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## Library Perspective, Vendor Response

Robin Champeieux

*Ebook Library*, [Robin.Champeieux@eplib.com](mailto:Robin.Champeieux@eplib.com)

Steven Carrico

*University of Florida Smathers Libraries*, [stecarr@uflib.ufl.edu](mailto:stecarr@uflib.ufl.edu)

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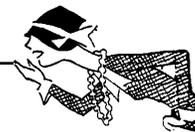
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# Library Perspective, Vendor Response

Column Editors: **Robin Champieux** (Vice President, Business Development, Ebook Library) <Robin.Champieux@eplib.com>



and **Steven Carrico** (Acquisitions Librarian, University of Florida Smathers Libraries, Box 117007, Gainesville, FL 32611-7007) <stecarr@uflib.ufl.edu>

**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*

**Steve:** I thought we might chat about the *Library Survey 2010: Insights From U.S. Academic Library Directors*<sup>1</sup> that was officially released this Spring. It contains several interesting survey topics and responses from 267 college and university library administrators that are worth discussion. We don't have the space here to go into depth on the survey responses in the sections "Strategy & Leadership" and "Core Library Services," so I suggest we focus our attention on the section "Library Collections Development and Management." One set of survey responses that caught my eye are how 54% of library administrators believe that in five years e-journal usage will be so prevalent that academic libraries will no longer need to maintain print copies of journals received online; while at the same time, only 7% of library administrators believe that in five years eBook use will be so prevalent that academic libraries will no longer need to maintain print monograph copies. It seems clear that these survey results are underlining what we knew or thought we knew: college and university libraries are moving away from collecting print journals (if the content is available online) but are still reluctant to phase out print books even when eBook versions are available. What's your take on this mindset?

**Robin:** The response isn't surprising — I think we're all aware that the transition to electronic journals is ahead of monographs and the evolutions are different — but taken in isolation it is misleading. Or rather, when you read the survey results as a whole a more nuanced and affirmative picture emerges. Library directors are predicting that they will devote more money to electronic monographs. Within five years, most predict that spending on e-monographs will surpass that of print monographs. The

survey results also emphasize the important relationship between the respondents acceptance of print monograph deaccessioning and preservation conditions. With preservation and access to historical collections needs met, the majority of directors reported that print deaccession would be important. What I think the report demonstrates is less about the increasing acceptance of eBooks and more about the still developing and uncertain practices and policies they necessitate.

**Steve:** True enough. In fact, a summary statement from the report made on print journals is telling: "the lack of standards and policies means that collections management decisions at many libraries are made on a case-by-case basis, rather than as part of a strategic process of evaluating collections and access."<sup>2</sup> This is certainly the case in my library. If a print journal is available online, or if a publisher of a print + online journal is now allowing online only for the same price, our selectors almost always cancel the print subscription. Unfortunately, many print cancellations are frequently done by selectors and Acquisitions staff scrambling to meet budget cutting deadlines. Not much evaluation goes into the process, so it is not exactly strategic. The concept about academic libraries not having a strategic process for deaccessioning the print versions of journals acquired online can apply equally to many libraries not having a clear collection strategy for eBooks, as you stated earlier.

**Robin:** Yes, but I think it is important to discuss some of the reasons why such a strategy for eBooks is so elusive. As the report's authors aptly raise, there is no widely accepted access model, nor are there mature preservation solutions. Is it your sense that these issues are proving more difficult to address with eBooks than with journals?

**Steve:** I think so. With journals the strategies of collection, archiving, and access is easier to conceive in an online environment — basically the online versions are replacing the print versions. A lot of libraries are not even bothering to keep a print archive if online access is available; others are taking steps to archive print versions with their state or regional consortia. With eBooks it's not so simple. In most cases the eBooks are not replacing the print versions; print and eBooks are being acquired in tandem. With so many academic libraries facing restrictive budgets, has collection management even been more challenging?

**Robin:** I think some of the challenges are tied to the infrastructure of producing, distributing and acquiring monographs and eBooks. This system, if you will, is very different from those supporting journals. Consequently, it is difficult to apply the lessons and practices the library community has developed for e-journals to eBooks. It strikes me that for monographs

and particularly electronic monographs, there is more distance between the players: the creators, publishers, distributors, buyers, and users of the content. This is just an anecdotal observation, of course, but consider preservation through the lens of a much used acquisitions workflow. From its primary book vendor, a library buys the majority of its electronic monographs; the vendor has contracts with multiple aggregators and the library executes separate agreements with its desired eBook providers. The library-aggregator agreement addresses an approach to archival access and preservation that is, in most cases, platform specific, unrelated to individual publisher practices, separate from any relationships and agreements the library may have with individual publishers, and often incompatible with the long-term archival services the library is employing. It strikes me that successful perseverance practices will need to address the business of acquiring eBooks to avoid vendor specific and publisher exclusive solutions.

**Steve:** Agreed, but one lesson the libraries may have learned from dealing with e-journals is with the purchasing methods now used for eBooks. From my observations at ALA and talking with other academic librarians, it sure sounds like most libraries are buying eBooks individually, whether firm ordered or acquired through approval plans or PDAs, and not so much as part of a pre-packaged deals that were so popular a decade ago. The Big Deal model that forces libraries to pay for an entire package of content — whether each individual journal in the package is wanted or not — does not seem to be acceptable for many libraries acquiring eBooks. You deal with a lot of academic libraries, **Robin**, would you say this is the case and be a distinction between e-journal and eBook acquisitions?

**Robin:** My perspective is skewed because I work for a company that does not sell packages of content. But, yes, there does seem to be an emphasis on title by title purchasing; however, academic libraries have always bought monographs this way. It's not surprising the same approach and expectations would hold for eBooks. Similarly, libraries are applying trusted monographic acquisitions and collection development strategies like approval plans to eBook. A question for another column might be should they?

**Steve:** That's a great question and we can delve into that another time. Talk to you soon. 🍷

## Vendor Library Relations from page 78

If the **Queen** can go to Ireland, and if the riverscape of the Thames is simply a palette, none of us anywhere should be surprised if, in our libraries, like London itself, everything seems utterly changed. 🍷

### Endnotes

1. **Long, Matthew P.** and **Roger C. Schonfeld.** *Ithaca S+R Library Survey 2010: Insights from U.S. Academic Library Directors*, Ithaca, 2010. 43 pages.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 31.