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Op Ed — Troubling Choices: Full-text Access and the Old Hard Copy Back Runs

by **Steve McKinzie** (Social Science Librarian, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA 17013; Phone: 717-245-1601)
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Once you've acquired electronic coverage of a journal title by a reliable provider like **JSTOR** or **Project Muse**, what does your collection development policy tell you to do with your old bound periodical titles? Do you toss them, cart them off to the land fill, or sell them on **eBay**?

I've a simple solution. Hang on to them. Keep them all.

Now, don't misunderstand me. I am just as appreciative of the marvels of PDF as the next librarian. Few things can rival the textual beauty of the modern full-text PDF article. Fully searchable and readily available, it comes downloadable, reproducible, and transferable. And if such wonders are not astonishing enough, one can now in many full-text products browse full runs of a journal or access all parts of a periodical issue just as they originally appeared. It is an amazing technology by anyone's reckoning.

Indeed, it is these extraordinary properties of PDF that give us such remarkable flexibility with journals. In some instances, the capacity of replicating articles exactly as they appear in a journal means librarians can now dispense with purchasing a periodical title altogether. You have access, so there is no need to shelf and bind paper issues. **Project Muse**, for instance, will give you full archival and current access. Forget the cumbersome binding and the tireless re-shelving. You've the convenience of fully-searchable, full-text Web access.

These wonders of PDF also give librarians my earlier-mentioned option — the possibility of tossing previously-purchased journal runs altogether. And why shouldn't we? Both **Project Muse** and **JSTOR** guarantee archival rights. That means complete ownership. You don't lease. You don't pay for online access. You buy the digital journal outright, just as in the case of a conventional hard copy subscription.

The upshot to all of this is that a good many libraries are seizing the opportunity and throwing out the old hard copy issues. The print bound volumes are off to the landfill, destined for the recycling bin, or auctioned on **eBay**. It is now standard practice at a good many institutions for librarians to de-accession any and everything in print that **JSTOR** and **Project Muse** cover. Sometimes it is a question of

economy. Housing comes at a high price, and librarians are nothing if not parsimonious and rigorously efficient.

More often it is a case of space. We value shelf space, and we can never get enough of it. Most of our collections are expanding — a situation that means you've less space today than you had yesterday — a dismal calculation if there ever was one.

But before you discard your **JSTOR** or **Project Muse** hard copy titles, succumb to the arguments for space and time savings, give the matter some thought. There are four very good reasons why you should hang on to old hard-copy full text journal runs.

First of all, full-access vendors often don't cover everything that is included in a journal. The whole journal isn't always there. The scanner's and technicians often exclude or fail to include book advertisements, conference announcements, and the journal's masthead, not to mention supplements and collaborative material. **JSTOR** is especially good about including everything between the covers of a given journal issue. Others are less so. **Project Muse**, for instance, omitted an important 1996 supplement to *American Quarterly*, a supplement that is part of many library's bound print collections.

Second, digital archiving may not be forever. I know, the vendors promise archival access, complete ownership. I don't doubt their sincerity for a minute, but I wonder in the long run about their ability to deliver. Their guarantees in the final analysis are just as solid as a good many others — sound as a dollar, as reliable as

Social Security. For the fact of the matter is, no matter how sincere a vendor may promise unfailing fidelity, the reliability of their promises rests ultimately on the solubility of a company or the permanence of a not-for-profit entity — a reliability linked to the stability of the market, the quality of their management or even the ethics of their lawyers.

Thirdly, there is the law of unexpected consequences. No one would have ever anticipated, for instance, that **Duke University Press** would withdraw a number of their titles from **Project Muse**. Nor would anyone have expected the *New England Journal of Medicine* to pull its holdings from several major aggregates full-text databases. The unpredictability of all this suggests that erring on the side of caution may be at least prudent, if not downright advisable.

Indeed this dimension of uncertainty may explain my fourth reason for holding on to the hard copy. Many faculty are uncomfortable with tossing back runs, even when we've assurances of full archival retrieval. **Kevin M. Guthrie**, president of **JSTOR**, reports in a 2002 article that in a professional survey most faculty agree that "regardless of what happens with electronic archiving it will always be crucial for libraries to maintain hard-copy archives."¹ Are faculty then more conservative than librarians, more skeptical about the publishing process, or more wedded to the tangible printed product?

I don't know, but I do regard faculty as major stake holders in the academic en-

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against the grain

people profile

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HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Just as exciting, with a few issues resolved—and many, many more still unresolved.

Managing Director, Bernan

by **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*, MSC 98, The Citadel, SC 29409; Phone & Fax: 843-723-3536) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: Can you tell us when you arrived at Bernan, and a little about the experience you bring to the Managing Director role there?

DW: I came to Bernan in the beginning of September, but — and I mean this in only the best of ways — I feel like I've been here a long time. That's because Bernan is a mix of both government publication distribution and professional publishing, and I have spent a good number of years associated with both.

