April 2004

Buyer Beware: Using Interlibrary Loan Requests in Purchasing Decisions

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Recommended Citation

Ingold, Jane L. (2004) "Buyer Beware: Using Interlibrary Loan Requests in Purchasing Decisions," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 16: Iss. 2, Article 9.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4287>

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The Intersection Where ... from page 28

to anyone except the requestor, I promptly refer both students and faculty to **PALCI**. I explain to them how easy and expeditious the process is—certainly faster than most out-of-print searches, and encourage them to use it to obtain titles that we would either prefer not to purchase or would have difficulty doing so. Inevitably they have been pleasantly surprised at how much faster **PALCI** is than the traditional method of obtaining a title through Interlibrary Loan and are using the system advantageously.

Bloomsburg University Pennsylvania joined **PALCI** in 2000, and the "borrowing statistics" demonstrate how quickly this method of obtaining books from other libraries has become the preferred method:⁴

Books requested by Bloomsburg University through PALCI		
7/2000 to 6/2001	7/2001 to 6/2002	7/2002 to 6/2003
180	329	1,036

Books requested by Bloomsburg University through traditional ILL method		
7/2000 to 6/2001	7/2001 to 6/2002	7/2002 to 6/2003
989	784	705

But more importantly, these figures also prove that while traditional ILL requests are slightly down, overall, more is being borrowed today than before due in part to the ease with which materials can be obtained. Patrons are better disposed to borrowing materials today from their desktop PCs than when they had to go to the library and fill out an ILL request form and wait for a book to arrive. The speed and efficiency of borrowing through **PALCI** has made many friends amongst our students and faculty.

In addition to direct-patron borrowing electronically through **EZ Borrow**, **PALCI** also offers reciprocal borrowing for faculty from member libraries. If a faculty member needs a particular book by tomorrow and if there is a member library who owns the title within a reasonable driving distance, they may go and pick it up. When the loan period is up, they can turn the book in to their own library's Interlibrary Loan department who will return the item.

PALCI also offers a "no fee" for ILL photocopy requests, which has simplified book-keeping for member ILL departments, and has also helped to lower the costs of resource sharing, one of the aims of any consortium.

Another one of the goals of **PALCI** from the very beginning was to "secure for its membership discounts on electronic information products such as abstracting, and indexing services and electronic journals."⁶ Smaller academic libraries would be unable to procure for its patrons the desired electronic information resources available today without the special pricing structures provided by consortia such as **PALCI**. Again, consortial purchasing has enabled a small academic library to purchase electronic resources that we would not have been able to subscribe to otherwise. Our electronic resources collection is better, larger, and less

expensive than it would have been without consortial agreements. More importantly, are the effects that these consortia could have on the marketplace and consequently for collection development in the future. According to **Allen** and **Hirshon**, one of the agendas of a consortium is "to affect the future as to how information will be created, marketed, and purchased by libraries. Consortia are seeking not only to have an effect upon the national and international agendas concerning issues such as pricing policies and copyright laws, but also bring pressure to bear upon information providers (particularly commercial publishers) to reduce the rate of rise in the cost of information, and to bring down the unit cost of information."⁷

The effects of belonging to a consortium such as **PALCI** are many. It has obviously had an effect on Interlibrary Loan but also on Collection Development and Acquisitions in our Library. More importantly, it has affected the way students and faculty think about procuring information: no longer is the on-campus library seen as the sole provider, but accessibility to many collections has made them more aware that resource sharing can be to their advantage. According to **Hirshon**, "Library consortia will become even more important in the future by

assisting libraries in implementing and managing the process of change... A library consortium with a broad understanding of how each of its members is coping with these issues has an ideal opportunity to explore these issues objectively, to understand and articulate trends as they are emerging and to create standardized methodologies that individual libraries can employ and customize at their own institutions."⁸

