April 2006

Serial Cataloging in the Digital Environment: Fast, Faster, Fastest

Mary Grenci

University of Oregon Libraries, mgrenci@uoregon.edu

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

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

Recommended Citation

Grenci, Mary (2006) "Serial Cataloging in the Digital Environment: Fast, Faster, Fastest," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 18: Iss. 2, Article 9.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4638>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

may have a different title for this person, but one glance at a job postings list will verify that there is a demand for librarians in this area.

Electronic resources have infiltrated and taken over almost every aspect of library service, from the catalog to indexes to books and journals. Recent library science graduates have, in general, more experience with electronic resources than their predecessors simply because they were required to use them in their studies. It is possible that in the future, there will be less of a need for an electronic resource specialist.⁴ Aspects of electronic resource management now covered by the electronic resource librarian may eventually be returned to other areas of the library based once again on function rather than form. If workflows for print resources can be merged with workflows for electronic re-

sources, eventually there may be no need to distinguish between the two.

Emery suggests that we need a more holistic view of electronic resources, because the processes of acquisition, access provision, administration, service provision, and evaluation are interrelated and cyclical.⁵ Print serials have similar connectedness, but it is not cyclical in the same way that online serials are. Long before computers and the advent of the Internet, serials librarians managed their collections regardless of the form they came in. This is still true for electronic journals, but unlike the many varieties of micro formats and print mediums, electronic formats are more ephemeral and require a different skill set to manage. The responsibilities of serialists have changed over time to reflect the change in mediums and delivery modes. They will continue to change in the future as technology provides new mediums for information dissemination.

Endnotes

1. **Stanley, Nancy Markle.** "Purchasing Electronic Resources: an Acquisitions Perspective." In *New Automation Technology for Acquisitions and Collection Development*, edited by **Rosann Bazirjian**. New York: Haworth Press, 1995.
2. **Zhang, Xiaoyin and Michaelyn Haslam.** "Movement toward a predominantly electronic journal collection." *Library Hi Tech* 23 (2005): 82-89.
3. **Duranceau, Ellen Finnie and Cindy Hepfer.** "Staffing for Electronic Resource Management: The Results of a Survey." *Serials Review* 28 (2002): 316-320.
4. **Lomax, Eleanor L.** "Electronic Resource Librarians in the 21st Century." In *Expectations of Librarians in the 21st Century*, edited by **Karl Bridges**. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003.
5. **Emery, Jill.** "Beginning to See the Light: Developing a Discourse for Electronic Resource Management." *The Serials Librarian* 47 (2005): 137-147.

Serials Cataloging in the Digital Environment: Fast, Faster, Fastest

by **Mary Greci** (Serials Team Leader & Metadata Librarian, University of Oregon Libraries) <mgreci@uoregon.edu>

The digital format has caused major changes in libraries and serials cataloging operations have been affected as much as other areas. But how extensive are the changes? What are the effects on workload? How does the new environment affect production line staff? Finally, what do **Electronic Resource Management Systems (ERMs)** mean for the future of serials cataloging?

What Do Catalogers Do?

The goal of cataloging is to provide users with access to material by creating a surrogate that is accessible via appropriate search terminology. Searches may be via the card catalog, printed catalog, **OPAC**, another database such as **ContentDM**, or any other means. The mission of the individual cataloger focuses on providing access to material their library collects or otherwise makes available. This basic purpose has remained constant from the days of manuscript lists through the integrated online catalog of today. Catalogers organize information. If done correctly, that work facilitates retrieval of the information by those who want to use it. Records may appear in any format, follow any standard, be detailed or brief, and the goal remains the same: provide access to library materials.

Continuity in a Time of Change

The means of achieving this goal have

changed radically through the years. The advent of electronic journals and other online resources, along with how quickly this format was embraced by both libraries and library users, is just one of the more recent impetuses for such change. In many libraries, the purchase of print resources has declined. Libraries increasingly purchase large packages of e-journals and, whenever possible, provide access to these materials via their online catalogs. This access is near instantaneous for the end user. As a result, patrons and library staff have new and ever-expanding expectations of both the catalog and catalogers. Formerly, a search resulted in the retrieval of the surrogate, or catalog record, and a few more steps were required to find the needed document. Now, the search often results in the full-text of the needed materials, and the demand for this level of access is only increasing.

