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Technology Left Behind — Letting the Patron Drive

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Shrinking budgets and limited financial resources have made it increasingly important for libraries to spend their money wisely, on resources for which patrons demonstrate a need and are certain to be used. “[W]e must seek new ways to make our dollar go further and challenge the traditional role of the academic library as a ‘just in case’ collection vs. a ‘just in time’ service provider.” (Macicak and Schell) As a part of the effort to accommodate expressed patron needs and use financial resources shrewdly, the implementation of patron-driven acquisition programs is a growing trend in academic libraries.

While the phrase “patron-driven acquisition” is frequently associated with the purchase of eBooks, for the purposes of this column patron-driven acquisition (PDA) is defined as any patron-initiated collection development model, of which eBook acquisition is only one type. Other PDA models include purchase-on-demand of items requested via interlibrary loan and PDA of both print and electronic books through a firm order vendor.

This column will highlight some of the ways in which libraries could implement patron-driven acquisition as part of their overall collection development plan. It is important to keep in mind that patron-driven acquisition is not meant to replace traditional collection development, but instead to act as a supplement to the library’s selection of resources.

eBook PDA

Several eBook aggregators offer PDA programs, including **netLibrary**, **MyiLibrary**, and **EBL**. According to the company Website, **ebrary** is in the process of developing its own patron-driven acquisition program, slated to launch this coming summer. (<http://www.ebrary.com/corp/librariesPatron.jsp>)

While the specific parameters of eBook PDA programs vary from vendor to vendor, the general principle is the same across platforms. Similar to print approval plans, the library builds a profile outlining the types of materials to be made available for purchase. The criteria for inclusion can include factors such as LC classification, publication date, publisher, and price. The eBook vendor provides the library with MARC records for those titles that match the library’s profile. The library is not actually charged for any of the eBooks until a patron finds the title in the library’s catalog and clicks through to view and use the eBook.

In an effort to expand its collection development efforts beyond a traditional print model, the **University of Texas Libraries** implemented a patron-driven acquisition program through **EBL** in the 2007. While there were some initial issues with librarian buy-in to the program, patrons responded positively and had little difficulty transitioning to the online format, according to **Macicak** and **Schell**. One of the benefits cited as a result of the

implementation of the patron-driven acquisition program was “discovering ways in which we can improve our purchasing power through statistical analysis of cost, use, publisher, and subject.” (Macicak and Schell, S37)

Two significant benefits of implementing patron-driven acquisition for eBooks are the automation of the acquisition process and the seamless access that is provided to the patron. Libraries are able to monitor their spending through deposit accounts, and the library staff does not have to be involved in ordering each individual item, potentially freeing up valuable staff time. Because resources are not purchased until the point of access, libraries are assured of at least one use by a patron. From their perspective, patrons are unaware that the resources they are accessing are not yet owned by the library. They are able to access the eBook in the instant that it is purchased.

Interlibrary Loan PDA

Fulfilling interlibrary loan requests by purchasing materials, rather than borrowing them, is another way for libraries to put patron-driven acquisition into practice. As patrons request items through ILL, a decision is made as to whether the request should be fulfilled via ILL or the item purchased outright. Like the purchase of eBooks at the point of access, purchasing materials requested through interlibrary loan ensures that materials are acquired based upon a demonstrated patron need.

Each library approaches the purchase of interlibrary loan materials from a different perspective, and there is no single approach to implementing such a program. Libraries often develop clear acquisition policies from the outset, outlining the types of materials that will be purchased, under what circumstances an item will be purchased (rather than ordered via ILL), and how the item will be handled once it arrives at the library.