I started with Harper & Row in the 70's in medical publishing, then with Aspen Publishing in the early 80's in healthcare management, and finally in the later 80's and 90's at Government Institutes, where we provided legal/regulatory compliance information for the business, college, and library markets. This included authored books, subscriptions — print and electronic — self-study and live training courses, as well as distribution of government regulations and federal agency industry guidebooks.

During those years — and you do start to feel your age when you describe your career in "decades" — I've held a wide range of editorial, marketing, manufacturing, publisher, and operations management positions, so I'm comfortable with the various aspects of the Bernan business (although the underlying technologies have certainly changed throughout those years).

Most recently, I was Vice President & General Manager of Government Institutes, which had become the publishing and training division of a large consulting engineering firm.

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terprise. They deserve a hearing and a voice in our library decisions — especially in regard to journals in their discipline.

All of these arguments suggest that the better collection development policy regarding old journal runs may be the more cautious one. I realize, declining shelf space may force one to discard. I don't blame anyone for taking that step when there seems no other alternative. But if you have the room, if you are not willing to cast all caution to the wind, and if you don't believe rigorous efficiency is always the way to go, consider keeping your old journal runs of JSTOR and Project Muse. Prudence, sensitivity to our patrons, and a measured skepticism about the future argue that it makes good sense. Discarding quality bound journals should always be a last resort.

Endnotes

1. Kevin M. Guthrie, "Lessons from JSTOR: User Behavior and Faculty Attitudes," *Journal of Library Administration*, 36, no. 3, 118.

ATG: Looking at the "state-of-Bernan" as it exists today, aren't the majority of your publications government-document based?

DW: Yes, that is the case, especially on the Bernan Distribution side, and also true to some extent for Bernan Press, our publishing imprint, although here the typical approach is to add proprietary analysis and expertly compile and organize the government information that is used.

ATG: Then with most government documents now available online, what are Bernan's plans as a publisher and distributor moving forward?

DW: Well, for one thing, I think the move to electronic dissemination of information may be inexorable, but it is also evolutionary, and the need for print versions will stay around for a long time.

Another consideration is open-ended potential to add value to government documents by aggregating the tremendous amount of information out there, providing a user focus to it, and then adding to it other information such as expert analysis.

Additionally, the growing accessibility of government data online reminds me of a comment I heard a CFO make in the mid1980's when spreadsheets first came out: "The problem now is that everyone thinks he or she is a financial analyst."

In that vein, the increasing ease in accessing government regulations doesn't make you an attorney any more than the ability to access government statistics makes you a statistician. In short, at times there can be almost too much information, too loosely organized, available.

ATG: What about the statistical data published through Bernan Press — do you have plans to "mine" that data and make it available online?

DW: Absolutely, and the "who, what, when, where, and how" of this is actually one of the key points of our current strategic discussions.

ATG: Given the particular experience you bring to the table, what changes can we expect to see coming out of Bernan?

DW: The short-term answer is a qualified "None." There should be little change to the core Bernan business, because it is a solid business of service to the library community built on a long-standing "customer first" relationship — and while you always strive to improve, there's no substitute for keeping your eye on your customers' changing needs.

However, what I do hope to bring to Bernan are things that will be additive in nature.

Bernan Distribution will continue to emphasize its comprehensiveness in providing libraries "one-stop shopping" access to over 45,000 U.S. government and intergovernmental

tal titles, and I certainly encourage the expansion already underway to bring this same level of comprehensive distribution to electronic information services.

We are also working to improve the ease with which customers can place orders, access current and forthcoming title information, and communicate so as to get quick answers to questions and resolutions to problems.

Bernan Press already has a wonderful and growing collection of statistical references in publication, although we're more than just Data Books.

We have a new title that we co-published with the Library of Congress, the *Encyclopedia of the Library of Congress*, which will be a wonderful addition to any library. We have co-published important titles with other government agencies in addition to numerous titles with the World Trade Organization, and we'd like to continue to expand our activities in this role.

Where I hope my personal experience will come into play is in helping us build an even wider range of authored and compiled publications and reference works that will have appeal not only to the traditional Bernan library market, but also to corporations and government agencies.

ATG: I understand Bernan Press has a title on the CHOICE "Outstanding Academic Books of 2004 list coming out in January. What is that title?

DW: "The Almanac of American Education" has been selected for inclusion in CHOICE's annual "Outstanding Academic Titles" list. That's a real source of pride and a tribute not only to our in-house publishing staff, but also to our outside Editors involved with these works, and I think it is this kind of recognition that will encourage more federal agencies and intergovernmental organizations to work with us in co-publishing ventures.

ATG: What do you see as the key to future products and services that Bernan will provide, and thereby the key to Bernan's future success?

DW: That's always a dangerous question because it requires a broad answer, and in answering broadly you can sometimes miss something "right in front of your face," as they say, simply because you live and breathe it every day. I also want to be careful that ideas and concepts aren't interpreted as promises!

With that caveat, I think the keys to future success boil down to five things for us:

1. Always begin by listening to your customer's needs. This sounds simple, but it's easy to lose sight of it, given the exigencies of the day.

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