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Electronic Journal Subscriptions: The Agent's Perspective

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Other Local Considerations

- Is this a local or regional publication or a publication dealing with local issues? Consider the importance of format for publications dealing with local geography and culture. It is possible that your library is expected to have this type of publication in print.

The criteria listed above are, again, only basic criteria to consider when developing policies and guidelines to advise faculty and staff on whether or not a print subscription can be cancelled when the electronic version is also received. Because the area of electronic journal publishing is a rapidly changing one, no set of guidelines can list every criterion that should be considered and policies should only serve as a basis for decision-making by allowing for title-by-title consideration and unforeseen issues. However, having a set of guidelines to advise the decision-making process on this issue has proved to be very helpful for those academic libraries that have policies and guidelines in place. According to the October 2005 survey, decision making has become proactive rather than reactive, decisions are made clearly and with consistency, and academic libraries have saved staff time by referring to their guidelines when making decisions about canceling print subscriptions when the electronic version is also received.

Endnotes and References

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3. Michael Litchfield, "ATG Annual Survey Report," *Against the Grain* 15, no. 1 (February 2003): 53-55.
4. Survey of academic librarians conducted by author in October 2005. The survey was on the development of guidelines to advise library faculty and staff on the decision of whether or not to cancel print subscriptions when the electronic is also received.
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6. Ten respondents in the October 2005 survey who reported that they do not have guidelines in place did not respond to the question about their plans to develop and implement guidelines to clarify the circumstances under which print subscriptions can be cancelled if the electronic is also received.
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Electronic Journal Subscriptions: The Agent's Perspective

by **Tina Feick** (Vice President, Customer Relations, Swets Information Services, 160 Ninth Avenue, Runnemede, New Jersey 08078; Phone: 1-800-645-6595, ext. 2238; Fax: 1-856-632-7238) <tfeick@us.swets.com>

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Libraries in the E-world: New Service Needs

To understand the subscription agent's new role and the value an agent provides in the electronic environment, it helps to first take a brief look at the impact that electronic migration and market forces have had on libraries. Acquiring, accessing and managing information is increasingly complex due to differing publisher pricing models and packages, licensing and rights management, and a lack of overall standards and consistency. In addition, libraries face new challenges to provide comprehensive electronic access, yet lack the time and resources to keep pace with these changes due to intense budget pressures. As a result, many libraries find they need a reliable partner to manage the operational complexity, adapt to electronic needs, and minimize costs — this is where the agent comes in.

How agents have responded: Evolving Services and New Technology

E-world Perspective for the Traditional Agent Services

Though different from print, the model for e-access to journals still falls primarily in the subscription model, with some deviation for back-file and single article purchases. The majority of e-journals have a once a year fee charged on a subscription basis. There may also be a separate content and/or e-access fee, but all of the fees will still be billed annually. Consequently, the library's, publisher's, and agent's systems can accommodate ordering, payment, and invoicing of electronic resources, just as they do for the print world. Where agents have had to adjust their subscription systems falls into several categories: customer profiles, catalog title listings, publisher profiles, and pricing.

Customer Profiles

For the customer profile, **Swets Information Services (Swets)** and other agents have created e-resource profiles. In this profile is stored data such as IP ranges, registered platform providers, e-resource contact person with contact information, etc. When an order is placed with a publisher for an e-journal, either on the order or in a separate document will be the customer's e-resource profile. The publisher will then know the IP range for the e-journal and also where to send access credentials and other information.

As with address changes for print subscriptions, changes to a customer's IP address range result in mailings (by email) to those publishers handling electronic orders for the customer. Also, a change in the e-resource contact will cause a flurry of emails with the hope that the various systems will be updated. Later in this article, I will talk about standards that will eliminate this manual, though sent electronically, process.

