Against the Grain

February 2012

Publisher Profile: Sustainable Collection Services

circulated since 1990. Third, most low-use titles are securely archived and readily accessible elsewhere. All that's needed is the tool that pulls this information together.

Most libraries can also benefit from help with data management. It can be difficult and time-consuming to normalize bibliographic data for comparisons with external sources. Circulation data poses its own challenges, because it is inherently non-standard. Even libraries that have the necessary expertise don't always have enough time to pursue collection analysis. A vendor such as **SCS** can provide some of that capacity.

ATG: Many librarians have spent their careers building print collections. How do you convince them that the need to deselect is paramount?

RL/RF: Librarians are always deselecting, whether they realize it or not. No library buys everything that is published. Selection and deselection are the same activity. The choices that built those print collections involved "discard" of thousands of other titles that might have been added. At point of selection, librarians are attempting to judge which books will be used by their community — but without any data. At point of deselection, there is actually better data — a track record of circulation and sometimes in-house use. Deselection decisions are actually clearer than selection decisions. That doesn't mean they are easier, though. It's much harder to remove a book from the shelf than it is to ignore a publication announcement. But it's really the same intellectual activity, with the same effect on users. As **Lizanne Payne** likes to say, we shouldn't advantage older titles over newer titles just because they're already on the shelf.

ATG: Is there an overall strategy that you try and get your clients to adopt as they tackle the deselection of their collections? What about issues of marketing the new changes to faculty? Do you recommend faculty involvement?

RL/RF: Our emphasis is on data and library-defined rules. Very few libraries have the staff capacity to support title-by-title deselection. We're trying to provide a flexible and intelligent batch approach to a very time-intensive process. We assemble data on age, local usage, subject, location holdings in other libraries, presence in **Hathi**, and other factors. We enable the library to define its withdrawal and retention parameters, and first produce a collection summary. This helps gauge the effect of the library's chosen rules. Those rules can be adjusted and the process repeated until the library is comfortable with the results. This iterative approach is similar in some respects to writing and revising an approval profile, except that we can generate results immediately. This interactivity is a powerful tool, but it also gradually acclimates librarians to controlling deselection through rules, rather than title-by-title evaluation.

The degree of faculty involvement depends on the institution. We do think it's useful

Sustainable Collection Services LLC

Sustainable Collection Services SCS

63 Woodwell's Garrison
Contoocook, NH 03229
Phone: (603) 746-5991
Fax: (603) 746-6052
Website: *www.sustainablecollections.com*

AFFILIATED COMPANIES: R2 Consulting LLC
FOUNDERS/PARTNERS: Rick Lugg, **Ruth Fischer**, **Andy Breeding**, **Eric Redman**.
KEY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES: SCS offers decision-support systems and data services for rules-based deselection of print monographs. The firm also provides consulting related to the managed drawdown of print monograph collections, shared print archiving projects, offsite storage, and deselection workflows.
CORE MARKETS/CLIENTELE: Academic libraries.
NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 4

to make the case for deselection directly to faculty. They need to understand the choices and hear the rationale. A couple of libraries have even asked **SCS** to do that on their behalf. It's especially important if deselection is likely to be controversial, which it often is. We've thought a lot about this issue, and have concluded that direct and frequent engagement with all stakeholders is critical, as is an ongoing communication program. For those interested in the public relations aspects of deselection, **Rick's** blog contains a number of entries. (*http://sampleandhold-r2.blogspot.com/*).

ATG: What roles will initiatives like the HathiTrust and other shared collections strategies like remote print storage play? Are such strategies financial viable for smaller libraries that have substantial investments in print collections?

RL/RF: There are really two issues here. First, we want assurance that all content is secure. **HathiTrust** and shared print archives can satisfy that need, allowing individual libraries to withdraw material without risk of it disappearing from the collective collection. The second issue is accessibility — can my library re-obtain withdrawn content in the unlikely event that it is subsequently wanted? There may be several avenues for this. Membership in **Hathi** or a regional shared print program is one way to provide that access. In some respects it may be the healthiest option for the community, as these organizations need financial support to make shared archiving viable. But ILL remains an option as well. Many titles will also be available from commercial eBook providers — perhaps even for short-term circulation. Used print copies may be readily available. Print-on-demand will become an increasingly viable option. Any of these avenues will require expenditure on an item that was previously held, but the chances of this happening are slim. Most withdrawn books have not circulated in more than a decade. And the cost of re-obtaining a few titles pales in

comparison with the direct costs and opportunity costs of keeping all of them on the shelves.

ATG: You mentioned in a recent blog post that "As a community, it behooves us to face — even embrace — this situation (the case for deselection, shared print, etc.) How should the library community do that? What are the costs? What are the benefits?

RL/RF: Managing down print collections is really just another kind of stewardship. We need to move excess copies out of the system, so we can support more users in new ways without having to expand our buildings. Users want other things more than they want large onsite print collections. Libraries need to tackle this situation before the Provosts and Chief Financial Officers come calling. The cost of deselection is significant: data analysis, decision-making, communication, record maintenance, and materials movement. Collaboration imposes another layer of costs, but action in a collective context is really the only way to make responsible progress. And the benefits of shared print are compelling, not just to the scholarly record, but to participating libraries. Just look at **Constance Malpas'** projections in the **OCLC** report on *Cloud-sourcing Research Collections*. She estimates that the median **ARL** library would realize 45,000 square feet in space savings and $500,000-$2 million in annual cost avoidance. That's worth some effort. And think of what else might be done with that space — all without risk to the integrity of the collection.

ATG: During ALA Midwinter, OCLC issued a press release announcing a 'strategic partnership' with SCS. What does that partnership entail?

RL/RF: For some time, **OCLC** has been talking about opening up **WorldCat** data for libraries and other partners. Their recently-announced WorldShare platform gives third-party partners improved access to its Web services