Discussions about e-journals generally focus on what is new and challenging about this constantly changing environment. It is important to remember, however, that much of what has gone before is still valid and useful in the present. In many cases, what is considered "new" would more accurately be termed "changed." For instance, when a new title is received at the **University of Oregon Libraries**, it is processed first in Collection Development & Acquisitions (CDA). If it does not meet the criteria for our "acceptcat"

procedure, it is routed to Metadata & Digital Library Services (MDLS) to be cataloged. A cataloger then goes through a series of steps that results in catalog access to the publication. Until we fully implement our **ERM** (discussed later in this article), the basic workflow and final goal of staff dealing with particular titles remain the same regardless of physical format. The differences — and there are many — appear only in the details.

So What Are the Differences?

Cataloging of electronic journals is, of course, different in several respects from the cataloging of more traditional formats. The difference that most directly affects the production catalogers in my team is the high priority given to electronic journals and the type of catalog access that is provided.

Cataloging Priority

Items received in print or another tangible physical format may be routed to the serials cataloging backlog, the priority shelf, or the problem shelf. The identification of an item as priority depends on the final shelving location, the type of receipt (continuing or one-time purchase, gift, depository, etc.), and whether there is already a record or records in the catalog. Electronic journals are another matter. They are *always* considered priority, with purchased titles ranking higher in the scale than free titles. The primary reason for

continued on page 36

this is discussed below, but essentially, it is because there is no access to these materials until they are cataloged, unlike print and other materials that typically can be accessed by patrons from the moment they are ordered.

One question that is repeatedly brought up by my staff is: "how priority is priority?" In addition to the categories above, we also take part in both serial and non-serial departmental priority projects. The department only has one priority cataloging level, so all priority materials are routed into the same serials cataloging "priority" work stream. Not unreasonably considering our heavy workload, staff want to know which of these continually received categories is the *real* priority.

The answer to this question is electronic journals. We always have multiple categories of priority material to deal with. When e-journals are one of the types, they take priority over everything else. Other work is dropped while staff shift their attention to providing access to these titles. The reason for this is that there are no "in process" records — either with or without URLs — for e-journals. They are not accessible in the catalog until catalogers process them. This is different from titles received in physical form, for which brief records are usually input in the catalog at the time of ordering or acquisition by the library. Among other things, the brief records input for titles received in other formats show when items have been received by the library and allow patrons to submit rush cataloging requests. There is no such system in place for online journals.

The Effect of Large e-journal Projects

We frequently have projects to catalog electronic journals received in a certain package or packages. Most of these last a few days or weeks. Last year, however, we worked for months on a priority project requiring maintenance or addition of records for thousands of online journals. Everything had to be done quickly because all changes took effect on January 1, 2005 and error reports immediately started coming in from patrons and public services. Because our workflow depended entirely on the workflow in CDA, we often had to edit records multiple times in order to change information related to a particular package. The result was well over 8,000 e-journal subscriptions added, withdrawn, or maintained between January and mid-April 2005. The project had started earlier in CDA, resulting in an increase in catalog maintenance for e-journals as early as November 2004.

The Current e-journal Cataloging Process

So how did we manually add, maintain, or withdraw over 8,000 subscriptions in about

three and a half months? The answer lies in the standards and level of cataloging applied to online journals. Actually, rather than call it "cataloging," it would be more appropriate to say we "provide access to online journals through the library catalog."

We rely on spreadsheets received from CDA to provide basic identifying data, URL, and online holdings, and this text is used to create a bibliographic record. If it is a new online title we have at some time received in print, our process is to check access at the site, add a few fields to the bibliographic record already in our database, add item and holdings records for the online version, and add a union list record in **OCLC**. If it is a new title we have never received in physical format, we search **OCLC** to see if there is an acceptable record for the publication in any format. If there is, we download the record and continue with normal e-journal processing. We only do actual cataloging of e-journals when there is no acceptable record available for the title in any format.

Our standard for "acceptable" copy for e-journals is, by necessity, very different from the standard used for other material. We frequently purchase e-journal packages that contain hundreds of titles. There is no way we can provide our traditional level of cataloging for all of these online journals and still continue with other work. There is also the time factor to consider. It can take a couple of months to provide fully cataloged records for a package that we now process in a week. When you consider that we often pay thousands of dollars for an annual subscription to one package and it is common for more than one large package to be added or changed at the same time, it is easy to understand the need for the speedier process. A third consideration is that we usually end up adding e-journal access to a record for the title in another format and we often do not own the title in that format. We cannot maintain records for formats we do not own so to accept what is given.

