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Antje Mays

Winthrop University, antjemays@uky.edu

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Biz of Acq — Using Technology to Increase Collaboration between the Library, Teaching Faculty, and the Campus At Large

by **Antje Mays** (Head, Monograph & A-V Acquisitions, Dacus Library, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, South Carolina 29733; Phone: 803-323-2274; Fax: 803-323-2215) <maysa@winthrop.edu>

Column Editor: **Michelle Flinchbaugh** (Acquisitions Librarian, Albin O. Kuhn Library, UMBC, 1000 Hilltop Circle, Baltimore, MD 21250; Phone: 410-455-6754; Fax: 410-455-1598) <flinchba@umbc.edu>

Column Editor's Note: *Antje Mays outlines many different ways of using technology to better link academic librarians and faculty, focusing particularly on how the appropriate use of technology in Acquisitions can improve the image of the library. Antje's article is a unique comprehensive overview of how technologies can be used to make Acquisitions not just a book purchasing department, but a department that works proactively to impress constituents, helping to make the library a central and prestigious part of the campus community. While Antje is writing particularly for academic libraries, much of her discussion is also applicable to other types of libraries. — MF*

Today's academic library is wired to the gills and technologically sophisticated. Often the library is a place to test new technologies such as elaborate business and research networks, wireless networks, and instructional technology. All this is in addition to libraries' traditional roles of information repository and research center. One would be led to believe that the library is truly at the hub of campus life and thus on the forefront of university-level strategic planning.

And yet, libraries often find themselves at the heart of a struggle for identity, adequate funding, even recognition as a viable entity relevant to adding value to campus life and the stature of the university-at-large. Why the disconnect? How can the library build its stature in the campus community? While motivations for this disconnect may never be fully understood, there are definitely some tangible steps libraries can take to boost their image in the eyes of external constituents.

The first purpose of this article is to share some ways technology can be used to increase collaboration between teaching-faculty library liaisons and library acquisitions. Technologies available include e-business tools, business software, data analysis, the integrated library system, e-mail, campus Web-systems, and message boards. The second purpose for this article is to illustrate how these technologies can be useful on campus in supporting the mission of the university, the library overall, the business of acquisitions, and the community of teachers and learners, tying them all together.

Technologies can be harnessed to foster closer collaboration and bridge the gap between the "back room operation" of library acquisitions, the "storefront area" of reference and in-

struction, the library's administration, and the external constituents. Successes include the following:

1. Promoting the library as a proactive presence in the teaching process and academic community.
2. Generating excitement about materials in the library.
3. Putting the library on the map of campus and community consciousness.
4. Maximizing efficiency through e-business tools (e.g. easier information access, shorter shipping times, and other customer enhancement benefits).
5. Making data analysis and reporting a snap for various administrative needs.

Issues and tips to be explored address the following areas:

I—The technologies.

II—Acquisitions and clientele groups:

A—The business of acquisitions and the teaching faculty.

B—The business of acquisitions and the university administration.

C—The business of acquisitions and the external constituents.

III—Pulling it all together.

I—The Technologies

Technologies abound in the library and on campus. The beauty is that many of these needed technologies are already at our fingertips and readily available. Some are painfully obvious and simply require a creative reworking of how they are used.

University-internal technologies:

1. The integrated library system.
2. The library system's statistical analysis tools.
3. Scripts for administrative data gathering needed on recurring basis, such as automated output of new-acquisitions lists.
4. The home-grown PC-based acquisitions system for libraries whose ILS lacks good data-analysis capabilities.
5. The library Website with new acquisitions and other hotlinks to various collections.
6. A Web-portal for library selectors (either on the library's Website or the acquisitions librarian's Web-space, whichever is more readily available).
7. The library's databases with access to book and video reviews.

8. The university's Website showing the academic calendar and/or the accreditation calendar (such information is frequently advertised to prospective students and parents of students to promote the quality of the university—the library can use this information to its own advantage and for strategic-planning purposes).
9. A prominent link to the library from the university's main page promoting the library throughout all user groups.
10. Electronic files of the accreditation master calendar obtained by the library from the Provost's Office.
11. Web-based or electronically e-mailed information about academics such as:
 - a. program changes.
 - b. new courses being added, dropped, and modified.
12. Web-based full course descriptions—very helpful for collection development.

