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People Profile: Steven R. Harris

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library would have to license an additional copy. Each copy would only be good for 26 uses. Obviously, print books do not last forever, but it is rather tortured logic to say that eBooks should have such fragility programmed into them. The library community exploded in an outrage that went something like, "That is OUR copy. Who are they to say how many uses we should have per copy? eBooks aren't print books! We are NOT going to pay more for an eBook just because it is heavily used."³ I think the logic of this is also rather backward. We should be less concerned about paying more for heavily-used materials and more concerned about paying as much as we do for those that are completely unused, especially in the digital collection.

In the print world, we were always committed to paying for containers regardless of whether they were used, but we can now readily identify exactly how much use each item is generating. Embracing a real cost-per-use model would be beneficial in this situation. In the digital environment, it makes sense to pay a fair rental fee for every single use, but no fee at all for unused materials. But it also makes sense to give up ownership altogether.

Many eBook patron-driven-acquisition (PDA) models adopt some of this pay-per-use philosophy, but not all of it. Most PDA plans, for example, allow a certain level of use or some kind of short-term loan before a purchase is triggered. I wonder why a purchase is ever necessary. Purchasing only makes sense if we think we are getting a great deal in terms of cost-per-use, which will likely be true only if use stays heavy throughout the life of the item. That would probably apply to only a small number of titles in our collections. But what additional value does ownership provide within the eBook platform? Why not continue to rent the materials until the demand is depleted? An owned-but-no-longer-used eBook has no greater value than an owned-but-no-longer-used print book.

There are other reasons why some of you will argue that we need to continue owning our collections, even in a digital realm. When collections were built of physical containers, one of the functions of the library was to privilege particular items from the world of information, in essence to make some materials more discoverable to the local user population by virtue of close proximity (and the metadata we developed in the local catalog). In our networked environment, and with the myriad of discovery tools available to our users (**WorldCat**, **Google Books**, **Hathi**, etc.), that sort of privileging for discovery's sake is completely unnecessary. In fact, to suggest that local users are best served by a subset of the available information which we have pre-selected for them is manifestly patronizing. Obviously, some user populations (college undergraduates, for example) are only interested in "good enough" information. In a library made of physical objects, they may be best served by a pre-selected and already-in-place collection of books. In the electronic

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Steven R. Harris

BORN AND LIVED: Born and grew up in Ogden UT. Lived in Salt Lake City, Tucson, College Station, Baton Rouge, Knoxville, Logan UT, and Albuquerque.

EARLY LIFE: Read a lot of books, despite my parents saying, "go outside and get some fresh air!"

FAMILY: Wife and 2 dogs.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: In school, I've been a Scot, a Wildcat twice, and a Ute. At work I've been a Ute, an Aggie twice, a Tiger, a Volunteer, and a Lobo.

IN MY SPARE TIME: I fiddle with gadgets.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *Infinite Jest*, *Moby-Dick*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, and about 75 others.

PET PEEVES: Pet peeves.

PHILOSOPHY: We only know reality via perception — perception is flawed.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Co-writing a couple of books.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Help library staff and users come to love the online world.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Librarians will give up the notion of owning library collections and settle down to effectively mediate access and facilitate preservation of digital information. Publishers will happily cooperate in these endeavors. 🐾



environment, there is no reason not to give them access to a wider range of materials including things we own and things we don't own. As **Rick Lugg** describes it, we can curate a discovery environment and deliver to users a platform where they can find for themselves what they need.⁴ But selecting and purchasing materials beforehand is unnecessary.

Librarians will also say that ownership is necessary to fulfill our preservation mandate (**Clark's** library as museum). How will we preserve our intellectual history, our scholarly record, if we don't own the objects we want to save? How can we trust publishers and vendors to perform this task when they clearly haven't demonstrated a will or desire to do so?

It has long been clear that libraries can only hope to perform as archivists of the intellectual record by working together. No single library can save all of human knowledge. It makes more sense for individual libraries to stake out a (very small) segment of the publishing output that they will pledge to save and preserve. The rest is superfluous. Why not rent those segments that are transitory — own and save only those elements that are part of the institutional commitment? This is even more plausible in the digital collection. Digital objects manifest

as many if not more preservation problems as physical objects. Ownership does nothing to resolve these. Instead of focusing on ownership of individual collections, libraries should work collectively with **Hathi**, **Google**, **Portico**, **LOCKSS**, the **Internet Archive**, and other organizations to identify and save both born-digital materials and scanned representations of physical items.

Libraries will have a hard time adopting a rent-preferred collection philosophy. Many of our most dearly held principles will militate against it. Community members, library boards, faculty, students, and university administrators will also not understand its benefits without a great deal of explanation (nay, pleading). Chaining ourselves and our users to a small, owned collection doesn't make as much sense as it once did. If we want digital collections to really live up to their potential and to break free from the tyranny of principles and procedures developed in a time gone by, then we really need to rethink the necessity of ownership. We also need to divorce ownership from access and preservation and begin to think of libraries as workshops where the work being done is different from one moment to the next.

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