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Library Perspective, Vendor Response

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Column Editors' Note: *This column for **Against the Grain** is devoted to discussing issues affecting library acquisitions, library vendors, and the services and products they supply to academic libraries and the publishing marketplace as a whole. It is an ongoing conversation between a book vendor representative, **Robin Champieux** and an academic librarian, **Steven Carrico**. — RC and SC*

Robin: In our last column, we touched upon emerging acquisition and access models. Let's follow-up on that. As you know, I recently joined **EBL**, an eBook aggregator that offers a patron driven model. But I am more interested in discussing this from a wider perspective. What advantages do these untraditional and new models offer, and where do they fall short?

Steve: As an academic librarian may I suggest something to publishers and eBook aggregators that they're going to love to hear? With so many academic libraries facing restrictive book budgets, isn't it time eBook providers begin offering eBooks within a more reasonable cost-benefit scale? For that matter, why should libraries pay full-price for resources that are hardly, if ever, used? Wouldn't it be great if eBook providers offered a "money-back guarantee" where after a year any purchased eBooks with less than say two uses — not just views but real uses — could be returned back to the publishers? Like that would happen!

Robin: Well, I know you're being a bit cheeky, but I understand where you are coming from. I think you are saying that the dominant acquisition models don't address library needs and budgets. And, publishers and aggregators need to offer something more relevant. Right?

Steve: Absolutely! By creating new, more flexible models of acquisitions, book vendors and publishers will get libraries to purchase

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offered because we already have a jillion copies of those titles. I don't stop there, because you will never get anything else offered from those or related sources.

As in the case of our latest prospective donor, a retired General in California, I spent about thirty minutes finding him two academic libraries that were willing to accept his donations and he was very happy. Our job is not always to just say yes or no, but to offer some alternatives for our generous donors. A little work and compassion for others goes a long way in promoting future gifts which might even involve estate gifts. I believe this is truly something to think hard about! Build your public relations and they will take care of you later. It's a gift! 🐾

more eBooks than they do now. It will make better sense to spend their money on online publications that can be shared. Thus, libraries will increasingly focus their budgets around these models of acquisitions. If not, it's going to be a case of killing the goose that laid the golden egg.

Robin: I don't think most publishers and aggregators are opposed to experimenting with new ideas, but they would insist on models that also address their business interests. I don't believe this is unreasonable as long as those interests are reasonable. To pose a related question, how do you think libraries need to work differently to respond successfully to patron expectations and needs in the face of dissipating budgets? I believe exploring this question is also important, because what you describe above also calls into question traditional collection development methods, such as approval plans, which do not include criteria like circulation expectation. Moreover, there are loud and thoughtful voices in the library community — both libraries and publishers — that have argued for the importance of seminal works and collections of record, wherein use is not a defining feature of value. Finding business and acquisition models that address these different interests is important. For instance, if publishers agreed to the model you propose above, I predict that they would begin to value circulation predictions over scholarly impact when choosing what to publish. Is this what we want?

Steve: It's an interesting dilemma, for sure — I guess the ideal libraries strive for is to offer scholarly collection building AND high circulation. Unfortunately, that is the exception, not the rule. But, **Robin**, even when we are talking about scholarly content that is of high use sometimes the acquisitions models being offered to libraries aren't helping the situation. Let's face it, many academic libraries' budgets are consumed by ongoing subscriptions and license agreements, so there is less "discretionary" funds to spend on books. This is certainly the case in my library. So to meet demands of users and spend our money more prudently, we are pushing the acquisitions of eBooks and are hoping to partner with libraries in our state consortia to share these eBooks. At the risk of being cheeky again, here's the problem reflective of the publishers threatening the goose. We asked a vendor rep to build a shared eBook plan around titles offered by a very prominent university press, but we were told that the press is reluctant to accept our consortia's buying one eBook and sharing it with all the libraries' users. Why? Because the folks running the press believe this model would cut down on multiple copy sales of that title across the state. I find that logical but shortsighted. Instead, aggregators working with the press could ask each library in the consortia to provide the individual amounts they spent in the previous year on books issued from that university press. Each library could pool those funds into a deposit account then

select and share eBooks from the press until the account is emptied. In this scenario the libraries would acquire more titles for their users, their funds would go further, and the press still receives a healthy profit, since libraries are spending as much as they would have anyway. But now the libraries are vested and roll this plan into their annual budgets… Whether this model is sustainable is not my point. What I'm suggesting is these are the types of flexible models that need to be tried.

Robin: I absolutely agree and like what you propose above. At first glance, I think it's viable and acknowledges the publishers' interests. There needs to be more open and honest dialogue between vendors and libraries so new kinds of models like this can be proposed and piloted.

Steve: To their credit, eBook suppliers have developed the patron-driven purchase plans, and this acquisitions model is becoming widely used and accepted in libraries. It's a simple idea but effective — users drive the purchasing-mobile.

Robin: Obviously, you know where I fall on the topic of patron-driven acquisitions. I believe we will see even more development in this area, especially as a greater number of libraries incorporate this model into their acquisitions workflows and purchase plans mature. I'm curious. I know **UF** recently piloted a patron-driven program. What motivated the libraries to test this model, what were the results, and how to you think the experience will influence collection development and acquisition processes moving forward?

