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A Vendor's Perspective on Consortial PDA

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I. Introduction

When visiting libraries as representatives of Ingram Academic, we are often asked what our customers in North America are doing with eBook patron-driven acquisition or PDA. While what works for one library might not work for another, we have found some commonalities as well as clear trends in the trajectory of PDA. In recent conversations we have been asked about our experiences implementing shared **MyiLibrary** PDA plans for library consortia. This article draws on those experiences and provides an overview of the challenges and unique considerations involved in starting a consortial PDA plan.

As a vendor, we are involved in all aspects of the process — from planning to implementation to collection management to usage analysis — so we tend to take the big-picture perspective regarding challenges and benefits of consortial PDA. Since there are many decisions to make, complications can easily arise from trying to bring together different collection goals, maneuver variations in ILS systems, and facilitate communication between all the libraries and departments involved in a consortial purchase plan. It can be easy to lose sight of the forest because of all the trees. By sharing some of our knowledge of consortial PDA plans, we hope our vendor perspective can begin to bring the forest into focus.

II. Evolution of Consortial eBook Purchases

Ingram Academic has watched the consortial purchase of eBooks evolve rapidly in just a few years. Library consortia have frequently purchased **MyiLibrary** eBook packages on behalf of the libraries in their groups. This process was and is relatively straightforward and involves an agreement among the libraries regarding the content that will be purchased; pricing negotiated between the consortium, vendor, and publishers; and a license agreement signed by the consortium. The vendor then provides MARC records or URLs for the content, and invoices are paid.

Last year we began to participate in consortial PDA pilots, in which **Ingram** provided a one-time batch of MARC records for backlist content to the consortium and only invoiced for what was used in a set period of time. Because these pilots involved PDA, Ingram had to get permission from publishers for each title that was included in the plan. The pricing model (what constitutes a use, how many uses trigger a purchase) had to be negotiated as well. The libraries maintained perpetual access to titles that received enough use to trigger a purchase at the end of the pilot, but titles that were not used or purchased were turned off, and records had to be removed from each library's local catalog. One of the most difficult aspects of these trials was convincing publishers to participate, and in one case the negotiating process lasted longer than the PDA trial itself.

In the latest iteration of consortial PDA, **Ingram** is matching newly-published content to a shared profile and adding new titles to a pool of **MyiLibrary** PDA records on a weekly basis. We also assist in managing duplication (of titles and formats) across the consortium and provide information on the status of PDA content to individual libraries within the group. If we are not able to supply an eBook to the consortium, we notify the individual libraries of the title's availability in print through a slip or approval plan. In short, **Ingram** has transferred our integrated eBook and print approval structure into the consortium environment.

The process of setting up this new type of consortial PDA has allowed **Ingram** to re-envision our structure on almost every front — from relationships with publishers to title status displays on OASIS (our online order management tool); from **MyiLibrary** usage reports to more standardized pricing models; and from mechanisms for duplication control to more flexible profile parameters. We have built each new process with the understanding that this will not be a one-time fix or a one-time setup. Rather, we tend to agree with **Joseph Esposito's** assertion that demand for consortial PDA plans is rapidly expanding and is representative of a major shift in thinking about monograph acquisitions.[1]

III. Appeal of PDA

The shift from shared purchase to shared purchase-on-demand plans has several driving forces. A major force, stemming from better digital technology and proliferation of portable e-readers, is user comfort with eBooks contributing to increased patron demand. However, eBooks generally have higher prices and, especially for libraries facing budget constraints, user demand coupled with higher per-title prices makes PDA appealing. Budget cuts have also contributed to mandates for innovative resource sharing.[2] At the same time, libraries are re-evaluating monograph usage statistics and the long-standing "just-in-case" purchasing philosophy.[3]

These days, most libraries have some experience with PDA and are becoming more comfortable with the process and philosophy of PDA as another acquisition method for monographs. At **Ingram Academic**, the libraries most interested in sharing a PDA plan were libraries who were early adopters of the PDA model. It made sense for these libraries to pool their resources and share content, taking advantage of a system they already had in place.

The advantage of having a PDA workflow already in place does not make the so-called devilish details any less complicated. The details and associated decision-making processes are certainly amplified in the collaborative environment. In the following section we outline the vendor's view of the details that need to be considered when implementing a consortial PDA plan.

