (9%), university purchasing or administration (7%), and a variety of other positions (12%), including serials librarians, designated reference librarians, a cataloging/electronic resources librarian and an electronic resources/copyright librarian. Smaller institutions relied more heavily on acquisitions librarians and directors to negotiate, with such positions negotiating contracts at two-thirds of colleges and community colleges and all responding special libraries.

The decision to discard hard copies of material purchased in electronic format can be a difficult one. Some users may be unwilling to adapt to a new format. More problematic is that electronic formats may not duplicate exactly the contents of their print counterparts. They may leave out certain types of materials (letters to the editor, book reviews, etc.), excerpt only selected articles, or exclude pictures or charts.¹⁰ The overwhelming majority (68%) of libraries responding indicated that decisions on canceling or withdrawing print equivalents was left up to the selector. Another 18%, perhaps wary of losing access to electronic products in the event that the subscription was discontinued, kept both the print and electronic items, while 6% of responding libraries waited for a period of time to evaluate the online products before canceling print counterparts. Several respondents noted that the decision to retain the print copy was sometimes dictated by price breaks offered by vendors or by consortial deals, rather than library policies or librarians' wishes.

Receiving & Processing

The challenges that electronic materials pose to traditional workflows based on print resources continue after materials become available to the library that ordered them. At one time, the **University of Minnesota** did not use the integrated system to track expenditures of electronic items.¹¹

Most libraries have now joined Minnesota in including electronic resources in their integrated system and in their technical services workflow. However, integrating electronic resources with print resources raises new questions: How-and by whom-are they checked in? How is an electronic item inspected for defects? And who is notified of its arrival and expected to process it?

Some libraries opt not to "inspect" electronic resources at all: 16% indicated that they did not inspect such resources, while another 36% indicated that they only spot-checked resources. Such libraries often indicated that they expected selectors to have inspected items for defects prior to placing an order, or that they were informed of problems by feedback from public services staff or users. However, many other libraries do systematically inspect their receipts, and several libraries noted that they had a schedule for checking links on materials. Libraries that do systematically inspect electronic receipts rely most often on selectors (55%), systems personnel (43%), reference librarians (37%), heads of collection development (35%), and electronic resources librarians (10%). Used by less than 10% of responding libraries were administrators, media librarians, and catalogers. Some libraries responding to the survey have firm guidelines for the inspection of materials. One library noted that a trial of the product was required before it could be ordered. Another library requires one selector to be designated as a "point person" who evaluates the product, creates information manuals for the product, provides training for other librarians, and remains the in-house expert on that product once it is available at the library.

Cataloging issues relating to electronic resources affect acquisitions because "there is no longer an assumed path to cataloging after acquisitions of a remotely accessed title, as there has been for all but a subset of print materials. There is not piece received to trigger cataloging, and not all remote resources are catalogued."¹² Following check-in, libraries can and do exercise a number of options for making electronic resources available, and consequently, for routing materials out of the acquisitions and/or serials department. Close to two-thirds of responding libraries (62%) said that they catalogued electronic resources in their OPACs, but an even greater majority (93%) made their electronic resources available via library Web pages. University libraries (90%) were most likely to rely on Web pages, while only 50% of colleges and 66% of community colleges did so. Subject pages developed by users are also frequently used by 45% of all respondents; again, university libraries were more likely to use them (49%) than community colleges (33%) and colleges (20%), or other institutions. This overlap is not surprising. The **University of Minnesota** relies on Web pages and catalogs to provide access to electronic titles. Some librarians at that institution want to continue adding links to the Web page because users find it convenient; in addition, despite attempts to review holdings, each review still identifies items that have not been cataloged. Other

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Endnotes

- ¹ Frank R. Allen, "Materials Budgets in the Electronic Age: A Survey of Academic Libraries," *College & Research Libraries* v. 57 n. 2 (March 1996) 133.
- ² These concerns are noted in several places: Ellen Finnie Duranceau, "Beyond Print: Revisioning Serials Acquisitions for the Digital Age," *Serials Librarian*, v. 33 n. (1998) 86; Margaret Ann Johnson, "Managing the Acquisition of Electronic Resources," *Technicalities* v. 18 n.6 (June 1998) 11; O. Gene Norman, "The Impact of Electronic Information Sources on Collection Development: A Survey of Current Practice," *Library Hi Tech* v. 15 n. 2/3 (1997) 130.
- ³ Cindy Steward Kaag, "Collection Development for Online Serials: Who Needs to Do What, and Why, and When," *Serials Librarian* v. 33 n. (1998) 108.
- ⁴ Ellen Finnie Duranceau, "Beyond Print: Revisioning Serials Acquisitions for the Digital Age," *Serials Librarian* v. 33 n. (1998) 86.
- ⁵ Trisha Davis, "The Evolution of Selection Activities for Electronic Resources," *Library Trends* v. 45 (Winter 1997) 394-6.
- ⁶ Joyce L. Ogburn, "Vendors and the Acquisitions of Electronic Resources," *Serials Review* v. 24 n. 1 (Spring 1998) 105-6.
- ⁷ Margaret Ann Johnson, "Managing the Acquisition of Electronic Resources," *Technicalities* v. 18 n.6 (June 1998) 11.
- ⁸ O. Gene Norman, "The Impact of Electronic Information Sources on Collection Development: A Survey of Current Practice," *Library Hi Tech* v.15 n. 2/3 (1997) 126.
- ⁹ O. Gene Norman, "The Impact of Electronic Information Sources on Collection Development: A Survey of Current Practice," *Library Hi Tech* v. 15 n. 2/3 (1997) 120.
- ¹⁰ Kathleen A. Clark, "Implementation of ISI's Electronic Library Project at Purdue University: Criteria for Selection and Publisher Pricing Schemes," *Serials Librarian* v. 35 n. 4 (1999) 37; Helen M. Grochmal, "Selecting Electronic Journals," *College & Research Libraries News* n. 9 (October 1995) 632.
- ¹¹ Margaret Ann Johnson, "Managing the Acquisition of Electronic Resources," *Technicalities* v. 18 n.6 (June 1998) 12.
- ¹² Ellen Finnie Duranceau, "Beyond Print: Revisioning Serials Acquisitions for the Digital Age," *Serials Librarian* v. 33 n. (1998) 103.
- ¹³ Margaret Ann Johnson, "Managing the Acquisition of Electronic Resources," *Technicalities* v. 18 n.2 (February 1998) 36.
- ¹⁴ Gail Julian [recorder], "Managing Electronic Journals in Times of Change," *Serials Librarian* v. 34 n. 3/4 (1998) 283.
- ¹⁵ Duranceau, 93-94.
- ¹⁶ Duranceau, 94.
- ¹⁷ Duranceau, 95.