Steve: Based on everything I've read and presentations given from librarians and vendors on their experiences with patron-driven acquisitions, I'd agree with you — this is a model that will continue to be used increasingly by libraries and their consortia. At **UF** we ran a six-month pilot project using the **MyiLibrary** platform, but it wasn't launched until after our librarians had a long debate on the pros and cons of allowing patrons to determine acquisitions purchases. What swayed the vote to begin a pilot was curiosity — many librarians were anxious to see the type of eBooks patrons would use. Of course the patrons didn't know their use was triggering purchases. The high usage of the eBooks was amazing, and my administration viewed the pilot as a success, if for no other reason than knowing eBooks purchased through this patron-driven initiative were used. It makes Admin most upset to see studies showing how many books in library stacks are never used. They see it as a waste of money, and questions begin to creep up about our selection processes and ability to ascertain patron demand… It can get very uncomfortable at collection meetings.

Robin: Yes, I've heard similar feedback from other institutions. I think those uncomfortable meetings and conversations are important, however. You mention that **UF's** experience has brought up questions about the Library's

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selection process and ability to predict use. In my view, the question is what is the impact of this work on meeting your patrons' information needs? It's kind of a scary question for vendors, as well. Most of the dominant business models are predicated on a "just in case" acquisitions approach.

Steve: You'll have to explain what you mean by "just in case acquisitions" — I'm not sure I like the sound of it.

Robin: Sorry **Steve**, I'm not sure who coined it, but it's often used to describe a model of purchasing content upfront in anticipation of need rather than buying content upon use or access. I agree that it is a sticky term in that it assumes a circulation-based assessment of what should or should not be purchased.

Steve: Hey, Library School was a long time ago! Well, as academic libraries increasingly have to explain or even defend resource expenditures to university and state officials, the "just in case" approach is fast becoming more of a 'just justify' your acquisitions.

Robin: Well, that's a good thread to carry this conversation into our next column. What results are university administrators expecting from their libraries, how are they being evaluated, and how should vendors help their customers respond to these expectations?

Steve: OK, talk to you then. 🐂

Little Red Herrings — Living on the Fringe

by **Mark Y. Herring** (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herringm@winthrop.edu>

Just when you thought the news could not get any worse for libraries, a new twist emerges on an old theme. When I saw the headline, I couldn't help *clicking*: "Books Are Becoming the Fringe Media." In a post dated 20 February of this year, **Kevin Kelleher** (*http://tinyurl.com/ylqya7h*) opines that books are, or are becoming, the new fringe media. People just aren't reading them anymore, and certainly no one wants to digest 300 pages of text. No siree, this is a slam-bam generation. We want it now, we want it fast, and we want everything you need to know in 140-characters or less. This came as somewhat depressing news to me, an over 50-something. Not only am I on the downside of everything, it turns out that my interests, too, are fringe-worthy. Forty years ago if you intimated I *wasn't* fringe, or living on the fringe, or outside the mainstream, I would have asked you to step outside, assuming I wasn't at a peace rally. Now it appears that yesterday's radical animosities are today's conservative tendencies. What a brave new world in which we live!

Now, I don't doubt the assertions of the blogposter, or Webcaster, or podundit, or whatever we call them these days. I can see the writing on the wall, and what's more, I can read it. Books are going the way of all flesh, not so much because we hate them, or because we have little use for them, or because they have become démodé. We're dispensing with them because this is a brave new world, and we have gadgets for that sort of thing now. Print is soooo-oh-soooo yesterday. Furthermore, it's not even — OMGYG2BK — green.

We've known for the last, say, twenty-five years that reading is in decline. Studies done by just about everyone (but especially the **National Endowment for the Humanities**) show that *all* sorts of reading are on their way down: newspapers, books (fiction or nonfiction), plays, and short stories. In fact, you name the reading material, and you can be fairly certain it's no longer being read at all, or not like it used to be. Reports of the millions and millions of **Kindle** buyers (soon to be eclipsed, perhaps by **iPads** if the name or battery issue doesn't sink sales before they begin) hint, perhaps, that the picture is not so bleak. Ah, but we know that the mean age of those **Kindle** readers is, well, the fifty-something crowd who carry the water for all readers these days. The twenty-something crowd is reading virtually (pun intended) not at all, or slightly more than five minutes *a day*.

A number of reasons obtain for the current phenomenon. We have e-readers galore (more than four dozen by my count), the Web in abundance, notebooks in surfeit, blogs in the tens of millions, and the Web in, well, let's just say the Web is the poster child for the definition of ubiquity. Furthermore, nearly everyone is now being educated at the **University of Google**. This means that classes must not last longer than 1.234 millionth of a second. Add to all this **Twitter**, in which Millennials and others wax philosophical about their latest break-up, grey hair (singular), or the fact that wow-who-saw-that-coming you have to work for a living and very few jobs begin at six figures for a BA and no experience.

Honestly, none of these are really bad things in themselves, if I may wax philosophical for a moment. I have done all these things: read a half-dozen books on a **Kindle**, have a half-dozen social networking sites I visit regularly, blog from time to time on our library's site, surf the Web, read a couple of dozen blogs, and so on. I don't think these things really are, in and of themselves, bad. And by themselves I do not think they hold all the blame or even the lion's share of it. Sure, all contribute, but none by itself is to blame exclusively.

They all come together, however, as I have said before in these pages, at the same moment and so have created a kind of perfect storm. All of these things are but tempests in teapots, taken together or taken separately. So what else is there? One thing more remains, and it is, if anything is, the williwaw, the tempest,