June 1999

Biz of Acq-Statistics, Codes and Tracking Withdrawn Volumes: More on Getting the Most Out of Your Automated System

Brian Flaherty

New England School of Law, bflaherty@nesl.edu

Sandra K. Paul

SKP Associates, SKPAssoc@cwixmail.com

Albert Simmonds

SKP Associates, awsimmo@ibm.net

Rob Richards

University of Colorado Law Library, rrichard@stripe.colorado.edu

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

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

Recommended Citation

Flaherty, Brian; Paul, Sandra K.; Simmonds, Albert; and Richards, Rob (1999) "Biz of Acq-Statistics, Codes and Tracking Withdrawn Volumes: More on Getting the Most Out of Your Automated System," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 11: Iss. 3, Article 33.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3926>

Biz of Acq — Statistics, Codes, and Tracking Withdrawn Volumes: — More on Getting the Most Out of Your Automated System

by **Brian Flaherty** (Acquisitions/Government Documents Librarian, New England School of Law, ph: 617-422-7293) <bflaherty@nesl.edu>

Column Editor: **Rob Richards** (Technical Services Librarian, University of Colorado Law Library) <rrichard@stripe.colorado.edu> <http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu/~rrichard>

Column Editor's Note: *Acquisitions librarians are well aware of the heightened standards of accountability under which libraries function today. In this environment of increased scrutiny, we are required to produce more and more types of statistical information about what we acquire, and what we do with the resources in our collections. Brian Flaherty, Acquisitions/Government Documents Librarian at the New England School of Law Library, has some excellent ideas for how to use our automated systems to generate useful statistical reports. In this month's column, Brian shares with us a case study of a particular technique for coding records to generate statistics, and suggests several additional uses of this method.*—RR

It is a cliché to say that the majority of work that goes on in libraries is largely unseen, and certainly unappreciated, by its patronage. In addition to the organization and provision of information, libraries, perhaps more than most other organizations, are in a constant state of self-appraisal and self-policing: collection development policies are reviewed and revised, collections are evaluated and weeded or enhanced, usage statistics are calculated, cataloging practices and schedules are revised, collections are shifted to maximize ever dwindling space. In addition to attending to our own high standards, we are very often called upon to answer to a "higher authority." We have to justify our budgets to administration or to library boards. We have to commit "self study" for faculty committees, or for continued participation in government programs. For many of us in academia, we have to demonstrate that we meet an association's accreditation standards.¹

Nearly every report required by an association or administration requires a lot of basic statistical reporting. For acquisitions and serials librarians, this has traditionally meant a lot of bean counting: how many new titles did you catalog last year? How many new volumes did you add to your collection? How many volumes did you withdraw from your collection?

What was your total volume count at the end of the year? Every year, the **American Bar Association** asks us these questions. When I began my job here almost ten years ago, this meant pulling out the great blue accession books and counting added volumes and withdrawn volumes. We subtracted the second from the first, and added the net added volumes to the total volume count for the previous year. While the actual statistical calculation was hardly difficult, and the whole process never took much over an hour or so (I work in a mid-sized library), it took many student hours per week to record each added or withdrawn volume in the accession books.

Of course, all of this changed with the advent of integrated automation, right? After all, computers are far more efficient bean counters than people. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to make a system do everything you want it to—especially after only the first pass. But after some experience with the system, and some creative use of the **Innovative** "create lists" function, we are able to use the system to calculate nearly all of the statistics requested by the **ABA**—from the straightforward "volumes added" tally, to the much more involved "volumes withdrawn" statistic. This article presents a case study of how we use certain techniques to generate commonly requested acquisitions statistics from our automated system.²

Now in order for our statistics problem to make sense, I really need to describe our library. As I said, we are a mid-sized law library with just over 280,000 volume equivalents. We have approximately 60,000 treatises, 100,000 volume equivalents in microform, with the remaining 120,000+ being classified as either serials or periodicals. Included in the "serials and periodicals" classification are all law reviews and periodicals, government documents (administrative materials), case reports, collections of laws and codes, digests, and national legal encyclopedias. In the summer of 1994, we brought up all modules of the **Innovative Interfaces** automated system. Simultaneously, our building was gutted and rebuilt from the inside (the library, of course, remained

open). A decision was made to barcode only the circulating collection, i.e. the treatises. The prospect of barcoding 50,000 (at the time) treatises amid the roar of continuing construction was, well, daunting; the prospect of barcoding 150,000 volumes was positively unthinkable.