We do follow the **CONSER** aggregator-neutral standard when inputting original records that describe the online version. We usually do some level of **CONSER** authentication (minimal, core, or full) for these records. This type of cataloging is rarely needed, however, because almost all e-journals we receive already have copy available for some publication format.

Although it looks simple, our process is often not a smooth one. Problems can — and do — occur every step of the way. Many are taken care of in CDA before they send on the spreadsheets. Others slip through, to be caught when catalogers compare spreadsheet information to bibliographic records or check the holdings noted on the sheet with the online access available at the journal Website. Catalogers resolve any bibliographic problems that arise. Notification is sent to CDA if major identifying elements are different than

what they have on file. These elements include things such as title of the resource, print ISSN and the split of holdings among bibliographic records. We are more likely to see holdings or access problems rather than bibliographic ones, however, and these must be returned to CDA for resolution. The resolution can take as little as a few hours or as long as several months.

During the first three and a half months of 2005, serials cataloging staff did very little other work aside from e-journals, problem solving that could not wait, and the occasional rush request. We kept receiving all categories of priority materials throughout that time. New paid subscriptions for material in a physical format still arrived. Titles still changed. Problems of all types continued to appear on our "problem shelf." Depository material continued to arrive at the same rate as always. We are still digging our way out from under this physical backlog — 10 months after the e-journal project was completed. We have maintained the goal of providing catalog records for all material we have received by cataloging e-journals as soon as possible. The trade-off has been that brief, in-process records for other "priority" titles remain in the system longer. Thus far, this situation has been considered acceptable by public service departments.

The sheer magnitude of some of the packages and projects means catalogers go on autopilot and a problem may occur several times before it is noticed. Once the nature of a problem is understood, already cataloged titles may need to be spot-checked to see if it affects more titles in the package. It may turn out that an entire package must be returned to CDA for problem resolution before cataloging can continue. At other times, the problem affects only one or a few titles and cataloging can continue for all of the others until the next problem arises.

Prior to the project, newly received priority material rarely took up more than half a shelf and we were often completely caught up. Added volumes and cataloging problems were routinely dealt with the same week they were received. That is all changed now. We regularly have full shelves of newly received priority titles, plus added volumes and problems, since we began e-journal projects. Even now, after all these months, we have almost three full shelves of new priority items that need to be cataloged.

This type of priority backlog would have been unacceptable two years ago. It has been difficult for some team members to adjust to the change in expectations related to print material, particularly when we are not yet ready to remove material from the priority category. Personally, I still wince every time I pass the serials priority-cataloging shelves. We all realize, however, that this is simply the way it will be, at least until we fully implement an **ERM**. With a continual stream of electronic

continued on page 38

Serials Cataloging ... from page 36

journals and serials staff who are involved with high priority departmental work on digital collections, we have accepted that we will now routinely leave print serials priority material for months before dealing with it.

Effect on Staff

E-journal processing is quick and easy when there are no problems and adequate records are already available. Combine this with the large volume of titles in many packages and there can be a negative effect on accuracy and staff morale. Mistakes happen and problems go unnoticed when staff go on autopilot. This is a predictable, and understandable result of performing the same few tasks over and over again for hundreds (or, in the case of last year's project, thousands) of titles. The repetition of basic record editing and creation also has an influence on the level of satisfaction staff members get from their work.

My staff have voiced the opinion that anyone could now do their jobs. In reality, this is not true. Much of what we see with e-journals is *not* straightforward, however, and it takes someone with special knowledge of serials and online publications to not only recognize a problem but also know what to do about it. Similarly, only a specialist can tell when what looks like a problem really *is not* a problem but just requires minor tweaking of records. Morale can become an issue when staff do not realize they are drawing on specialized knowledge developed through many years of experience. The large number of titles and repetition of steps overshadows the fact that they are using analytical and problem-solving skills gained from years of working with serials. They forget how long it took them to hone these skills to their current levels and may also forget that serials knowledge is not second nature to everyone.