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librarians object to separating information by format and find the Web page list, now close to 500 items, cumbersome to maintain.¹³

One way of reducing the time and effort needed to maintain Web pages which list electronic resources is to export data from cataloging records and use it to dynamically generate Web pages which list electronic products. A small number of the institutions surveyed for this article (7%) do so, and another 7%, including the author's institution, are working to develop such products. At a recent ALA discussion on electronic serials, the audience leaned towards using a combination of dynamically generated Web pages and catalog records. They felt that users would prefer to find information displayed in a grouping that might prompt use as opposed to finding individual items in the catalog.¹⁴

A wide variety of staff positions is needed to support electronic resources and maintain the means of accessing them. Not surprisingly, the survey used in this article found that a broad cross-section of library staff may be notified upon arrival of an item. The survey results indicate that those notified include the selector who ordered it (55% of libraries), the systems office (42%), head of reference (37%), head of collection development (35%), and electronic resources librarians (10%). Notified at less than 10% of responding libraries were catalogers, faculty members, media science librarians, and administrators. Two-thirds of the libraries responding to the survey indicated that they notified librarians in more than one of these categories upon receipt of electronic resources. Two libraries issued a library-wide electronic mailing.

Impact on Personnel

The explosion of electronic resources being incorporated into everyday library work has changed work routines, and, in some places, has resulted in the creation of new jobs or the re-structuring of already existing positions. Ellen Finnie Duranceau's informal survey of postings to listservs in 1997 revealed advertisements for newly created technical services positions, including "electronic access librarian," "Electronic Publishing and Collections Librarian," and "Scholarly Communication Librarian."¹⁵ Of those libraries responding to the survey done for this column, 35% of libraries report such changes, most often in acquisitions (10% of respondents), serials cataloging (7%), electronic resources (7%), cataloging (3%), serials acquisitions (5%), or collection development (3%). Another trend is writing new responsibilities into library positions. As examples of this trend, Duranceau's 1997 study also mentions serials librarians with electronic resources added to their job descriptions, and acquisitions librarians who are asked to assume responsibility for licensing and negotiating.¹⁶

An instance of such a change is the recently created Acquisitions Coordinator at the University of Wisconsin. This trend is ongoing: several respondents cited examples of new or re-written positions for which they were planning or seeking approval.

Conclusion

Electronic products do not fall neatly into traditional definitions of information products; digital resources, therefore, compel libraries to change practices and staffing in order to accommodate these new resources. For example, electronic products blur the lines between monograph and serial, and addressing the issues of copyright, access, and quality control raised by electronic resources does not fall exclusively into any one traditional library unit. Dealing with electronic resources is a trial and error process; a variety of approaches are currently evolving. One observer notes that the challenges presented by adjusting workflows to integrate electronic resources provide the potential for

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"confusion, ambiguity, and turf wars."¹⁷ These challenges have doubtlessly had such effects. However, as this article demonstrates, it is also true that librarians and library staff from many parts of the library are successfully working together to meet these challenges. 🌱

Webworthy

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Web sites are selected for broad appeal, depth of information, and ease of access. Sites are organized by broad subject area and visited just prior to publication. Please let the editor know of any sites that are not accessible. Comments and suggestions welcome. Unless otherwise noted in square brackets following the description, Internet addresses were published in *Science*, NetWatch column edited by Jocelyn Kaiser.

Cancer

The second leading cause of death in the nation affects everything from art to finances to wills. The University of Pennsylvania Cancer Center maintains Oncolink, which offers a wealth of information to patients and their doctors, information which not only in-

forms treatment choices, but also provides financial assistance (American Viatical Corporation which purchases Life Insurance Policies for cash), aesthetic relief (Confronting Cancer Through Art), conference information, and book reviews. <http://oncolink.upenn.edu/>

Chronology

Need to know the exact time, to the fraction-of-a-second? Check the National Institutes of Standards and Technology Official U.S. Time site, where you can select a time zone, drop over to the exhibits area and find out what Daylight Saving Time is and why we use it, or wander through a complete history of time. Note that Coordinated Universal Time, one of the zones available, is

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