Endnotes

1. For an overview of library consortia see Kopp, James J. "Library Consortia and Information Technology: the Past, the Present and the Promise." *Information Technology and Libraries*, v. 17 no. 1, March, 1998 p.7-12.
2. Allen, Barbara McFadden, and Hirshon, Arnold. "Hanging together to avoid hanging separately: opportunities for academic libraries and consortia." *Information Technology and Libraries*, v. 17 no 1, March 1998 p.36.
3. **PALCI** was started in 1997 as the Pennsylvania Library Connection Initiative with thirty-five private and public academic libraries. For more information on **PALCI** see <http://www.palci.org>.
4. I wish to thank my colleague Ann Diserod for providing these ILL statistics and information on our current usage of **PALCI**.
5. Allen and Hirshon, p.39
6. Allen and Hirshon, Ibid
7. Allen and Hirshon, p.37
8. Hirshon, Arnold. "Libraries, Consortia, and Change Management." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, vol.25, no.2, March 1999, p.124.

Buyer Beware: Using Interlibrary Loan Requests in Purchasing Decisions

by **Jane L. Ingold** (Assistant Librarian, John M. Lilley Library, Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, 5091 Station Road, Erie, PA 16563; Phone: 814-898-7278; Fax: 814-898-6350) <jli4@psu.edu>

"ILL requests represent a demonstrated need by the faculty and students for materials not in the library, and it is important for bibliographers to consider those needs when planning and evaluating collections. By providing information on items requested from other libraries, ILL data also helps identify areas of the collection that may need to be strengthened to support developing research activity and to pinpoint areas where collecting levels may be inadequate to meet interdisciplinary needs." — (Williams, et al 32)

It is not an uncommon practice for libraries to use interlibrary loan requests as a tool for collection development. In the past a fair amount has been written touting the advantages of this technique. A flurry of activity took place in the early 1990's, highlighted by a 1991 review of the subject by **F.K. Rottman**. Some writers, including **Jo Ann Lahmon**, describe systems for tracking the information in a useful manner, while others such as **Suzanne Ward** describe purchase-on-demand programs. The

Purchase Express program at **The University of Virginia** even aims to have the book in a patron's hand within seven days. (Clendenning 16) **Atkins** and **Weible** used data on unfilled ILL requests to assess lost materials in their own collection at **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**. **Yontz** and others studied the problem of patrons attempting to interlibrary loan locally-held materials.

In her Library to Library column **Mary**
continued on page 32

Buyer Beware:
from page 30

Jackson discussed three main areas in which ILL statistics can aid in collection development. She maintains that they help us to identify missing items, to select possible journal additions and to purchase appropriate monographs. In the latter case she suggests sharing copies of original ILL requests or summarizing titles ordered in certain disciplines and sharing them with collection development staff. Alternatively, she proposes that bibliographers physically examine ILL materials when they arrive. (Jackson 88)

This third option has been our library's approach. Though done in quite an informal manner, the task can be more complicated than it seems. Often, I will notice a large order on the same topic. I believed I was finding a weakness in our collection. Yet, when I performed a subject search I would find that we already had what I considered an adequate collection of books on the topic. In one instance, a patron ordered about a dozen books on homelessness, a topic that by my estimation is amply covered in our collection. My question then was twofold: are they looking at a specific aspect of the topic that I am not recognizing or are they simply bypassing our library altogether and ordering from another campus?

First, some background. The **John M. Lilley Library** is located at **Penn State Erie, the Behrend College**, one of 24 campuses of **Penn State University**. In addition there are 15 subject libraries located on the main campus at **University Park**. Our seven full-time and three part-time staff serve 3,600 students (FTE). Our collection stands at 135,000 volumes while the entire **Penn State** system numbers 4.6 million volumes. The lion's share of items requested through ILL come from another **Penn State** campus and are patron-initiated through our online catalog, the CAT. Within the last year **Penn State** has begun to use **ILLiad** for traditional interlibrary loan which allows the patron to request online but is staff assisted so that materials already available at **Penn State** are not ordered. Previously, there were several databases through which one could request materials, including **OCLC WorldCat** and **VEL**, the union catalog of the libraries of the **Big Ten**. Requests could also be made online or on a hand-written form.