In-House business software:

1. Spreadsheets.
2. Database files.
3. Web files.
4. Individual faculty Web spaces to share information that could be useful for projects across campus.
5. Statistical analysis packages can also be useful for:
 - a. tracking use and ordering patterns.
 - b. comparison of enrollment patterns and buying patterns.
 - c. comparison among some areas to the disciplines in terms of coverage and ordering levels.
6. E-mail—useful tool for information dissemination, despite the nuisance of spam.

E-business tools:

1. Vendor databases.
2. Vendor ordering portals.
3. Library system's business-to-business electronic ordering module.
4. Library system's electronic invoicing module.

Web-based tools:

1. Vendors' Websites.
2. Currency converter sites.
3. Online book reviews.

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4. *Library Comparison Tool* from the Department of Education.
5. Accreditation agencies' Websites.
6. Message boards for online book clubs and student/faculty discussions.

How can this grab-bag of technologies work for us to foster collaboration? Here are some ways to harness each above-listed technology category in service of several campus constituencies:

II—Acquisitions and Clientele Groups

A—The Business of Acquisitions and the Teaching Faculty

All these technologies are great tools for providing customized data and service to students and faculty alike. Thus they can be a powerful tool in increasing collaboration. Faculty love customized services and like to see the library take an active role in seeking out ways to support the curriculum. Using these technologies to support high-touch customer service (not in lieu of it) will result in the teaching faculty eating out of the library's hands.

University-internal technologies:

1. Balancing the need to cut down on paper and making publishers' catalogs available to teaching faculty and in-house library selectors: a Web-portal for library selectors with publishers and sellers by discipline, materials type, country/continent of materials' origin, bibliographic utilities, currency converters makes this information widely accessible without cluttering up anyone's shelf space. Sensitive information can be password-protected or placed on the restricted intranet.
2. The library catalog's customized search-and-notify function can be set to generate automatic e-mails of new additions based on individual faculty interest, such as e.g., *MyMillennium* in *Innovative Interface's* library systems.
3. The function of hold/notify can be shared by acquisitions and circulation to enhance the library patron's positive library service experience.
4. Web-based lists of new acquisitions, generated by the library system and placed on the library or acquisition librarian's Website for all to see.
5. University's Web-based course descriptions, academic programs descriptions, curricular shifts, course additions and deletions. Used in tandem with interacting with individual teaching faculty, this resource provides handy information for collection development and management.

In-house business software:

1. Spreadsheets: Keeping data, for example, old year-end expenditure in easily reproducible electronic form speeds up all forms of multi-year financial histories. No matter what the information needs, faculty are always impressed when these data can be produced quickly with scenario-pertinent analysis. Most workplaces have business-productivity soft-

ware suites such as Microsoft Office and WordPerfect Office which include spreadsheets and data analysis tools.

2. Databases: Project-specific data can be captured for easy analysis. With sophisticated library systems, project-specific data can be "dumped" from the library system into a database and analyzed further.
3. Web-space: Information needed often can be placed on the library's Website or the acquisition librarian's Web-space (which ever is more easily feasible in your particular setting). Examples include ordering instructions for library selectors, links to selection tools, and bibliographic-instruction materials.
4. E-mail: Recurring information needs, such as information for new library liaisons, instructions on how to access the passworded approval-plan database, or other often repeated explanations can be written once and stored as e-mail signature files. Then when the need to share such repeat information arises, all one has to do is reply to the question, write a quick personalized introduction, and add on the repeat information from the list of signature files. Faculty love it when the reply comes quickly!

E-business tools:

1. Business-to-business tools to maximize efficiency: Speeding up ordering and reducing shipping time can be achieved through use of the library system's electronic ordering module, vendors' ordering Web-portals, and e-mailing orders to vendors (especially useful for accelerating arrivals when ordering from abroad), by shaving off the time of sending and handling letter mail.
2. Efficient, yet high-touch customer-oriented selection tools: Vendor databases can be set up to generate regular e-mail announcements of hot-off-the-press program-relevant materials for the teaching faculty (and of course also the in-house library selectors) to choose from.