Catalog Title Listings

Subscription agents' catalogs have expanded exponentially in order to provide for the numerous format options. For a single title, there could be as many as ten different options for selection. With tiered pricing, agents must show all of the tiers available and in a limited space provide a succinct description of the options. The tiers used to relate to the type of ordering institution (individual, academic, corporate, government, etc.), but the interpretation has changed over time. Tiers are now defined by a variety of factors, such as an institution's total FTEs, FTEs involved in a specific discipline (like Health), Carnegie Classification, usage, the type of medical institution (teaching hospital, clinical hospital), etc. As publishers moved from a single subscription pricing (same price for all) to a tiered pricing policy for electronic subscriptions, some publishers did not assign a tier to each subscription, defaulting to the agent to make the initial decision. Others provided a spreadsheet listing the current subscribers, making it easy for agents to set up the orders. Despite this, **Swets** still receives conflicting information; one day an institution may be at one tier and the next day at another. As a result, **Swets** has our **BEAM (Bibliographic E-Access Management)** team determine the correct tier or subscription level.

Of course, tiers and policies vary from publisher to publisher. Just keeping track of what is available is a demanding and complex job. In addition, as titles move from one publisher to another publisher with a different policy, we can no longer just move the subscription to the new title record. We must now analyze each subscription, consult with the customer if necessary, and go through the entire reordering process, providing new activation information.

In the **Swets**' system, we also store licens-

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ing information relating to the subscription. If a license is required, we either provide the link to the document on the publisher's Website or an actual copy of the license. When a license must accompany or shortly follow the order, we have established a license tracking system that will notify the customer service representative until all of the appropriate fields have been checked off.

Publisher Profiles

In the publishers' module of the **Swets** system, we now store information about e-journals for each publisher. For instance, a publisher may have a separate ordering address for just electronic orders, or e-journal orders may be required to go directly to a platform provider. The publisher contact for the e-journals will also vary from the print contact. Additional information such as the license location, publisher's URL, IP address and/or password authentication, and terms and conditions have become part of our tracking. No longer do we have one address and one contact.

Pricing

Customized pricing is now part of the agent's routine. For a single title within a package plan, there could be as many price listings as there are customers. The base price for each title in a package is the price of that title in the year it became part of the library's package. For example, if the title was ordered to start in 2001, the price for 2001 is now the base price for that title. For package plans, deals often call for a guaranteed inflation "cap" of anywhere from four to eight per cent. Following on the above example, in 2002, the price for the subscription will be the base price from 2001 plus the contracted "cap." This price will not match the publisher's pricing for 2002 for that title when not ordered as part of a package! Of course, cap levels differ from deal to deal and customer to customer. It is entirely possible that there could be 2,000 price listings for one title. In the print world, there was usually one price with up to three options (for types of institutions: academic, corporate, etc.) — this no longer exists in the e-world.

Additional programming has been required to update our catalog of titles, adding fields of data, providing links to publishers, connecting customized pricing to the correct customer account, and sending out information bulletins about the e-journals. Because of the changing nature of the e-journal, almost daily we receive notification about changes to our system, demanding that staff keep up-to-date on publishers' pricing policies, system changes, and new procedures and often requiring additional training in order to ensure that everything is understood.

Collection development in the e-world is full of options. Customers can certainly view online offerings through an agent's online catalog, but to provide customers with a comprehensive overview agents have developed a variety of management reports. **Swets**, for example, has an Internet Availability Report (IAR) showing

against the grain people profile

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BORN & LIVED: Born in West Chester, Pennsylvania - Grew up in Cheyney, PA a block from **Cheyney University** where my father taught US history.

EARLY LIFE: Loved to read, started book collecting as a teenager; dramatic readings, extensive family trips throughout the US and Canada.

FAMILY: All of my family were/are readers. Father — professor at **Cheyney University** near Philadelphia and mother an elementary school librarian — My mother got her library degree after I went to college. Sister also an avid sci fi/fantasy reader and lives in Hawaii. Husband — Howard Zogott — is Director of **Cranbury, NJ Public Library** and we share interest in theatre and poetry.