For this article I developed and administered a survey on the interlibrary loan practices of our patrons. For purposes of this study I used both type — intercampus and interlibrary lending — using a definition put forth by **Baker and Jackson**; that is, "a transaction in which, upon request one library lends an item from its collections, or furnishes a copy of an item, to another library not under the same administration or on the same campus." (Baker 2)

I attached the surveys onto incoming ILL

materials. These were mostly monographs although some were audiovisual materials. Photocopied items are either mailed directly to the patron or delivered as a pdf file to an **ILLiad** account and are therefore not available for my perusal. I placed a questionnaire collection box on the circulation desk. A total of 131 responses were received.

The first question concerned the status of the respondent. There were seventy-five undergraduate and two graduate students, forty-nine faculty and staff members, and five community patrons.

The second question concerned the reason for their use of interlibrary loan. Forty-seven percent of the respondents were gathering information for a paper or other class assignment, while nearly twenty-five percent were borrowing items of personal interest. Faculty preparing for a course accounted for ten percent, while faculty scholarly research added another eight percent to the mix. Business purposes, "other," and those citing more than one reason rounded out the survey results.

In its *Guide to the Evaluation of Library Collections*, **ALA's Resources and Technical Services Division** states "Interlibrary loan requests are generally acknowledged to be indicators of unmet research demand on the part of the library's users. These analyses may be used to identify areas where the collection is not satisfying patron needs."

And further: "Items requested on interlibrary loan represent a use of the collection because the requestor has *presumably* (italics mine) checked the collection, found the item lacking, and decided that he or she still needs the item." (Lockett 12)

Presumably, is the crux of question number three: "Before using interlibrary loan, did you try to locate materials in the **Lilley Library**?" I expected to see interesting results to this question and I was not disappointed. While all of the graduate students and community members responded yes, twenty-four percent of students and twenty percent of faculty and staff did not look for locally available materials first. Less than one percent answered that they didn't recall.

Those who answered either no or don't remember to question three were asked to end their questionnaires at that point. Question four asked those who did check our local holdings to indicate whether they had borrowed items on this subject from the **Lilley Library**. Half of those asked did indeed borrow some materials locally.

Those who responded no to question four were asked to complete question five which related to inadequacies in our collection. The following possibilities were offered as suggestions; the **Lilley Library** materials were: too broad or specific, in an undesirable format, too old, not on the shelf, don't remember, didn't look at any, and other.

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The most common reply at fifteen percent was that the items were not on the shelf. The various other listed choices netted between less than one percent and about five percent. However, when I examined the results, one fill-in answer under "other" appeared repeatedly: that the **Lilley Library** had nothing on the topic at all. Variations on this theme made up thirteen percent of the responses. This information would have been more valuable if I had asked which subject they were researching, but I was restricted from asking this question due to privacy concerns.

continued on page 34

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BORN & LIVED: Fitchburg, MA; Amherst, MA (twice); Baton Rouge, LA; Maryland (twice).

EARLY LIFE: Eh, what? I'm not done yet.

FAMILY: Soon-ish, starter project on fiancé: Charlie and cat: Ki-Ki.

EDUCATION: B.A. in English UMass-Amherst; M.L.I.S. LSU.

FIRST JOB: Approx. age: 10 Job: Cat sitting business (also did "baby" sitting, but preferred cats - they're a lot easier and more predictable)

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Access Librarian, Anne Arundel Community College in Arnold, MD. Librarian for Digital Initiatives & Research and Instructional Services Planning, UMass-Amherst.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Pretend I'm the active and outdoorsy type (biking, hiking, walking, exploring). But really I watch a lot of PBS and more of my radio's buttons are being replaced by NPR stations.

FAVORITE BOOKS: I used to read (non-work related) books... Now I'm lucky if I have time to get through an issue of *Utne*.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: George Bush (sorry, that's the first serious thing that came to mind)

PHILOSOPHY: Work as hard and as well as you can, so that you can enjoy your free time to relax and ponder other interests.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Everything, I'm really impressed I've done it and it's working out so well!

