Doing More with Less, Revisited: Batch Processing, Outsourcing and Data Driven Curation, Five Years Later

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today, as they look to build their larger collections.

After two years of loading holdings and integrating eBook collections into **GOBI** workflows, the library has seen benefits of this integration. The selectors appreciate that they can now see what has been purchased or is part of an eBook collection, the questions to Acquisitions have greatly decreased, and selectors are spending down their budgets without fear of unnecessary duplication. Having eBook collections integrated into the monograph vendor workflow also gives the library a better way to view their English-language collection more holistically regardless of format, making it easier to identify and address gaps in the collection. The library is now working towards a new set of profiles that will address these disparities and better serve the users in the future. By consolidating and centralizing, they believe they have improved the efficiencies for all. 🐾

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excluded without category parameters or specific titles lists of what is being excluded.

Takeaway: When dealing with content providers, a clear scope of content included in the plan is important to define before implementation. Consider documenting specific title lists of either included or excluded titles; clearly defined publication ranges (especially if an acquisition program doesn't run concurrent with a calendar year); and a thorough understanding of how a publisher eBook platform does or does not mirror print publication lists and schedules.

Conclusion

A consortial eBook acquisition program is an exciting way to build a shared collection and rethink collection development. The ability to achieve further efficiency through a shared ILS and NZ really enables a consortium to push the boundaries of traditional monograph acquisitions. Through discounted purchasing, consolidated data analysis, and streamlining record loading, the consortium achieves economies of scale at many points throughout the selection-to-acquisition process.

Along with the possible efficiencies comes the potential for added complexity. The pitfalls and lessons learned by the **Alliance** ESG highlight the

importance of a team committed to investigating issues and identifying solutions to mitigate the impact on the larger consortium of members and users.⁴ Careful planning, detailed documentation, and constant communication are critical to avoid problems with acquisitions at a consortial scale. 🐾

Endnotes

1. www.orbiscascade.org/member.
2. **McElroy, E. and S. Hinken.** (2014). "Pioneering Partnerships: Building a Demand-Driven Consortium eBook Collection." *Against the Grain*. 23(3).
3. **Robbelloth, H., Ragucci, M., and DeShazo, K.** (2017). "Evidence-Based Acquisition: A Real Life Account of Managing the Program Within the Orbis Cascade Alliance." *The Serials Librarian*. 73:3-4, 240-247.
4. The authors wish to acknowledge the collaborative efforts of the 2017-18 ESG members in responding to issues and identifying solutions to keep the Alliance eBook program moving forward during a very complex period: **Abigail Bibee** (Reed College), **Faye Christenberry** (University of Washington), **Andrea Eickholt** (ESG Chair, Eastern Washington University), **Jesse Holden** (Orbis Cascade Alliance), **Tom Larsen** (Portland State University), **Lorena O'English** (Washington State University), **Alexander Rolfe** (George Fox University), **Michelle Weston** (Western Washington University).

Doing More with Less, Revisited: Batch Processing, Outsourcing and Data Driven Curation, Five Years Later

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Doing more with less — this is a common theme we hear in libraries. In 2013, we presented at the **Charleston Conference** on this topic, followed up by an article in *Against the Grain*.¹ From 2010 to 2013 **Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Libraries** spent time exploring batch processing and outsourcing technical services and collection curation. We outlined projects utilizing these techniques, talked about our approach and reflected on early results of these projects. When recently approached to explore the topics of outsourcing, curation automation, and efficiencies in technical services it seemed like a wonderful opportunity to revisit some of the examples five years later. Pre-processing services, data-driven curation of the collection, vendor provided MARC records, and "internal outsourcing" were examples we felt could use a fresh look.

We have lived with our theory of "Good Enough" for some time and continue to find it useful. With limited resources we need

to determine how to allocate a finite amount of staff time and operating budget. For us this theory of "Good Enough" is the attempt to balance the investment of people and budget versus the impact any particular service or procedure may have for our users; the larger the impact, the more likely we are to dedicate time and money. It's common for service-minded professionals to want to do their very best at every task for our patrons. This drive is one of the key factors in a great library and a positive work culture. But with widespread dips in enrollment translating into budget constraints, it is simply impossible to be the very best in every service we offer. Libraries must continue to ask ourselves, our faculty, and staff what can we get done with the resources we have? What is the alternative for this project if we cannot be "perfect"? For **GVSU**, this thought process boils down time and time again to what will ultimately benefit our patrons the most. Library leadership

must continue to balance the resources at hand to provide the best possible service to our patrons. The examples that follow are updated, and show how **GVSU Libraries** streamline or outsourcing work.

