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What's the Use? Perspectives on Usage Statistics Across the Information Industry

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Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

What's the Use? Perspectives on Usage Statistics Across the Information Industry

by **Rossi Morris** (Media Relations Coordinator, EBSCO) <rmorris@ebSCO.com>

Librarians are dedicated to making sound collection development decisions that are in the best interest of the communities they serve. But with the explosive growth of electronic resources and widespread budget and staff cuts, collection development has evolved into a laborious and complex process for librarians tasked with providing the most valuable resources to their users.

In response to these increased demands, innovative tools have been created and new standards have been established to help librarians better measure the value of the resources within their collection — and gathering and analyzing usage data are the staple measures for making well-informed collection development decisions.

The role of usage in collection development is not news. What is noteworthy and worth discussing, however, is the story behind each collection development decision — the challenges, the successes.

Usage remains part of the ongoing dialogue on discussion lists and blogs, and there is no shortage of conference tracts and sessions focused on how to manage, collect, and base decisions on it. When I approached *Against the Grain* Editor **Katina Strauch** earlier in 2012, my goal was to share with *ATG* readers how **EBSCO** continues to work alongside librarians to help them get a better handle on usage gathering, loading, and reporting so they can devote more time to building a collection that will meet the objectives of their institutions and meet the research needs of their end users.

Katina had a bigger idea, however. Her suggestion: for the September 2012 issue of *ATG*, pull together a collection of articles with usage as the prevailing topic. It could feature articles from individuals in the various information industry sectors — libraries, vendors, and publishers — all of whom would provide unique perspectives about usage and the role it plays in their day-to-day functions. It also could

include results and commentary from a survey of *ATG* readers on a variety of topics concerning usage.

This issue aims to do just that. It goes behind the scenes to show what librarians are doing to make well-founded collection development decisions, particularly in terms of usage analysis. It explains some of the motivating factors for beginning a usage-analysis strategy and the groundwork necessary for implementation. It also notes what librarians are measuring and why, in addition to collection goals; the challenges encountered; and the tools, methods, or systems employed to track usage and gather data. Ultimately, this issue aims to reveal what librarians do with this data after it is collected — and the benefit it provides to the library and its users.

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If Rumors Were Horses

Fall is getting off to a great start! Lots of Rumors to report!

Did y'all hear about **Roger Schonfeld** getting stuck in an elevator in Manhattan? This happened August 28, 2012. Talk about dramatic! The **New York Fire Department** had to break through the side of the elevator to get him out, and it took 45 minutes. And like superman **Roger** had to jump to get out! Gosh! Here is a link to **Roger's Facebook** page. Scroll down to August 28th (can't send a direct link to that date) and there are several posts and pictures. Thanks to **Leah Hinds** for keeping us informed. And glad you are... out of the elevator, **Roger!**

<http://www.facebook.com/roger.schonfeld>

I was shocked to hear that the awesome **Francine Fialkoff**, editor-in-chief of *Library Journal* is leaving *LJ* effective September 1 (Yikes, that was yesterday!). **Francine** has been at *LJ* for 35 years including 15 as editor-in-chief. Under her watch, many significant changes have taken place at *LJ*. She started **Movers & Shakers, Library by Design, Best Small Library in America, the LJ Teaching Award, Librarian of the Year** and **Library of the Year**, to name just a few innovations.

Effective immediately, *LJ's* executive editor **Michael Kelley** <mkelley@mediasourceinc.com> will take over as interim editor-in-chief. **Francine** plans to stay in the library world and can be reached at <ffialkoff@gmail.com>. Her final editorial will appear in the

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the world, including the **British Library**, to create widespread commercial access to rare and interesting materials in innovative ways. Last year, **BiblioLabs** created *The British Library's 19th Century Historical Collection App*, which made more than 65,000 **British Library** books easily accessible on the iPad and won the **2012 Publishing Innovation Award**. (A small secret! If you read *Fifty Shades of Grey*, second volume, just glance at it, mind you, the heroine mentions the **British Library app**. Shhhh...) (And another small secret! I did not read *Shades of Grey* but my husband did and he discovered this small piece of juicy news for all to see.)

