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What's Next for eBook Acquisitions? Challenges for Libraries, Vendors, and Publishers

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review handbooks as well as concise manuals to popular health sciences works. The pilot ran from November 2011 to January 2012 with 431 demand-driven records imported into the online catalog and 65 titles being purchased. Since conclusion of the pilot, almost all of the purchased titles have continued to have high use, with many titles reporting an annual average of over 100 successful session requests. LHL opted not to lease access to content since the titles selected for the pilot are popular with students. Even though this was a small pilot, it showed that without any library marketing or promotion, users could find titles in the online catalog and that the titles purchased continue to be heavily accessed.

In the future, purchasing large bundles of electronic book content could become nonexistent, replaced by demand-driven acquisitions. Years of usage reports show which titles users constantly access heavily, moderately, or not at all. Rarely can librarians select and create their own bundles, begrudgingly purchasing content not necessarily needed for the library's collection. Though bundles continue to be promoted by publishers and aggregators as a cost-effective approach to buying content, demand-driven solutions allow librarians to add

content without the financial liability. "Just-in-case" consumption is now being replaced by "just-in-time" purchasing models, making library budgets "work even harder."² The annual effect of inflation, coupled with meager budget increases in content expenditures, has eroded purchasing power. Thus, in an academic era of public accountability and thriftiness, more than ever librarians need to prove to their stakeholders that content expenditures can be tied back to direct use by library users. Demand-driven solutions do not require a large commitment of money as librarians can control and craft what titles are made available to their community.

With demand-driven systems, perhaps the profession is embarking upon a golden age of acquisitions. Price and McDonald's retrospective study demonstrated that user-selected electronic books were used about 2.5 times more than pre-selected works made by librarians.³ It is not that librarians are terrible selectors, but there is so much published content it is almost impossible to predict what users might need at any given moment. Librarians can easily add large sets of demand-driven records to their online catalogs and wait for users to trigger online access. Coupled with article fulfillment services like Get It Now, librarians can offer more content than what was previously offered by the Big Deals without tying up a huge portion of the library's budget.

Demand-driven solutions are reviving academic library collections stunted by years of meager growth due to declining materials budgets. These same solutions can also be used to quickly develop new collections as schools expand degree programs and offer distance education classes and support blended learning environments. With the possibility of offering users a larger selection of titles than ever before, without upfront costs or multiyear agreements, librarians are becoming more nimble in effectively meeting users' immediate needs to access content. 📖

Endnotes

1. Nicole Mitchell and Elizabeth R. Lorbeer, "Building Relevant and Sustainable Collections." *Serials Librarian* 57 (2009):327-333.
2. Steve Sharp and Sarah Thompson, "'Just in case' vs. 'Just in time': e-book purchasing models." *Serials* 23, no. 3 (November 2010) : 201-206.
3. Jason Price and John McDonald, "Beguiled by bananas: A retrospective study of the usage and breadth of patron vs. librarian acquired ebook collections. (<http://cdll.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/lea/id/177>) Accessed November 28, 2012.

What's Next for eBook Acquisitions? Challenges for Libraries, Vendors, and Publishers

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There's no question that digital technology has had an enormous transformative impact on monographic library acquisitions, both influencing acquisitions methods and changing the nature of the resources which we collect, or — more to the point — to which we provide access for library patrons. At first, digital technologies streamlined the acquisition of print resources and allowed libraries to scale back on staffing as acquisitions and cataloging became less like an assembly line and more like project management. However, as eBooks have emerged from technological advances, libraries are having to spend more time and money on negotiating licenses while managing a wider range of workflows than in a strictly print acquisitions environment.

The arrival of eBooks on the library scene created some chaos for acquisitions. Whereas in print acquisitions a book from any publisher can be cataloged, shelved, and circulated the same as any other, eBooks do not conform to the processes that work so well for print acquisitions. Due to publishers' fears of broad and easy distribution of digital content without remuneration to the publishers, eBooks were developed with so-called digital rights manage-

ment (DRM) restrictions that use digital technology — ironically — to restrict the dissemination of digital content in the form of eBooks. (In addition to reining in the ease of distribution of eBooks, also ironic is that eBooks still typically maintain the same form and format inefficiencies of print books instead of embracing the dynamic content and indexing potential made possible by Internet technologies.)

Early efforts by library vendors to be involved in eBook sales included the assertion that eBooks should be delivered through channels analogous to print books. Don't worry, vendors told libraries, eBooks behave like another binding, along with hardcover and paperback books. Vendors partnered with eBook aggregators, which developed eBook platforms that incorporated DRM, display and functionality for eBooks.

eBook aggregators also serve to address what may have been an insurmountable problem without them: eBook licensing. As use and dissemination of digital media have come to be governed by contract rather than copyright law, libraries found themselves in the position of negotiating with information providers just for the right to buy and share digital content. The process of license negotiation is time-consuming and results in many different agreements with different information providers. eBook aggregators allow libraries and publishers to reach a common set of agreements through an aggregator without requiring each publisher and each library to hammer out an arrangement individually. When a library reaches a license agreement with an aggregator, which is partnered with the library's primary vendor, then many publishers' eBooks can be worked into established acquisitions processes.

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This works beautifully for acquiring eBook titles by way of firm orders and approval plans. Preference for eBook or print book for a given title can be applied to approval plans broadly or with greater specificity. Even with one vendor, a library can have licenses on multiple eBook platforms and even choose among platforms for a given eBook title in many cases. However, this is only one part of the picture: unlike print books, vendors' access to the eBook market depends on eBook publishers' cooperation, which is not a given.