The **University of Minnesota Law Library** implemented a purchase-on-demand program through its interlibrary loan unit in 2005. The staff of the ILL unit is authorized to purchase low-cost items, rather than requesting the item from another library. The price of the item, including shipping, must be under \$20. Requests for items costing more than \$20 are referred to the Collection Development Department for consideration for purchase. (Zopfi-Jordan) In contrast, the **Harold B. Lee Library (HBLL)** of **Brigham Young University** purchases an item only if it cannot be obtained via the established interlibrary loan procedures. The purchase price point at **HBLL** is less than \$25.00. (Alder)

One of the primary benefits to purchasing items that are requested through ILL is that the process can be a faster and sometimes cheaper alternative than traditional interlibrary loan procedures. The staff at the **University of Minnesota Law Library** “found that purchasing rather than borrowing to fill an interlibrary loan request for inexpensive items works well and saves time.” (Zopfi-Jordan, 388)

PDA through Firm Order Vendors

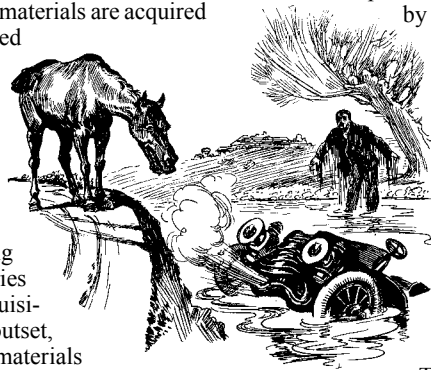
Firm order vendors also offer patron-driven acquisition services. These services are not limited by format, with PDA programs spanning both print and electronic books. In a process similar to establishing an approval plan, the library creates a profile outlining the types of books it would like to receive as part of the PDA program. The criteria can include LC Classification, price, publisher, imprint year, and the academic level of the content. (Many of these are the same criteria that eBook aggregators consider in the development of a PDA profile.) One added criterion is format; in setting up PDA with a firm order vendor, the library can set a preferred format for the content, print or electronic.

When first setting up a PDA program, the library establishes whether or not it would like to mediate access to the content. Requests for print books are usually mediated by a library staff member, while unmediated access is more common for eBooks. In an unmediated access program, the patron would be redirected to the electronic book seamlessly. In a mediated-access program, the requests would be sent to a library staff member for approval before the order is placed.

The staff member would place an order for the title after considering availability of funds and whether or not the title is suitable for the collection. Print books typically take a minimum of 2-3 days to arrive at the library. Libraries can monitor spending in two different ways, by depositing funds and drawing upon those funds as books are purchased and through monthly expenditure reports generated by the firm order vendor.

Michael Walmsley, Director of Sales for the U.S. at **YBP**, kindly provided me with some details regarding **YBP’s** patron-driven acquisition services, dubbed **Patron Choice**. **YBP** can implement PDA programs for both print and electronic books, bringing the management of both formats under a single vendor. **YBP** currently works with three different eBook aggregators, which could eliminate the need for

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a library to manage multiple PDA programs with multiple eBook vendors. As an approval and firm order vendor, YBP is in a unique position to know exactly what a library has already acquired in print and can de-duplicate the list of titles in the PDA program to eliminate the possibility of purchasing a title more than once.

Benefits of PDA

Libraries can benefit from incorporating a variety of patron-driven acquisition tactics into their daily operations, expanding the ways in which patron needs are assessed and fulfilled. The UT Libraries have, in addition to implementing the PDA program through EBL as described above, purchased print materials on demand through its Interlibrary Services. And, as a next step, the UT Libraries are investigating the possibility of incorporating patron-driven acquisition into their print approval plan through BNA. (Macicak and Schell, S36)

Patron-driven acquisition, in all of its incarnations, offers a number of potential benefits to libraries. In her column in the January 2009 issue of *Booklist*, Sue Polanka states that “[a]mong the benefits of PDA are guaranteed usage of new titles and proven usage of purchased titles, automatic acquisition, and seamless access for patrons.” Polanka goes on to say, “In addition, PDA can save time and eliminate guesswork for selectors, and it can be a cost effective alternative to ILL.”

While Polanka’s column specifically addresses patron-driven acquisition of eBooks, many of her comments regarding the benefits of PDA apply to all methods of patron-driven acquisition. Whether a library is purchasing materials that have been requested through interlibrary loan or using patron-driven acquisition to select print books, the same benefits apply. Libraries acquire materials based upon demonstrated patron needs, and they can be assured that the materials that are purchased will be used at least once.