EDUCATION: BA in Sociology (Anthropology) from **Allegheny College**, Meadville, PA. M.A. in Librarianship from the **University of Denver** and an MBA from **Temple University** in Philadelphia.

FIRST JOB: Head, Gifts and Exchange, **Free Library of Philadelphia** — included out-of-print searching and buying/selling to rarebook dealers.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Six years at **Free Library of Philadelphia** (4 in Serials) and 4 years at **Princeton University** as Head of the Serials Division. 21 years with **Blackwell's Periodicals** which merged into **Swets Information Services**, the subscription agency — from Serials Specialist to Vice President, Customer Relations.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Read mysteries, travel with my husband, go to the theatre/opera and peruse bookshops and museums!

FAVORITE BOOKS: Read and Collect African-American poetry — Harlem Renaissance. Read and collect mystery series: **Barbara Nadel** (Istanbul); **Barbara Hambly** (New Orleans); **Peter Tremayne** (Ireland); **Tony Hillerman** (New Mexico); **Sue Grafton** (California).

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Commercials during movies, closed independent new and used bookstores, spam emails.

PHILOSOPHY: Throughout my career as a librarian and agent — trust and service.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Winner of the first **NASIG Championship Award** in 2005 for **NASIG** involvement and serials industry contribution.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Retirement plans in place — preferably in a warm climate!

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Primarily electronic resources with agents continuing to act as intermediaries. Agents partnering with libraries, publishers and third parties to provide services.

the possible electronic options for each subscription. Each listing includes over thirty fields of information including publisher, pricing, URL and requirements. A Free with Print report is also on our list of standard reports along with a multi-year financial analysis, publisher, subject, fund/budget code, and other reports.

Additional Services in the E-World

The publishing industry's relationship with agents is being recreated in providing e-journal services. Publishers were willing for agents to handle the majority of print subscriptions, but in the e-world, some publishers want to control the marketing and the setup of the subscription with the customer. Agents can place orders with many publishers, and for a small majority we

can process the registration. A few publishers stipulate that orders for the electronic version must go directly to them, bypassing the agent. In response, **Swets**, for example, has increased our Publisher Relations staff in order to work with publishers and seek ways of improving services for e-journals. We find that after a publisher has tested the market, they are often willing to go back to working with agents.

After sending the order to the publisher along with e-profile information, **Swets** asks that the publishers provide the appropriate reference and registration numbers. Some publishers willingly do so, usually via electronic files. **Swets** then forwards this information to the customers.

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Many publishers will only send the activation information directly to the library as the eventual end-user. These publishers want the library to authenticate access and agree to terms and conditions. For some libraries this is a great burden, especially those with few staff. All agents are seeking ways to provide seamless access from the point of ordering as we see this as part of our role as an agent. Standards for transmitting activation data will certainly improve the situation, which is hopefully on the horizon.

Beyond activation and registration, agents provide a wide range of services for obtaining e-journals. Swets offers negotiation services for electronic package plans where we start with determining the appropriate packages for that customer. This can also include licensing. In addition, Swets and other agents can provide a detailed EDI (Electronic Data Interchange) invoice of the customer's publisher package plans. When publishers cannot provide EDI invoicing for libraries' automation systems, this service from agents enables customers to quickly process invoices and produce budgetary information. In order to obtain the required financial details electronically, libraries have been pressuring publishers to let agents handle payment and invoicing of package plans.

Streamlining Processes in the E-World – The Industry Responds

Largely for agents, it is still as manual a world as it was in the print arena; and even more so, as there is so much information to track and record. This is true not only for the agent, but

also for libraries and publishers. Just as agents are adding modules to their systems, libraries are turning to Electronic Resource Management systems (ERMs) produced by library automation vendors to help them handle the workload associated with electronic products.