Law books are updated, revised, expanded, and replaced with notorious frequency. This is particularly true with digests, compiled statutes, and legal encyclopedias. While it is very easy to count added volumes using the **Innovative** system—each new volume gets a barcode and an "item record," which is coded by type (i.e. serial, periodical, treatise, supplement)—**Innovative** has no explicit provision for tracking deleted item records by type. Indeed, the system does track "item records deleted." This figure, however, is not an accurate indication of volumes withdrawn. When we first loaded our records, there was a certain amount of "noise," i.e. database errors, which had to be deleted. Also, not every item deleted is counted in the **ABA** statistics. For example, we do not include supplements in our volume count. An item record for an added supplement could be coded in such a way as to exclude it from the "volumes added" statistic; however, because we were unable to tally deleted items by type, there was no way of differentiating between items that ought to be counted, supplements, and "noise." Finally, most of the volumes being removed from our collection were coming from our serials collection (statutes, codes, digests), and didn't have item records to begin with. While we could easily track new volumes added to the collection, our method of tracking discards at that time was to doom our student assistants to continued bean counting: we continued to record each discarded volume in our last de-accession books.

The solution—in retrospect, a fairly obvious one that nevertheless escaped us all—came with the idea of suppressed item records. Volumes held by our branch libraries (one in the faculty offices, one in the legal clinic) are suppressed from public view, but still available for staff use. It is an easy matter to create a list of volumes held in either of those libraries. I thought: why couldn't we do this for items no longer in the library at all—i.e. withdrawn and discarded items? We could use a fixed field code to encode each discarded item with "d", and have it automatically suppressed from the public display. To discard a volume without an

continued on page 84

Biz of Acq from page 82

item record, we would add a record, code it "d" for discard, and suppress it from the public display. For discarded items that we do not want to count, e.g. supplements, we could simply delete the item record from the system outright. The Innovative system automatically records the date a record was last edited, and so at the end of the year we could use the "create list" function to make a list of all item records with the code "d", last updated between July 1 and June 30 (our fiscal year).

Training the acquisitions, serials, and periodicals staff to enter a single code in an item record, rather than record the author, title, and accession number (or barcode) of a book being discarded, was hardly difficult. The new procedure took so much less time, it was truly a welcome change. It was decided that item records for discards would be purged from the system each year a few months after the ABA statistics were completed. We would create a list of item records from the previous fiscal year, and delete them using the "Delete item records function." Though the records would look a bit messy at first glance, they would never get truly out of control. Also, there would be no significant strain on the number of item records we had available to us.

While the new procedure has worked admirably well, there have been a few minor problems. First, we make an assumption that after a record is encoded as deleted, it will remain untouched. This is the case 99% of the time. However, occasionally a staff member who does not understand the discard procedure will go into a record and update it as "missing," possibly affecting the year end statistics. This can be avoided by proper staff training (see below). Care must be taken to delete supplement records rather than encode them "d", otherwise they will be counted as discarded volumes. Finally, for titles entirely withdrawn from the collection, there must be a code in the bibliographic record that means "discarded—suppressed from public display." This way, the item records attached to the particular bibliographic record can still be counted.