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Associate Director (or financial independence, which isn't likely since I don't play the lottery)

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Hopefully recovering from all the financial difficulty of the early part of the century, and rebuilding staffing and budgets to focus on the necessity to educate and inform.

Consortial Circulation via Patron Placed Holds in the USMAI's Shared Catalog and its Impact on Collection Development and ILL

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The **University System of Maryland and Affiliated Institutions (USMAI)** is made up of the fourteen campuses of the **University of Maryland**, as well as two independent state institutions, **St. Mary's College** and **Morgan State University**, and shares one online Aleph catalog, **catalogusmai**. Among the USMAI schools are two law libraries, a medical library and the flagship **University of Maryland Library at College Park**. **catalogusmai** was brought up live in January 2003.

The previous **CARL** catalog had been shared by **Morgan State University** and all the **USM (University System of Maryland)** institutions with the exception of the **Health Sciences and Human Services Library (HSHSL)** at the **University of Maryland at Baltimore**. **Patron Placed Holds (PPH)** were easily done between campuses, with the exception of requests for or from the **HSHSL**, which all went through **ILL**.

Patrons are now able to search the combined **catalogusmai** and request books online from any institution in the consortium. One of the unique features of the **USMAI** holds process in **Aleph** is that patrons are able to place title level holds in the **OPAC** rather than item specific holds. When a patron finds a title that they need, they are able to place a request without having to determine which individual copy is available to

fill their request. The system evaluates the hold group and places their hold on the best available copy, or recalls an item if no available copy can be found. Each library receives an "outstanding holds" (pull) list daily of materials requested for pick-up at other libraries. The books are located, discharged and marked by the system as "in transit" to the location where it was requested for pickup. Materials are mailed or transported to the appropriate institution, on various schedules. Depending upon mailing method used, some campuses may have to wait a week to receive their materials, while most campuses receive their materials within a few days.

Impact on Interlibrary Loan

While **USMAI** patrons may place holds on books through **catalogusmai**, articles are still requested through Interlibrary Loan. The advantage of this arrangement is that the **ILL** staff at **UMBC** (the **University of Maryland Baltimore County**) can spend time on these article requests and requests from other institutions, rather than dealing with the 13,000 hold requests filled by **UMBC** for other **USMAI** campuses, and the 7,000 **USMAI** requests filled for **UMBC** patrons. While these requests would certainly boost **ILL**'s statistics, the **ILL** staff would be overwhelmed by more than double the number of filled requests processed for both lending and borrowing. These statistics, of course, don't take into account the amount of time processing the titles that weren't sent but were searched in the stacks.

In addition to sharing an online catalog, the **USMAI** has many consortially purchased online databases, which serve the research needs of many **USMAI** patrons. Other more specialized databases are not necessary to some of the **USMAI** campuses, and so are consortially purchased only by campuses with those programs to support.

At **UMBC**, even with the many shared fulltext databases and over 4,000 total paper and e-journal subscriptions, we find that our

continued on page 36

Buyer Beware: from page 32

The results of this survey have confirmed my suspicions that, at least some of the time, patrons are bypassing our library for interlibrary loan. Their reasons for doing so are unclear, although they may believe it is timesaving to search more libraries at once. It seems that in an effort to make our users more self-sufficient we have lost a valuable communication opportunity. That is, we no longer perform an interlibrary loan interview as recommended by **Lois Gilmer** who states that patrons "may have very specific ideas on the subjects for which they need additional material. To ob-

tain as much information as possible to help in filling the request, the **ILL** librarian must exercise the same kinds of interview skills as the reference librarian does in the traditional reference interview." (Gilmer 122) We need to communicate to our patrons the need to thoroughly search our collection before incurring the time and costs associated with interlibrary loan. I plan to add this point to my library instruction sessions. I also believe we need to develop a strategy for receiving feedback from patrons on which subjects lack coverage in our collection.