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I Hear the Train A Comin’ — Cornell Hosting arXiv

Column Editor: **Greg Tananbaum** (Founder and CEO, Anianet) <greg@anianet.com> www.anianet.com

Column Editor’s Note: Teresa (Terry) Ehling is the Director of the Center for Innovative Publishing at Cornell University Library. I recently had the pleasure of speaking with her about arXiv, home to more than a half-million open-access e-prints in physics, mathematics, computer science, quantitative biology, quantitative finance, and statistics. Cornell, which has hosted arXiv since 2001, recently announced a significant change to its funding model. Terry was kind enough to explain the changes, as well as provide some insights into arXiv’s long-range planning. — GT

Why did arXiv need a new business model?

arXiv has been with us for nearly 20 years. It came to Cornell with Paul Ginsparg in 2001 and was supported initially by a mix of NSF funding and direct financial support from the Cornell University Library. In 2007 the Cornell University Library assumed full operational responsibility for arXiv, and the library has been arXiv’s primary source of financial support since that time. The recession and its impact on the library budget made it imperative that we identify and pursue alternative funding sources for arXiv. We developed a short-term business plan that relies on annual contributions from the top 200 users of arXiv, based on download data from the previous year. We believe that arXiv should be promoted as a shared investment in an academic resource that is vitally important for the researchers in the physics, mathematics, and computer science domains.

arXiv’s costs translate into a cost per download of 1.3 cents, or a cost per submission of around \$7. How does this compare with other scholarly publishing structures?

I would use the word “contrast” rather than “compare.” arXiv is a unique scholarly communications initiative. Unlike conventional publishing projects, arXiv’s MO is not to add value, in the traditional sense, to the content it delivers. For example, submissions to arXiv are not peer-reviewed. According to Paul Ginsparg, it was designed from the outset to operate several orders of magnitude less expensively than the journal system. From publicly available data we can also say with confidence that arXiv is less costly to operate, on a per-article basis, than most (if not all) institutional repositories. arXiv was and remains a rapid distribution system for e-print material in the

sciences and related fields. It was designed and optimized for the community it serves by members of that community.

Can you succinctly explain how the new model works?

Cornell University Library has launched a three-year effort to solicit voluntary, annual support from libraries at academic institutions, government research labs, international research centers, and other organizations that are the heaviest users of arXiv, based on the prior year’s download statistics. We have devised a tiered pricing model for the top 200 users; the suggested contribution for the top 100 institutions is \$4,000, \$3,200 for institutions ranked 101-200, and \$2,300 for those ranked below 100.

Why did you select a use-based model? What were some of the other possibilities you considered?

After extensive feedback from arXiv stakeholders at libraries around the world, we decided to base our pricing structure on use, specifically downloads. Given that we are committed to sustaining arXiv as a fully open-access academic resource, we felt this would be the most equitable model we could implement. We may consider a more nuanced user-based model in the future; for example, delimiting institutional use based on both submission and download data. We might also incorporate support from scholarly societies, an endowment, or funding agencies such as the NSF.

What has the response been from the institutions with heaviest use?

The response to date (early March) has been overwhelmingly positive. We’ve received funding commitments from 45 institutions, domestic and international, since we launched our campaign in mid-January.

How concerned are you about the free rider problem, with some institutions shouldering less than a fair share of the costs?

We have and always will have free riders. We don’t expect every one of the nearly 4,000 institutions we can identify by domain to contribute to arXiv’s support. arXiv’s top 200 users represent approximately 75% of arXiv’s download activity during the calendar year, so it made sense to target this group during the 2010 launch year.

The new model is meant to be a three-year, interim plan. Why not make it permanent?

We need time to explore our income options. Our goal is to realize a diversified revenue portfolio for arXiv. Ultimately we hope our funding docket will include a blend of ongoing underwriting from the Cornell University Library and financial support from the academic library

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