One troublesome problem has come with the new discard procedure. Because item records for withdrawn volumes remain on the system for at least a year, the staff display of a title often looks a bit cluttered. When reference and public service librarians search for a title, they usually see a bibliographic record, and a "summary of attached records." They see an item record attached to a bibliographic record, and assume that the volume is in the library somewhere; the item code indicating "discard" is not visible in the summary. One solution to this is to train public service librarians either to look at the public display (from which discarded volumes are suppressed), or to go into the item records and look for the discard code. Neither solution is practical: there is information on the staff display—e.g. record creation date—that is not available on the pub-

lic display. Also, it is not fair to expect public service librarians to dig into item records looking for codes to determine a book's whereabouts. Our solution was to use the fixed field: "LOCATION," and create a location code for discarded items. The item location is displayed in the summary of attached records—locations like 'ser' for serials collection, 'per' for periodicals, 'treat' for treatises, etc. We've created an item code 'discd' for discarded items. (Our cataloging librarian talked me out of using "trash," so that the summary of a discarded item would read LOCATION=trash.)

This case study illustrates only one way fixed field codes can be used in conjunction with the "create lists" function (or other search facility) to create useful statistical reports. Using such codes in other records, we are able to separate out electronic orders from firm orders from approval plan books, and determine the most efficient means of acquiring new materials. We can create a list of professors' requests, or books purchased for specific courses, and create statistical reports showing how much we are spending on materials directly supporting the curriculum. Automated systems usually come equipped with some kind of statistical program. However, even a well designed system (and don't get me wrong—Innovative is a very well designed system) cannot anticipate all of the statistical reporting that will be required of it. To get the most out of the system, a user must be willing and able to re-evaluate persistent problems from as many innovative angles as possible.

Endnotes:

¹ In nearly every college guidebook (e.g. *Guide to U.S. Law Schools*, *Peterson's*, etc.), library quality is represented (or at least implied) by a numerical volume count. In this age of electronic information—including CD-ROM, online and Web-based information—this statistic is increasingly fallacious. In 1995, the **American Bar Association** recognized this. In their accreditation standards for libraries, they used to include a list of titles in a "core collection;" each library was required to own the listed volumes. In 1995, the standard was changed to read: "A law library shall provide within the law school's facilities, through ownership or reliable access, a core collection of essential materials"—the key phrase here being reliable access. Libraries depend more and more on electronic information, resources not so easily quantifiable as "volume count." Traditional book budgets are cut back to make room for greater computer resources. Libraries and librarians make efforts to be proactive, to move forward, to lead in this (damn the cliché, full speed ahead) "age of information." It is a shame the only representation of library quality in so many evaluative resources remains "volume count."

² For more ideas about ways to generate acquisitions and collection development statistics from an integrated automated system—in this case the **Innovative Interfaces** system—see the presentations entitled *Innovative Use of INNOPAC Statistics* (last modified Feb. 27, 1997) <http://coast.lib.uncwil.edu/ronj/innopac/>.

Chaos — What Will The Next Generation EDI REALLY Look Like?

by **Sandra K. Paul** (President, SKP Associates)

Column Editors: **Sandra K. Paul**
(President, SKP Associates)

<skpassoc@CWIXmail.com> and **Albert W.**

Simmonds (SKP Associates) <awsimmo@ibm.net>

There is lots of talk about **XML**—**eXtensible Mark-up Language**—as the answer to the question posed above. I hope you read **Norman Desmarais'** article on that topic in the last **Chaos** column (*ATG*, April, 1999, pp. 86-89, 93), providing a great deal of information about the XML standard and its potential. If you didn't, you should. His last article specifically points to the potential of XML for Electronic Commerce, the area previously dominated by **Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)** standards in the U.S. and abroad. Many of us subscribe to the **XML/EDI listserv** and

get message after message telling us that the next generation is here. The problem is, that the next generation is NOT ONE SINGLE STANDARD — it's A LOT OF DIFFERENT approaches.

Do we really need new EDI standards?

Today's EDI standards were really developed to replace paper forms. We call them "Purchase Orders," "Invoices," and the like. They are standard, but a great deal of leeway was provided for the needs of different com-

continued on page 85