Set-up of such customized e-mail service entails working with the vendor and the subject selectors (in-house and/or across campus) to define curriculum-specific parameters.

The more sophisticated vendor systems can be set up to generate new-titles announcement e-mails to customized recipient lists that were constructed based on specific areas of faculty expertise.

E-mail announcements can be set to automatically reply to the acquisitions librarian, thus making the library selector's experience feel seamless and user-friendly while retaining the library's sole role of officially placing orders.

Web-based tools:

1. Vendors' Websites can be a goldmine of new titles to support specific needs.
2. Currency converter sites are useful for teaching faculty interested in estimating the U.S. price of foreign titles of interest.
3. Online book reviews are a great selection tool for acquisitions librarians and teaching faculty alike.
4. Online book clubs and discussion clubs can generate excitement and provide ac-

cess to the discussion for distance students and working adults whose schedules cannot accommodate traditional book-club and discussion meetings.

B—The Business of Acquisitions and the University Administration

Administrators represent the university's mission to the outside world and are charged with the task of keeping the university-as-workplace organized. As such they rely on all components, including the library, to represent the university positively to scrutiny. As such, university administrators need data quickly and need them presented in a businesslike manner. Scenarios such as accreditation visits and other external reviewers of the university can result in showcasing of strengths or embarrassment over clumsy procedures or disconnects. Administrators are more willing to support the library when positives are highlighted, such as using information technologies to strengthen (and document) the links between the library and the teaching side. It is best to leave complaints about under-funding or disconnected teaching faculty out of conversations with the visiting review teams. (Believe it or not, both *have* been witnessed!)

University-internal technologies:

1. The library's Website and acquisitions Web-portal which make program-supporting information readily available are positively received by accreditation agencies because they view such tools as evidence of strong connection between the university library and the teaching side—this in turn enhances the library's stature in the eyes of the university administration.
2. The library system's analysis tools ease data compilation. Libraries that never delete order records or budget years can quickly run older years' budget reports as the need arises. Libraries that do delete order records and/or fiscal years from the system would benefit from electronic output of the closed-out budget reports for later analysis needs.

In-house business software:

1. Having electronic archives of prior years' final budget reports as easily accessible spreadsheets help speed up compilation of purchasing histories and trends. Also keeping a blank pre-programmed spreadsheet handy makes it easy to quickly assemble the needed data and charts without having to chase old data or calculate cells. Why sift through printouts of old budget reports and/or reinvent the wheel of calculating spreadsheets when electronic standbys can make data gathering/analysis a snap? Administrators really do not want to hear why it is taking so long to provide a summary of the last five years of budget reports.
2. Database and spreadsheet-based data analysis such as library-acquisition histories compared with enrollment and materials-use statistics can document levels of need with numbers, and most administrators think in terms of numbers.
3. Electronic master lists of important dates such as accreditation and review visits

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should be obtained from the Provost's office and/or the university's Website. Incorporating this long-range master list of dates eases the addition to these work-intensive extra tasks to the pre-existing constant workflow. Advance preparation helps minimize disruptions and time-crunches and makes it easier for library acquisitions to provide timely and well-prepared context-sensitive reports.

E-business tools:

1. When used to speed up and customize acquisitions, the context-sensitive use of earlier-described e-business tools to provide high-quality and quick service increase the level of respect for the library's business savvy in the eyes of public services librarians, teaching faculty and students, visiting review teams, and the university administration alike.

Web-based tools:

1. The *Library Comparison Tool* from the U.S. Dept of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (<http://www.nces.ed.gov/surveys/libraries/academicpeer/>) is filled with every imaginable type of library statistics. This Web-based tool makes spur-of-the-moment producing peer-library comparison reports a snap. It is intuitive and easy to use. Again, quick, professional service and turnaround is valued by administrators.
2. Accreditation agencies' Websites provide useful insights into the reviewers' expectations. Taking initiative to access this information in planning for accreditation visits long before the rush gives libraries a strategic advantage in presenting available services and resources in the best light. Evidence of hands-on initiative and proactive collaboration always wins the hearts of review teams and university administrators.

