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Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

A Model For Improving Electronic Resources Decision-Making

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Libraries deal with a wider array of electronic information resources than ever before. Librarians make choices about gateways and remote access, local search engines and locally mounted files, magnetic tapes and CD-ROMs, networked resources and stand-alone workstations, mediated and unmediated user access, interfaces and World Wide Web hotlinks. We consider funding questions (which budgets to use and who has authority to expend how much) and policy issues. We seek to ask the right questions and to define

the local frame of reference in which to ask them.

This is a brief look at how one library is addressing the issues surrounding electronic resources. The University of Minnesota Libraries' approach is one possible model and may be useful for others to the extent that it identifies issues that need consideration. Like most libraries, Minnesota began selecting CD-ROMs cautiously when these were one of the few alternatives to librarian-mediated, remote database searching. However, within a surprisingly short time, we

found ourselves with an incredible array of electronic information resources; CD-ROMs are now just one of many possible electronic formats. The ad hoc decision-making that had worked originally was no longer a responsible approach. Acquisition and access decisions, many with system-wide funding implications, were being made throughout the Libraries without regard to or realization of what was happening in other Libraries units. Some problems the University of Minnesota Libraries seeks to solve are due to our large size and many service units and others are due to the complex nature of electronic resources.

The Libraries decided to step back and look at CD-ROMs and other electronic resources using two guiding principles: responsible budget management and effective service and information access for users. We realized that we needed a coherent and consistent framework in which to make decisions and the policies to guide them. We now have a standing committee, the Data Services Advisory Committee (DSAC), that brings together expertise in public services, automation, collection management, and technical services. DSAC is charged with drafting a selection policy for electronic resources, identifying other policy issues, and preparing recommendations on specific issues as they arise. Recommendations go to the Libraries Management Team for rejection or acceptance and implementation.

An early recommendation from DSAC addresses two troubling questions: responsibility for selection decisions and sources of funding. The University of Minnesota Libraries sees three

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If Rumors Were Horses

Blackwell is a conservative company but a lot's been going on all the same. The big news is that **Blackwell Delaware** has been formed as the holding company in North America and **Fred Philipp** has been appointed President and CEO. Fred has also replaced **Dan Tonkery** as President of **Readmore**. **Terry Collins**, Group Chief Executive with the **Blackwell Group** for many years is also out, effective April 19. The Blackwell Board has appointed a Group Management Executive Committee — **Richard Barker** (Managing Director, Blackwell Retail Ltd.), **Doug Fox** (Managing Director, B.H. Blackwell Ltd.) and **Neville Hopkins** (Group Finance Director, Blackwell Ltd). The Group will be chaired by **Julian Blackwell**. **Miles Blackwell** continues as a Director. **At Readmore**, **Judy Schott** has been appointed VP of Marketing & Sales. This issue of **ATG** contains an interview with **Fred Philipp**, see page 32.

I hear that since he can't play golf (even fanatics don't play golf in the snow), **Dan Tonkery**'s hard at work on a business plan and rolling out a new venture. No doubt to be continued ... As for **Terry Collins**, last time I saw him he was smiling ...

Have you signed up for the **2nd Academy for Scholarly Publishing Conference** in Charleston April 21-23, 1996?? It's in just a few weeks. Why not sign up now? **Charles Harmon** <CTHarmon@aol.com> is a patient man. He recently agreed to publish a paper about the **Academy for Scholarly Publishing**'s first conference held in Charleston in February, 1995, in the **Bottom Line**. And it's even in the latest issue. Check it out. And mark your calendars for this new event! It's a way for academic faculty to talk to publishers and librarians about the publication of scholarly information.

And change is still afoot at **Faxon/Dawson**. **Donald Lohin**, appointed as president of **Faxon** in May, 1995 (see **ATG**, June 1995, page 8), is no longer with Faxon. **Vern Cain**, to whom Lohin reported, will remain as president and Chief Executive Officer of Dawson, NA, and as president and CEO of Faxon. Faxon will have two regional service centers — one in Westwood with **Ron Akie** serving as Executive VP and General Manager, and the other in Oregon, IL with **Alan Nordman** serving as Executive VP and General Manager.

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levels of responsibility for selection decisions. First, many electronic resources are narrow in both subject and impact and are solely the responsibility of individual selectors. These are funded out of the individual materials budget subject fund lines. A second level of electronic resources is somewhat more broad. These are of interest to two or more selectors or to selectors in a single unit (for example, the Science and Engineering Library). Decisions about these resources are made by selectors in consultation and jointly funded out of one or more subject budget lines. First and second level decisions tend to be about CD-ROMs, though this is not always the case. Electronic journals, fulltext files, and some indexes available via gateways may be of very narrow interest. Third level resources are of broad-based, general interest and funded off the top of the materials budget. Selection decisions about these resources must be reviewed by DSAC.

