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Let's Get Technical — Nancy Drew and the Case of the Lost Books?



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In our previous article, “**Let’s Get Technical — What to Do With All Those Damaged Books**” *ATG* v.27#3, June 2015, we described how we dealt with a backlog of damaged books. In this article, we explain how we addressed the issue of thousands of lost books in our catalog.

The Situation

For years, the circulation department at **American University Library** would change the location of a book to lost for a number of reasons. If a book was never returned, it would be marked overdue and then eventually changed to lost. If a book could not be found, it would be marked missing and then after a set period of time and multiple subsequent searches, eventually marked as lost. In 2009, the Circulation Services Manager embarked on an ambitious project to inventory the entire main stacks collection. Over the course of the next several years, thousands more lost books were identified as a result of this inventory project. There had never been a systematic method to replace the lost books, so the Acquisitions Librarian decided this was a worthwhile project. In order to replace the thousands of books, more money from within the materials budget needed to be allocated for lost books. From 2009 to 2015, over \$57,000 was spent to replace lost books. The Acquisitions librarian expects the amount to stabilize around \$5,000 each year going forward now that the backlog of lost books has been cleaned up.

The Problem

The backlog of lost books existed because there was no system in place to decide whether the books should be replaced or not. Books that were marked as lost were never removed from the catalog, nor reviewed by collection managers for replacement. The replacement project initially started by having the subject specialist librarians look at each lost book title and make the decision about whether it should be replaced or not. The title list was generated by the Circulation Services Manager and given to the Acquisitions Librarian. The Acquisitions Librarian would then sort the title list by call number and create separate spread sheets for each subject specialist. The spreadsheets would be sent to each librarian with a deadline for decisions to be made. The default decision would be to not replace the title if the Acquisitions Librarian did not receive a decision by the deadline.

It was quickly apparent that there were too many titles for the subject specialists to analyze on their own. Some of the subject specialists wanted more information such as circulation statistics on the title to better inform their decision. Some of the librarians were overwhelmed with the number of titles to evaluate. It was decided that it would be best if some criteria could be applied ahead of time to decide on whether a title should be replaced. Then the number that the subject specialists would actually have to look at would be much lower.

We have a Collection Management Team that makes joint collection related decisions, so options for initial criteria were presented to this team by the Acquisitions Librarian.

The Criteria for Automatic Replacement and/or Review

Only books that have been lost for over 1 year are considered for replacement.

Of these items, replacement is based upon these criteria:

1. Automatically repurchase: <5 years old (by publication date) and <\$100
2. Subject Specialist consideration: circulation within the last 15 years or is <15 years old (excluding items identified in step #1)
3. Automatically delete: no circulation over the last 15 years and is 15 years old or more

After #2 of the criteria is determined, the list is split by Circulation into two reports (items not charged and items still charged to patrons), each file with two worksheets (replace and not replace)

1. Not charged*
 - a. Replace (of the criteria, #1 and; the items on #2 determined to repurchase)
 - i. Bib/MFHD/Item should be reused with a new barcode to retain circulation history
 - b. Not replace (#3 and; #2 determined to not be replaced)
 - i. Deletion should occur at the highest level possible (Bib/MFHD), but suppression may be used as necessary (e.g., with purchase orders attached, other active MFHD records attached)
2. Charged**
 - a. Replace (of the criteria, #1 and; the items on #2 determined to repurchase)
 - i. To be treated as firm added copy orders, placed on added copy shelf
 - ii. New MFHD and Item records created***
 - iii. MFHD above lost Item record is suppressed***
 - b. Not replace (#3 and; #2 determined to not be replaced)
 - i. Suppression occurs at the highest level possible (Bib/MFHD)

*For not charged items, Circulation will clear all outstanding fines attached to the item records

**For charged items, Circulation will relocate them to the lost location on the MFHD and Temporary Item levels; item discharge notes will be added (e.g., Bib and MFHD are suppressed – un-suppress if returned. Change back to auc on MFHD and item locations 9/10/14 mts)

***If it is determined that a new Bib should be utilized, the old Bib should also be suppressed

Note: Suppression is completed by Acquisitions and confirmed by Circulation

The Process

Once a year in the Spring, the Manager of Circulation Services generates an Excel report for the Acquisitions Librarian. The report contains several tabs that correspond to the various criteria used for evaluation. One tab contains books that are automatically replaced. One tab contains books that will automatically have their records deleted. One tab contains the list of titles that the subject specialists will need to analyze. The Acquisitions Librarian creates unique lists for each subject specialist broken down by their area of responsibility and sends out to them at the beginning of the Summer with a deadline for decision being two months from receiving the lists. In the meantime, the acquisitions staff can start to work on the lists of titles that can be automatically replaced or those titles that will be deleted. The workflow for replacing titles is the same as for replacing damaged books, outlined in our June 2015 column, “**What to Do With All Those Damaged Books?**”

The Results

For several years, we slowly and steadily eliminated the backlog. We are now at the point where each year, there are only a few hundred titles on the lost book list and each subject specialist has fewer than 100 titles to evaluate.

One wrinkle that has occurred in this process concerns our shared retention project (as described in our columns of November 2015 and February 2016). We now have books that are marked for retention,

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Looking toward a predominantly open access future and for the sake of argument, then, let's say that your library is supporting open access publishing ventures with 70%-75% of your materials budget (which is about the percentage you now spend on serials) whether through memberships in publishing and preservation cooperatives, maintaining an IR, digitizing special collections and printed materials, etc. Let's also say you have largely discontinued paying APCs to for-profit publishers (who consume the lion's share of the 70-75%) because, for all the value, including prestige, that such publishers might add to your faculty's work, your faculty and you have come to the point at which you dislike the idea of the profit-"overhead" those publishers have in their business model. The other 25%-30% is going to developing special collections and paying for those journal subscriptions and materials that have not flipped to open access.