Because aggregators offer eBooks from many publishers under one license, there is a "least common denominator" effect: the licenses will permit only as much flexibility to libraries as every publisher is willing to allow. eBook publishers have developed their own platforms too and will often market directly to libraries, bypassing vendors and aggregators altogether. In selling eBooks directly to libraries, individual publishers tend to be more accommodating of libraries' needs, perhaps eliminating DRM entirely or even using a Shared E-Resources Understanding (SERU) agreement in place of a license.

When a library buys eBooks directly from a publisher, it undermines the services its vendor provides and adds another workflow to the library's acquisitions processes. Vendors, of course, have an incentive to work with eBook publishers so as not to get cut out of the transaction. Nonetheless, some publishers remain reluctant to allow vendors to mediate their sales to libraries, and libraries must weigh the benefits of potentially less DRM against the need to negotiate another agreement and develop a separate workflow. Libraries can lobby on vendors' behalf with publishers to involve vendors in the sale, but even when these efforts bear fruit, the effectiveness of duplication control and other vendor services depends on the active cooperation of eBook publishers. In other words, a library can convince a publisher to let a vendor sell its eBooks in a given case, but the library cannot compel the publisher to provide timely notice of title changes, eBook availability, or MARC records to the vendor (nor to the library, for that matter).

Ultimately, when a library knows that it prefers an eBook publisher's platform to either the print version or an aggregator's platform version of the same content, the acquisitions

staff accommodate the purchase. The process efficiencies provided to the library by digital technology become subverted both by the need for flexibility in acquisition methods and by the range of format and platform choices provided to libraries in developing their collections. It is hard to complain, though, about purchasing packages of eBooks, whose titles may not be available simultaneously, are not shipped to libraries like print books, and require library staff periodically to check the publisher's platform for the availability of content and MARC records. This is because the acquisitions process may seem unique to each package of eBooks purchased and these sales models were not prevalent in a print environment. Regardless, in my experience, buying 10,000 eBooks from a publisher can be accomplished in as little as 30 minutes!

This leaves the library acquisitions department at a crossroads. On the one hand, buying some kinds of eBooks through its major vendors, typically those eBooks hosted on aggregators' platforms, retains many of the benefits for the library that have emerged from and been enabled by extensive partnering with one or few vendors, but with the tradeoff of more restrictions on use of aggregated eBook content. On the other hand, buying other kinds of eBooks, typically those hosted on publishers' own platforms, conveys more rights to the readers — by way of less DRM restriction — but without the streamlining and integration into existing workflows that have been developed in conjunction with these major vendors.

The flexibility afforded by eBooks has led to other efficiencies in providing content to library users. In one example, demand-driven acquisitions (DDA) allows a library to provide search results encompassing many eBook titles while only purchasing the titles that patrons use. In another, publishers are increasingly approaching library consortia with a range of offers on both their print and digital content, which is driven by the ease of disseminating eBooks and controlling access to them with DRM.

Though serials went through a digital revolution well in advance of monographs, they have paved the way for a lot of the eBook models in existence now. The eBook Big Deal is taking off, both on an individual institution and a consortium-wide scale. There are subscription models for temporary, yet deeply-discounted, access to large and dynamic eBook collections. Publishers are

selling custom-made collections at a fraction of the price of the print counterparts. Buying eBooks is becoming cheaper and less time consuming in many cases — once the license negotiations are out of the way — than buying print books. Before technical services staff breathe too much a sigh of relief at what seems to be a more efficient way of acquiring eBooks, digital technology will continue to push eBook publishers away from the print book format restrictions that have migrated to the eBook model and toward increasingly functional content, until the eBook can no longer reliably be seen as a surrogate format.

We are still very much in the throes of a publishing crisis. Authors continue to create content, but technology now provides nearly countless avenues for attracting readers to their content. In fact, "reader" is becoming more of a misnomer as content is not limited to the printed page, but can incorporate moving images, sound and interactivity impossible in print form. The old model of selling a book with a CD or DVD tucked in a pocket inside the back cover is out: current technology demands that the text and multimedia content should be integrated instead. The Website, whose form has left the printed page in its dust, is a more accessible model of providing print, video and audio content in a way that encourages exploration of a resource and rejects the strictly linear way of digesting content that a printed book suggests.

All content is not destined to be digested digitally. The Website model of content is not a panacea: some content remains better suited to the printed page, either because of the nature of the content; the preference of the reader; or the inability of the publisher to secure specific rights to images (in particular), or other parts of the content, which cannot be migrated from the printed page to the digital environment. The eBook is a poor approximation of the printed book from which it is trying to evolve and also of the Website, which it is hindered from emulating.

The tension between copyright, licensing, SERU, and open access will either continue to bog us all down in negotiations until one form comes to dominate or some other force renders them all obsolete. Meanwhile, libraries, vendors, and publishers will continue to seek ways to add value to the conversation between content creators and content users and ensure our relevance. 🌳

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book, *In the Grip* (a murder and romance). A column about his publishing saga is coming up in the June issue of *ATG*! Stay tuned!

Just learned of **another book** about a librarian who slipped in and out of the Jewish ghetto of Vilnius to carry food, clothes, med-

icine, money and documents to the prisoners. The book is by **Julija Sukys** and the book is *Epistolophilia, Writing the Life of Ona Simalte*, published in 2012 by **University of Nebraska Press**. Thanks to **Ramune Kubilius** for the citation!

<http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/product/Epistolophilia,674947.aspx>

http://www.lituanus.org/2008/08_2_01%20Sukys.html

Speaking of **buying books**, my husband and I buy tons of them. We prefer paper but recently we visited Cambridge, England, and did not take one print book. It was all on iPads and, you know what, I hate to admit it, but one gets fewer distractions (at least I do) with the online book than the print book. Go figure. Of course, I was reading lightweight books that took no intellectual power at all (airplane reading) but, still, I was surprised.

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