Staff satisfaction can also be affected when

they find they are referring more problems to others than they are able to resolve for themselves. My staff likes fixing problems within the team and the resolution of one difficult bibliographic problem provides more of a feeling of accomplishment than identification and reporting of dozens of e-journal problems. It is not uncommon for e-journal problems to be referred back to CDA for resolution, however — something that is unusual with print materials.

My staff is happier when we do not have a large e-journal project going on. They can concentrate on work with more variety and different types of problems to solve. Our continued focus on this other work at times when we do not have a large number of e-journals to process is important to the job satisfaction of serials cataloging staff.

It is important for staff morale and the smooth integration of new formats to the work of the unit that the elements of workflow that remain the same be acknowledged and the continued importance of past practices be recognized. Once again, to take the **University of Oregon Libraries** as an example, the positive relationships developed between CDA and MDLS staff continue to be a vital element in the success of a workflow that overlaps both departments. Our e-journal processes mean that staff in both departments work with each other in different ways than before, but the solid relationships that have already been formed remain important.

At this point you are probably wondering why we have not automated this "simple" e-journal process. There are several reasons for this, including a long-term lack of money and overwork of the people who might be able to come up with an efficient in-house system. The end is in sight, however, as **ERM** enters the picture.

The Effect of an ERM

Serials catalogers at my institution are eager to see full implementation of our **ERM**. We can tell by our growing backlogs that

material continues to arrive in tangible format. Departmental projects (usually related to digital collections) continue to increase and become more important. At the same time, progress on serials cataloging and retrospective conversion projects has decreased substantially. All of this combines to mean there will not be any lack of work when we no longer process e-journals manually.

It is hoped that the **ERM** will get us out from under the continuing e-journal cataloging beast. It will enable us to provide access to hundreds, even thousands, of online journals in the catalog with one upload command. Holdings can be updated and titles withdrawn just as easily. This means we will begin providing catalog access to thousands of titles available within dozens of databases, something we have not done in the past. In other words, we will be better meeting patron expectations as they are able to access many more titles electronically through the **WebOPAC**.

The purpose of implementing the uploading of **ERM** data into the catalog is so we can quickly provide access to more titles without having to touch every record manually. This does not mean, however, that serials cataloging staff will no longer work with online journals. What it does mean is a change in the type and level of work. Instead of spending a lot of time performing the same tasks over and over again, staff will be engaged in problem solving and clean up of the database after each load. System reports will help us identify many types of errors, some of which will be corrected using automated processes. Many more will need to be fixed manually, on a title-by-title basis. It is assumed this work will take less time than adding each title individually to the catalog but we will not know for sure until we are closer to full implementation. Regardless, serials cataloging staff will be able to focus more on bibliographic issues and bibliographic problem solving. This is the work they enjoy and get the most satisfaction out of doing well.

Rumors from page 22

and the new finding by the **ALPSP** that librarians are much more likely to cancel journals because of high prices than because of **OA** archiving.

www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/04-02-06.htm

www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/archive.htm

From **Edupage**, March 31, 2006 — **The U.S. Justice Department** is seeking Internet usage data from at least 35 companies in its efforts to defend the 1996 **Child Online Protection Act (COPA)** against court challenges. One of the subpoenas sparked a legal show-

down between the government and **Google**, which challenged the request for millions of records of Internet searches. In that case, the government significantly scaled back its request, which the judge ruled was allowable. Other companies that received similar subpoenas are **Comcast**, **EarthLink**, **AT&T**, **Cox Communications**, **Verizon Communications**, **Symantec**, and other makers of computer security products. The **Supreme Court** has ruled twice that **COPA** is likely unconstitutional.

news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20060331/ap_on_hi_te/internet_blocking

More from **Edupage** — I tell you, if it's not one thing, it's **HTML deprivation**. A study conducted by the **University of**

Southampton indicates that a majority of government Websites in the United Kingdom suffer from **HTML errors** and are designed in ways that restrict access to users with disabilities. According to the study, 60 percent of government sites contain errors, and 61 percent do not meet accessibility standards set by the **World Wide Web Consortium**. **BBC**, 30 March 2006.

news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4853000.stm
www.educase.edu/Edupage/639
www.educase.edu/resources

Well, we got a surprising number of poems, short stories, etc., for the **ATG fiction contest** and we apologize for the delay in announcing the winner. Ta da! The winner is

continued on page 58