What changes in your general collection development program? Here are some suggestions:

1. Since the local library is now "all that's accessible" online, selection does not take place except to the extent that your library chooses to support one open access publishing program or another. Enough libraries make different choices that your campus readers can get almost everything they might want without a password. As is the case in those consortia with eBook purchasing programs, your library may be paying for material that is less appropriate to your readers than it might be to other readers if it spends the majority of its materials budget on supporting publishing and related preservation and access platforms, but you will also be getting all that you want for your readers and working with other libraries and organizations to make scholarly materials available to all.
2. As the library collection becomes the aggregation of almost everything that exists, the networking of the library changes your "collection" from a bunch of "things" to a bunch of metadata and access pathways.
3. The library's focus thus changes from things to be collected to the services or purposes that make them available to and usable by readers. The majority of your collecting effort goes into "collecting on the fly" as you enhance discovery mechanisms you now have or create new ones that help individual readers find and use what they need. You also further develop reader advisory and materials repurposing services geared to helping them make their way through the ocean of freeness and incorporate materials in their own work, which you have been at great pains to do all these years anyway since **Google** became the search and discovery engine of choice.
4. Your library pays a lot more attention, that is, money, to collective efforts to preserve digital publications.
5. Your library and others establish concerted efforts to secure materials printed internationally and to digitize them for more general access when possible.
6. Your library may still buy print materials, but your physical collection doesn't grow by much, if at all, and you enter partnerships for the collective housing, distribution, and digitization of a majority of the print materials you now house on campus or in your own storage facility. You largely replace the local infrastructure needed for maintaining and accessing print by enabling user-initiated requests for physical or digitized copy from large fulfillment service centers operated by these partnerships.
7. Your library joins with others to press efforts for finding foster homes for orphan works, stepping up initiatives to investigate the copyright status of out-of-print publications in order to free the orphans for greater use and to establish copyright regimes favorable to opening more scholarship.
8. Since your readers are better served by having unimpeded access to everything than they are by your paying for a selection from that body of material, your mission becomes more centered on the overall and global enterprises of education and knowledge creation and dissemination.

About a decade ago **Lorcan Dempsey** popularized the concept of "collective collection"⁸ and more recently described what he calls the

"facilitated collection,"⁹ which derives from it. It's not far from the many ways in which library materials can be collectively assembled and managed, not far from the means for facilitating access to them in any format, to a world in which publication is open to begin with and (almost?) everything published is collectively made available and cooperatively preserved. As the facilitated concept of collection suggests, the word "collection" is less useful these days as a description of something on campus, except in the case when it is modified by "special," then it is as the body of material any given library can provide its readers by any means possible. Open access publications pose their special issues of bibliographic control, discovery, and preservation, but in many ways they are the ultimate in access facilitation, as long as people are willing and able to use digital formats and have an Internet connection. They lend themselves to several models of publishing and review, to experimentation with new formats, and to collective preservation efforts, as **HathiTrust** has amply demonstrated. Open access publications thus facilitate libraries' access to a new vision of collective enterprise in support of publishing efforts that make scholarship available to everyone rather than to local constituents through payment for individual items. Achieving this global, inclusive, and egalitarian goal will mean working away from and eventually overcoming the funding regimes, traditional relationships, and entrenched local interests that shaped print collections and the libraries that housed them, but the gains for all levels of education are great enough to make the effort worth our while. 🌱

Endnotes

1. "Beyond My People and Thy People, or The Shared Print Collections Imperative," **Becky Albitz**, **Christine Avery**, and **Diane Zabel**, eds; *Libraries Unlimited*, 2014.
2. "Risk, Value, Responsibility, and the Collective Collection," with **John McDonald**; **Dawn Haley**, ed; *ALA Editions*, 2016.
3. **McDonald** and **Kieft**, "Risk, Value, Responsibility, and the Collective Collection," 195.
4. Disclosure: I am Chair of the Board of KJN Consultants/Open Access Network (<http://openaccessnetwork.org/>), and some of the thinking in this article has emerged from developing the OAN.
5. <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/PressRelease/pressReleaseId-123242.html>
6. 3rd ed., *ALA Editions*, 2014.
7. **Kieft**, "Beyond My People and Thy People, or The Shared Print Collections Imperative," 299.
8. See this compilation of documents <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2013/2013-09r.html> and **Dempsey's** blog <http://orweblog.oclc.org/> posts from 2006.
9. <http://orweblog.oclc.org/towards-the-facilitated-collection>

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meaning we have to make a good faith effort in replacing them, whether they are old, or have circulated, or not. We also have titles that are marked as cultural heritage, meaning we also have to make every effort to replace the title with an exact copy, since we are committing to retain that title indefinitely. Often the subject specialists decide to replace a lost book with a new edition, but with our books marked for retention or cultural heritage, we have to try to replace the exact copy. These new examples of lost books have made the process a bit more complicated, with more spreadsheets, but luckily not many titles that are falling into these categories so far.

One other way that we replace books that fall outside this process is when a patron pays the fine for the lost book. A special yellow form with title information is routed directly from circulation to an acquisitions staff member for automatic replacement. This is a separate workflow from what is described above because the patron has acknowledged the loss of the book and has paid for it. Therefore, we will replace the title.

It's been a satisfying experience to clean up the backlog of lost books over the years. Dealing with the lost books in a timely manner has both cleaned up our catalog as well as focusing the budget money on replacing those items that are truly used. 🌱