IV. Challenges of Shared PDA

Librarians and vendors are faced with a host of challenges when considering consortial PDA. Coming to an agreement on any number of issues is a primary challenge. **Collaboration among multiple universities** has been and may continue to be the main challenge.[4] Setting subject and non-subject parameters for a single-institution PDA is a demanding and iterative process; when multiple institutions are involved, the decision-making process is amplified. Coordinating among multiple libraries for "fair share" can also be a tricky business, as sheer enrollment numbers will cause the populations of larger institutions to initiate more purchases than smaller schools. It is important to build a solid profile that meets the needs of all institutions involved, regardless of size and enrollment.

Publisher negotiations can also be challenging when developing consortial PDA. In a 2009 study by the **University of Iowa** libraries, the collection development librarians concluded that there is a growing concern in the publishing community that eBook PDA programs will jeopardize their ability to market monographic materials with a narrow, targeted audience.[5] The ascension of eBook PDA as a more common collection practice has changed the publishing landscape; many publishers are pushing back against consortial PDA due to questionable profitability, and some have pulled out of consortial agreements entirely. Others may be willing to participate at significantly-altered pricing structures, depending on the number of institutions and FTE of those involved.

Another hurdle that must be confronted when planning consortial PDA is how to handle **duplication** among multiple libraries. If a small number of institutions (two or three) are involved, they might wish to build a profile that includes only parameters not already collected on approval at each school. If a larger number of institutions (five or more) are involved, building such a profile may prove to be impossible. In that case, a more realistic approach is to develop an acceptable level of duplication for PDA titles. At **Ingram**, we are able to de-duplicate title lists of PDA eBooks against the holdings of each individual institution, but this does require each institution to regularly send updated holdings information to our system.

The technical requirements of **information sharing** present another obstacle. One of the most frequent questions we receive when developing consortial PDA is, "How can I tell whether an eBook is part of the PDA so I don't accidentally order it?" Each vendor database is unique, but at Ingram we developed a way to display PDA activity for each title record in OASIS. When OASIS users access the database with their existing, institution-specific credentials, they can easily identify unpurchased and purchased eBooks from the shared PDA plan. This clear display of consortial PDA activity at the local level can and should affect local ordering practices, and allows librarians to view the kinds of titles being selected for PDA.

Another challenge that must be faced when planning consortial PDA is how to prepare effective **usage data** for each institution involved. Usage data is priceless among academic librarians, who are increasingly forced to justify the relevance and worth of their collections. At **Ingram** and **MyiLibrary**, this feature is dictated by customer need, and our set of reports can be tailored to each consortium's requests. These reports include the amount invoiced each month, and lists of purchased titles including title, subject range (LC, Dewey, NLM), month of purchase, number of unique uses, ISBN, etc. We also provide institutional usage, by IP range and date, for each unique use as well as how many pages were viewed in each user session.

Flexibility is key when embarking on a new project such as consortial PDA. Librarians and vendors must be open to changes in existing policies and procedures, and must approach the process with the understanding that this is not a one-time fix, but an investment in future potential. Challenges and obstacles can be expected but should not be insurmountable.

V. Considerations and Best Practices

The planning and implementation of a consortial PDA program is not (and may never be) an exact science, but there are some common considerations that each library should address early in the process in order to alleviate some of the challenges outlined above.

How will the vendor and profile handle format duplication across the consortium?

Each library will need to determine whether print and eBook duplication should be allowed and, if duplication is to be avoided, how the consortial eBook PDA profile will interact with print approval coverage already in place at individual institutions. Since the number of academic monographs available in electronic format is still relatively low, the consortial PDA profile will most likely have to work in tandem with existing print approval profiles. Librarians will want to decide early on whether they will give precedence to the shared eBook PDA matches, whether they want to delay a print purchase to wait for an eBook to become available, or whether the vendor should cancel an eBook match if one or more institutions already own the print. Some of these decisions are easier to make and manage on an ongoing basis

if the shared PDA profile covers very specific subject areas, book types, or publishers.

How will individual libraries handle duplication?

Librarians among all institutions in the consortium should discuss how to handle the challenge of duplication control early in the planning process, and should come to a final decision once the PDA is active. Will librarians be allowed to firm order eBooks for their institution that duplicate consortial PDA records? Will duplication be allowed between eBooks and print books at the local level? Will duplication decisions be handled centrally, or will those decisions be left up to each subject selector? This can take some time to analyze among multiple institutions, so start the discussions early.