I just told a small white lie. My husband **Bruce** actually picked up this small tidbit about **FSG** from the incredibly creative **Mitchell Davis** of **Bibliolabs**! **Mitchell** is running a Plenary Panel during the **Charleston Conference**. Last week at the Launch party (mentioned above), **BiblioLabs** unveiled **BiblioBoard**, a free iPad App that is changing the way the world can access historical books and digital artifacts. Download **BiblioBoard** for free in the App Store. <http://www.biblioboard.com/>

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I signed on as guest editor for this special issue. To give the issue a balanced perspective, however, I needed the touch of an accomplished librarian with a shrewd eye. So I was thrilled when **Elizabeth "Liz" Lorbeer**, a content management librarian at Lister Hill Library of the Health Sciences at the **University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)** agreed to be the co-guest editor! With her finger on the pulse of the industry and her experience with usage analysis of e-resources, **Liz** brought great ideas and insight to the issue. She even contributed her own article, wherein she details the journal impact factor's role in academic collection analysis.

Numerous other librarians also have contributed their time and talent to this special issue: **Hilary Davis** and **Annette Day**, **North Carolina State University Libraries**, highlight their collaborative collection and analysis efforts; **Elizabeth Hoppe** and **Courtney Seymour**, **Union College Schaffer Library**, detail a pilot of purchase-on-demand via interlibrary loan (ILL); and **Lorraine "Lorri" Huddy**, **The CTW Library Consortium**, assesses the libraries' eBook pilot.

Publishers, vendors, and other industry experts also weigh in: **Jennifer Lin**, **Public Library of Science (PLOS)**, discusses Article Level Metrics; **Martha Kyrillidou**, **Association of Research Libraries (ARL)**, sits down for an interview about her valuable contributions to the industry through innovative assessment products and services for libraries; and **Oliver Pesch**, **EBSCO**, explains the vision behind the development of **EBSCONET Usage Consolidation**.

Also, as part of our goal to report on trends and issues related to usage analysis, we will share perspectives from several **ATG** readers in an article that outlines the results of a recent survey on usage. **EBSCO** consulted **Todd Carpenter**, **National Information Standards Organization (NISO)**, and **Peter Shepherd**, **Counting Online Usage of Networked Electronic Resources (COUNTER)**, to assist **ATG** with creating and conducting a survey to poll librarians on usage statistics and metrics in their day-to-day workflow and within their institutions.

With such a wide variety of experts and authors willing to contribute to this special issue, it quickly became clear that many in the industry have invaluable knowledge and insight on usage that should be shared. Because there is not enough room in a single issue for each account, **Katina** suggested an ongoing column on usage to ensure that all voices are heard.

In each upcoming issue of *Against the Grain*, we will continue to share informative articles on usage in "Analyze This: Usage and Your Collection." Upcoming installments of this column will address some of the topics covered in this issue and answer questions related to them:

The effect of usage analysis on staff structure and budgeting. Is the library creating new staff positions to specifically handle usage analysis, or is an already overburdened staff or staff member taking on the task? Budget cuts may be the impetus for beginning usage analysis, but do budgets undergo further reductions after usage data is calculated?

Vendor-provided usage tools and what a library should look for when choosing such a tool. Is the library relying more on its own usage data, vendor-provided usage reports, or the comparability and/or combination of the two? Are there variations in library-collected usage data versus vendor-provided usage data?

Maximizing usage data findings. Once the analysis is complete, at what point and how does the library decide on consolidation of resources, acquisition of new resources, or implementation of a new service?

Combining usage data statistics with other statistics, such as impact factor or learning outcomes. How does the library rely on user feedback when making collection decisions, where does it rank, and how reliable is it?

In the next several installments, look for these features: **Cheryl Highsmith**, **Chapman University**, writes about implementing a genre-specific approach to usage analysis; **Gracemary Smulewitz**, **Rutgers University**, offers insight about discoveries made in a subscription analysis project; **Lorraine "Lorri" Huddy**, **The CTW Library Consortium**, assesses the libraries' eBook pilot; **Forrest Link**, **The College of New Jersey**, evaluates the relationship between purchases versus the content users seek via ILL; and **Rachel C. Lewellen**, **UMass Amherst**, explains the many benefits of usage-based decisions.

This is your special issue and column, so if you would like to offer your thoughts about the perspectives in these pages or share your library's usage-related story, please contact me at <rmorris@ebSCO.com>. Enjoy! 🌸