C—The Business of Acquisitions and the External Constituents

External constituents (outside the teaching/administration loop) include Friends of the Library, non-academic staff and executives, trustees, the general public to the extent supported by the university's mission and scope, schools, librarians and educators at other institutions, researchers in other countries. While levels of obligation to support the general public vary greatly between public and private universities, the library's presentation of self can indirectly foster members of the general public to attend the university or support it in some other way by joining the Friends of the Library, making a gift, generating library-friendly publicity, etc.

University-internal technologies:

1. A prominent link to the library on the university's main Web page announces the library's importance to the campus-wide learning and research experience.
2. Information on new acquisitions on the library's Web-page showcases to the entire campus, the outside world, and pro-

spective students (and parents) how well the library supports all of the university's programs.

3. Information on new gifts added to the library on the library's Web-page is a great PR tool to show appreciation for gifts received and added by the library.
4. Information on books given by Friends of the Library on the library's Web-page is a great PR tool to publicly express appreciation for the Friends of the Library, show existing Friends that their support of the library is in good hands, and to recruit new Friends members from the general public.

In-house business software:

1. Spreadsheet and database software increases the efficiency of library acquisitions. They are very useful for external projects in instances where the needed detail of measurement is not easily supported by the general library system. Such projects typically require detailed data analysis within individual donors' project records rather than activity by fund or bibliographic record. Examples include membership lists tied to special projects, such as donor-based Adopt-a-Book or Friends of the Library projects, where each of many donors is entitled to a book selection in their name. When such donors request an accounting from the library, they expect the information right at that moment. The donor's perception of the library's documentation efficiency can make or break the next donation and impacts good relations. A well-designed database helps the library provide the data quickly; this enhances the acquisitions department's reputation for efficient business operations.

E-business tools:

Members of the general public often appreciate library Web-portals for selectors. Examples:

1. Members of the public wishing to donate their books often appreciate being able to glean the value of their gifts from libraries' portals to out-of-print dealers' Websites, since libraries are not in a position to issue appraisals. Out-of-print deal-

ers' Websites can provide going market rates for items for donors' tax purposes without implicating the library in appraisal activities.

2. Members of the outside often appreciate the library's Web-portal links to currency converters.

Web-based tools:

Librarians and educators at other institutions, members of the general public, researchers in other countries, and any interested parties outside the university's immediate circle can benefit from well-designed Web-portals that pull together sites such as currency converters, publishers and sellers by continent/country, material type, and discipline, educational Websites and accreditation agency sites. An intangible benefit to the library is the increase of its stature both on campus and far beyond.

III—Pulling It All Together

No matter which technologies are adopted, and no matter how the enlisted technologies are combined, ultimately the key for library acquisitions is to not passively wait until a need is expressed, but to be proactive and take the initiative. A conversation with a colleague at another university's library about customized reports included descriptions of how reports are run "whenever they want them," and "they" tend to request them at the last minute, "they" meaning librarians from Public Services and other constituents in campus. The natural question: Why? Why wait passively? Who says librarians in Acquisitions and Technical Services cannot be proactive, anticipating the customers' needs? The technologies are a powerful ingredient, but cannot serve as a substitute for human initiative.

Ultimately, the library as a whole serves the users—students, faculty, external clientele. The most effective way for library acquisitions to contribute to the library's effective service to the outside world is through context-sensitive use of business technologies. These include Web servers with the latest library information, Web links to the latest library acquisitions, links to useful sites, and sophisticated use of business and statistical software. When used seamlessly in support of the university's mission, these tools help generate excitement about the library.

And They Were There

Reports of Meetings — NASIG 2003

Column Editor: **Sever Bordeianu** (University of Mexico) <sbordeia@unm.edu>

North American Serials Interest Group (NASIG)
Portland State University, Portland, Oregon, June 2003

Report by **Linda Lewis** (University of New Mexico)

NASIG, the **North American Serials Interest Group**, met in Portland, Oregon in June, 2003. The host university was **Portland State University**.

NASIG has always been held on university campuses with many people staying in the dorms. This time the meetings were on cam-

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