Which publishers will be included in the consortial PDA profile?

The vendor must negotiate with publishers at the start of each new consortial PDA plan. Our experience at **Ingram** has shown that this process can take at least three months. A list of desirable publishers should be generated early on in planning, so that they can be contacted well before the target "go live" date. Publisher negotiations also help to dictate pricing models, so the earlier the publishers are involved, the better. Librarians can also assist in this process by demonstrating past eBook usage at their institutions, and by concretely defining their goals for the shared PDA plan — how long do they plan to keep PDA records active? Will they also buy the titles in print? Is the goal to provide more access opportunities to patrons, or is it to build a targeted and permanent collection?

Who will facilitate communication?

Whatever decisions are made regarding consortial PDA practices, they should be communicated clearly to all members of the planning committee, as well as to the librarians at each institution. Effective communication can go a long way toward building trust among members of the consortium and can prevent missteps and potential fiascos along the way.[6] Each person involved in ordering needs to be aware of the repercussions resulting from consortial PDA, as their local collection development and acquisitions practices will most likely be affected.

VI. Conclusion

Consortial PDA can seem like a massive tree of complex roots and branches, but partnering with a vendor can ease some of the stresses and perplexities involved. Not only do vendors have a wealth of historical and current industry knowledge, they also offer added-value services, such as the free MARC records and customized usage reports offered by **Ingram** and **MyiLibrary**. When working with a vendor, the support does not end when the consortial PDA begins. Knowledgeable experts will provide profile maintenance and adjustment, as well as ongoing loads of PDA MARC records, and will continue to acquire content from new publishers as the plan progresses.

Is consortial PDA a viable contender in the future of collection development? Most likely. This model supports collaboration and best use of decreased funding, and from our position in

the vendor universe, interest is rapidly rising. Our growing experience at **Ingram** has proven that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to consortial PDA. It will continue to evolve and be dictated by customer demand and publisher negotiation (and re-negotiation). We should be prepared to confront new challenges and barriers along the way, and to cultivate a shifting set of best practices to share with our colleagues. Each new trial will add to our growing knowledge base, allowing us to navigate the forest with growing confidence and ease. 🌲

Endnotes

1. **Esposito, J.** (2012, May 8). Sizing the market for patron-driven acquisitions (PDA). Retrieved from *http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2012/05/08/sizing-the-market-for-patron-driven-acquisitions-pda/*.

2. **Lugg, R.** (2011). Collecting for the moment: Patron-driven acquisitions as disruptive technology. In **David A. Swords** (Ed.), *Patron-Driven acquisitions: History and best practices* (7-22). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

3. **Hodges, D.**, **Preston. C.**, and **Hamilton, M. J.** (2010). Patron-initiated collection development: Progress of a paradigm shift. *Collection Management 35*(3 & 4), 208-221.

4. **Doyle. G.**, and **Tucker, C.** (2011). Patron-driven acquisition – working collaboratively in a consortial environment: an interview with **Greg Doyle**. *Collaborative Librarianship 3*(4), 212-216.

5. **Fischer, K. S.**, et al. (2012). Give 'em what they want: A one-year study of unmediated patron-driven acquisition of e-books. *College & Research Libraries 73*(5), 469-492.

6. **Clement, S.** (2007). Skills for effective participation in consortia: Preparing for collaboration and collaboration. In **Mark Jacobs** (Ed.), *Electronic resources librarianship and management of digital information* (191-204). New York: Haworth Information Press.

translates into "right" action. But in considering what is right, we should avoid both the automatic jump to moral absolutism (pronouncement) or a fall back to a transcendent universal (formula): the variables at play are such that we cannot always foresee or predetermine what a "good" or "best" outcome would look like. We do not have either the tools to structure such an outcome nor the consensus to build that outcome even when we can envision it. However, we must operationalize and *conversationalize* our ethics locally and within the broader community to foster decisions that allow us to meet obligations in the present while creating the conditions for a future where we meet unforeseen obligations impacted by myriad variables outside of our control. 🌲

Endnotes

Joyce Ogburn. "Acquiring Minds Want to Know: What Are Our Obligations?" *Against the Grain*, v.5#5, Nov 1993, p. 46.