DSAC identified several categories of resources that should be funded off the top. These are:

- major monograph catalog/s (WorldCat, RLIN BIB, *Books in Print*)
- general-interest periodical index
- general-interest fulltext periodical file
- encyclopedia
- English language dictionary
- current awareness service
- *Dissertation Abstracts*

DSAC also has responsibility to review each of these resources as the contract comes up for review and to recommend renewal or selecting a new provider. The committee prepares criteria to use in reviewing options. These are the usual considerations when selecting materials — completeness, accuracy, ease of use, etc. — and some considerations specific to the information resource and medium, including criteria for weighing alternative formats of delivery. DSAC is responsible for scheduling demonstrations, soliciting staff opinion, and writing pro/con statements for each resource.

DSAC reviewed how electronic resources have been funded and recommended a new approach that aims at being consistent and equitable. In the past, electronic resources might be supported through the materials budget, the systems budget, or the operating budget. Source of funds depended on where the money was available at the time and who was making the selection decision. DSAC recommended that all electronic information resources be funded from the materials budget. This includes purchases and subscriptions, materials that are owned and leased, CD-ROMs, magnetic tapes, and remote resources charged on annual contracts or per use basis. Continuing expenditures and the dollars that support them will be pulled into one budget (the materials budget). This will

give the Libraries a complete understanding of all expenditures for electronic resources and make it easier to tell our community how much we spend for them. This practice also encourages awareness that selecting electronic resources is part of the total collection management equation and all that implies in choosing how to spend available money.

DSAC recommended that electronic resources that fall outside the general interest category be assigned to appropriate subject selectors and fund lines, along with the dollar amount to cover the annual cost. This places responsibility for collection and budget management directly in the hands of the selectors, who know user needs and expectations and can make informed decisions about how best to spend their allocation. Currently, we are assigning responsibility for electronic resources that have been covered as part of block payments or funded off the top through an earlier ad hoc decisions. Each selector will review the resources which have been assigned to him or her and then decide which to continue, cancel, or replace with another option.

The University of Minnesota Libraries has put an additional complication into the decision-making process. We are aware that many electronic resources have consequences far beyond the cost of purchase or lease. Besides general interest resources, any resource that has system-wide implications must come before DSAC. "System-wide implications" covers many issues. Does the information resource require any form of system-wide support to make it accessible? This may be programming, new hardware and software, new wiring and telecommunication lines, new furniture and facilities modification, or public service staffing support. Even a free resource may cost the library in expensive programming time or local training. Does the electronic resource duplicate a resource? Is the same or another electronic format available in the Libraries? Does the resource have implications for existing and new cooperative agreements? Is the resource to be added to the Libraries' online menu of information choices?

"We hope that decisions about electronic information resources are made that balance user needs against library resources to meet those needs."

DSAC brings the committee members' combined experience and knowledge to all selection decisions that have potential system-wide impact.

An example of a special assignment given DSAC is the charge to review options for local search engines to use with local networks. While we realize that not all search engines work well (or at all) with every CD-ROM or other type of data file, we wish to avoid as much user confusion and frustration as possible. In addition, one search engine used on several servers is often cheaper than

multiple contracts for different products. DSAC developed a lengthy set of criteria for evaluating search engines and software for loading and maintaining local databases. The criteria fall under the following headings:

- clients available
- indexing
- search construction
- search processing
- result presentation
- data export
- document delivery
- support for users with disabilities
- security and individual privacy
- available data
- maintenance
- technical issues
- future development
- costs

DSAC is collecting information on possible search engines and about to schedule demonstrations of their top choices. The committee will consider the databases each search engine supports and how various options might support current CD-ROM subscriptions. DSAC also is concerned about consistent interfaces on public workstations at all University of Minnesota Libraries service points. Some variations are logical, but DSAC would like to see common principles and conventions guiding design of the user interfaces and Libraries Web pages. Our users should recognize immediately they are in the Library online system and know how to navigate and to find the resources they seek.

Through DSAC, the University of Minnesota Libraries is trying to make better decisions about electronic resources in all formats. Selectors have more information about how to make informed decisions and more individual responsibility for doing so. Simultaneously, decisions are more consistent across the University Libraries. Approaching decisions systematically has eliminated some duplicate CD-ROM subscriptions by moving to local networks or gateway access to the resource. When multiple copies of a CD-ROM title remains logical, the Libraries now asks

for single/multiple copy discounts.

We hope that decisions about electronic information resources are made that balance user needs against library resources to meet those needs.

DSAC is charged with an oversight role when an electronic information resource or its potential impact is larger than the purview of one selector or one unit. DSAC does not try to second guess selectors or to recommend one approach or one format for electronic resources. DSAC realizes that selectors and subject- or clientele-based units are better informed when it comes to user needs, volume of expected use, and the most effective way to spend money to meet these. DSAC's responsibility is two-fold: to keep the proverbial big picture in view and to provide a combined expertise that individual selectors may not yet have.