Recent efforts through the **Digital Library Federation (DLF)** (<http://www.diglib.org/>), **National Information Standards Organization (NISO)** (<http://www.niso.org/>), **International Committee for the EDI of Serials (ICEDIS)** (<http://www.icedis.org/>), and other industry groups have resulted in proposed plans to streamline the process by sending data electronically via transaction sets.

Agents are supporting these efforts through membership, sponsorship, and participation. Through a Joint Working Party of NISO and EDIteur (EDI for Europe), for example, transaction sets are being designed to send title coverage information (including holdings), update subscription details, describe an e-resource, supply Table of Contents, define license terms, and spell out the requirements for access registration. These files, which are sent electronically, will update link resolvers, ERMs, and other systems.

As part of the **SUSHI (Standardize Online Usage Statistics Harvesting)** group sponsored by NISO, DLF and COUNTER, two agents (Swets and EBSCO) successfully transmitted a usage report to two library automation vendors (**Innovative** and **Ex Libris**). In addition to agents and automation vendors, content providers and libraries are also participating.

These types of standardization efforts are necessary for all parties of the serials industry; watch for updates on standards in *Against the Grain* and on the NISO, ICEDIS, and DLF Websites.

Conclusion

Administrative services have always been a major role of subscription agents, and the increasing complexity of e-resources has resulted in a growing need for these services. Basic administrative tasks, such as ordering, invoicing, and renewing electronic subscriptions, involve title setup, providing information for activation, new pricing models/packages, and licensing and rights management. Agents help to streamline these processes through EDI interfacing with automated systems and by taking on the time consuming work of managing these processes when automated options are not available. In addition, libraries now require electronic journal management reports for better overall budget controls as spending shifts from print to electronic, and they rely on agents to provide for these reporting capabilities.

The electronic needs of libraries are growing far more technical and complex, and just as libraries have had to reorganize to handle e-subscriptions, so have agents. We have undertaken extensive training of staff, as well as the addition of new staff and electronic capabilities, investing significantly in new technologies for e-resources.

The e-world continues to evolve and agents are addressing the needs of the marketplace through providing services and products, participating in standards organizations and working closely with our publishing colleagues to ensure that our customers have access to their electronic resources. In the long run, our goal is for our customers to have seamless ordering, and activation and uninterrupted access and we will endeavor to work towards that end.

Vendors Begin to Address the Needs of Community College Libraries

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The two most popular questions at the reference desk are: "Where can I find ____?" and "Why is it not available online?" In community college libraries, the third most popular question is "Why don't YOU have online access to ____?" Community College libraries are currently experiencing significant frustration in migrating print holdings to electronic access.

Traditional library holdings included small numbers of periodical titles (less than 500) at each campus library, with very limited backfiles, often five years or less. Reference collections are small and focus on high use titles. Emphasis is placed on currency and exposing students to their

discipline's literature, not comprehensive research. Students often do not have access to abstracting and indexing tools for many journal titles held in the collection. Book and periodical jobbers enable technical services staffing to remain minimal.

Acquiring online access to the same print holdings is proving elusive. The business models employed by publishers, in general, do not address the needs of community college libraries. Vendors have taken a conservative approach when migrating their product mix from paper format to electronic. Given unknown price/demand curves, nobody wanted to determine by hindsight that

they had given away their "digital gold." Early on, the bottomless demand for electronic access gave vendors immense bargaining power. Products and licensing terms and conditions were focused on increasing revenue per subscriber. As a result, product design, product pricing models, and annual increases were barriers to acquisition. Acquisitions librarians experienced significant culture shock. The envisioned digital library was, in practice, difficult to realize.

At the turn of the century, most e-journals and e-books were licensed in big collections of titles. Title by title selection, the traditional selection process of libraries, was replaced by all or nothing bundles of titles. At the time, there was an insatiable demand for online information, thus the bundle products were attractive.

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