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The Future of the Hardcopy Journal

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There are many factors that determine the format of the journal. One is profit. How do publishers derive their profitability from their publications? Two is accreditation. Which states still only accept a hard copy count (volumes per student) for accreditation purposes? Third is space. Which libraries have the actual space to store hard copy journals?

Now, thoughts on the future of the printed journal. The electronic age, with the digitization of data, is a challenge to the printed journal. This is not the first time in the history of publishing that the printed journal has been challenged. Going back to the 40's and 50's, microfilm was used to create space by storing numerous large volumes on compact microfilm reels and film cards. This also continued into the 70's when other media, such as CD-ROMs, were used. These special libraries rely upon the Internet to provide their users updated information from resources linked to their Web site. Their users often also have remote access to the OPACs (Online Public Access Catalogs) from these member institutions.

The university and college library market still prefers the hard copy journal, however, many do not collect back to the first volume of their hard copy collections due to space and usage restrictions. There is a trend to maintain a collection of at least three years prior to subscription, if not five, for frequently used journal titles that circulate heavily within the institution. This trend, I believe, will continue until a specific technology and access is found that will provide the ideal solutions for all types of libraries and users.

I also believe that the competition between universities, colleges and companies to be on the cutting edge of research, limits the ability of the library community to find the ideal alternative to the printed copy. Ever since Gutenberg invented the printing press in the 1500's there has not been an impact on publishing as great as the development of the Internet in the early 1980's. This national and international online connection through computer networks exploded on the scene. Many different pieces of information are available through informative Websites in unlimited subject areas, all able to be linked through easy access.

There are many other factors, such as cost, circulation of material, copyright and storage of journal collections that drive demand for the printed journal. This is a must be addressed not only as separate entities, but also consortially with member libraries in small and large groups. Some consortial agreements allow for the bulk purchase of material electronically through site licenses. Others allow the sharing of collections, such as in the state of Florida, where only one institution has to own the hard copy journal for others to share the electronic format. Previously, the institution that subscribed to an electronic journal had to possess the hard copy of that title for its purchase. Now the accreditation has been limited to one of the eleven state institutions in Florida. I am sure that other states, in order to ease the cost of education to individual institutions, might go to this accreditation model. Other alternatives are probably being considered by libraries across the country, each with its own goal for collection development. Federal legislation for these states might change some of these arrangements.

Currently, there are e-journals being published only in electronic format. These are very cost effective as they allow publishers to produce publications not only for large audiences, but also for limited focused groups. These journals are not only easily accessible, but are available with different pricing schemes, many times bundled with the hard copy journal. For a fee, there are also services that index these electronic journals for the convenience of the customer. Companies such as TJDNet and Ovid Technologies provide this type of service to libraries.

Copyright is also an issue that is ever changing and is a gray area due to duplication and print on demand that exists between publishers and vendors. Also, different jurisdictions, such as the European community, as opposed to North American publishing, create different obstacles for uniform control of copyright and legislation. Perhaps the corporate model is best, where remote information kiosks are networked from the home office of the company to satellite locations around the country or the world where they can communicate electronically and print-on-demand any information stored in their database and shared by the network.

Even printing journal issues-on-demand, as offered by Elsevier and a few other publishers, will increase as demand dictates that a reproduced copy of an issue, or even a complete volume, would be the ideal alternative for the user. I am sure that we will be challenged again in the next few years with alternative technologies that will drive venture capitalists to produce newer technologies to handle the information explosion.

Looking at the role of the back volume vendor, we must embrace technology and listen to our client base and implement products that will serve their needs as the hard copy journal has since its inception 4.5 years ago. It is our responsibility as a full service vendor to offer product alternatives, such as document delivery, reprints, and print-on-demand, which are available to us and can be conveniently distributed to clients through our Website. The market is extremely dynamic and those vendors that didn’t adapt to current and future trends over the years are collecting dust or just no longer participating in this exciting information age.

"I believe the paper copy will prevail at least for the next fifty years."

Each situation is unique and must be addressed not only as separate entities, but also consortially with member libraries in small and large groups. Some consortial agreements allow for the bulk purchase of material electronically through site licenses. Others allow the sharing of collections, such as in the state of Florida, where only one institution has to own the hard copy journal for others to share the electronic format. Previously, the institution that subscribed to an electronic journal had to possess the hard copy of that title for its purchase. Now the accreditation has been limited to one of the eleven state institutions in Florida. I am sure that other states, in order to ease the cost of education to individual institutions, might go to this accreditation model. Other alternatives are probably being considered by libraries across the country, each with its own goal for collection development. Federal legislation for these states might change some of these arrangements.

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