Pre-processing Services

In our presentation and article from five years ago, we provided examples of why pre-processing services from vendors can be a way for libraries to save time and get materials to users in a much shorter time frame. These services include application of call numbers, barcodes, RFID tags, and property stamps on materials. Having the vendor do this processing work allowed us to keep up with the incoming materials, while only having one cataloger and ten to twenty hours of student help per week. We saw our processing time per book drop from eight to ten minutes per item to two to three minutes per item on average. Over these past five years, we've seen our books budgets begin to decrease due to the need to allocate funds away from print materials to support other formats and resource types as well as budget cuts. These reductions in funds, and

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the resulting decrease in physical book orders, have prompted us to reevaluate what we are asking our vendor to do. As the item records are created when we import an electronic invoice, it makes sense to have the vendor add the barcode and the RFID tag. Having these added removes the need to access the item record upon receipt. We also feel that the investment in having the vendor add the call number is worth the cost as it reduces the number of labels we need to purchase, reduces wear and tear on label printers, and we don't need to enter the bibliographic record unless something else seems to be an issue within the record.

Reviewing vendor-provided services does allow us to adjust what we outsource to better meet current needs. Previously we had vendors apply property stamps to material, but with reduced physical orders we have discontinued this service. The property stamp doesn't require any work to look up the item or examine the record. It takes our student employees very little time to stamp our materials and by not having the vendor add the property stamp we estimate we will save between \$1,500 and \$2,000 per year. As we continue to examine what we are paying vendors to do for us we will be weighing both the cost and time investment in each step. We know we will not be getting more staff lines or student hours in the foreseeable future as the budget will continue to be tight, so determining the appropriate balance between cost and workload will become even more important.

Internal Outsourcing

The **GVSU Libraries** have always looked for ways to provide employees experiences in areas outside their standard work, if there is interest. In the past, this has been service desk employees interested in learning about library technologies or moving from a liaison role to a role in scholarly communications. Recently, the **GVSU Libraries** has formalized a skills development program for our unionized clerical staff. This program, called the Professional Support Staff Skills Enhancement Program, is an effort to get our unionized staff the skills they want or desire to become better applicants for any library position they are interested in. While this program was developed with the benefits to the staff in mind, it also has the potential to benefit departments that have lost staff lines.

The technical services areas within the **GVSU Libraries** have put together some opportunities for staff that both offer new skills and provide significant benefit to the department. The different opportunities being piloted at this time are authority control (running headings reports and addressing issues) and basic cataloging for departmental libraries across campus. These projects will be supervised by the Metadata and Resource Discovery Librarian and will include training and review of work. Ideally, after receiving training, the staff will be able to complete this work with minimal supervision. This will free up more

time for the Metadata and Resource Discovery Librarian to focus on other higher impact tasks.

While this program is newer than the presentation and article we are revisiting, it is relevant. Some of the early work that staff in the program are trained on are the types of work we would have outsourced in the past. Ideally, staff participating in the program will graduate to higher level work, but using work we had outsourced as a training experience benefits the staff member and the libraries' bottom line.

Vendor Provided MARC Records

Just as we did five years ago, we rely heavily on vendor provided MARC records. With the same amount of staff, an equal amount of content, and new priorities to focus on, we would be unable to provide multiple access points to these resources without these records. Additionally, we have found that more vendors, especially streaming media vendors, are not included in the unified index that our discovery layer uses. Vendor consolidation has also created unexpected issues with discoverability. As the market shrinks and larger vendors compete, we have been disappointed in their progress toward vendor-agnostic discovery. Adding MARC records to our catalog, which is then ingested into the unified index, is more important than ever as they are a proven and effective way to get resources included in our discovery layer.

While MARC records do save a lot of time and help with resource discovery, they can also create issues. First, some vendor MARC records are of poor quality, with just basic fields such as title and basic subject headings. This is frustrating to some of our subject liaisons, as they see students struggle to find some of these resources, and better MARC records would aid with discovery. Second, some vendors don't have MARC records for all of their content, and that can cause interruptions in workflows as staff have to double check to make sure that all ordered titles are represented in the catalog.

An example we recently ran into is with a streaming video provider. As we license these films we import their MARC records and add an order record to the bibliographic record so we can track spending. After working on this for a few months, we started to notice more and more of the items we were licensing didn't have MARC records available. This meant we either had staff create brief records, or that we would need to have our only professional cataloger spend time cataloging records that we may only need for one year. After speaking with the vendor it turned out that they were adding content more quickly than they could create records for and that those records would be created "sometime in the near future." After stressing the importance of these records for both discovery (as this was the only way the content would be included in our discovery layer) and for our own internal processes, the vendor has sped up their MARC record creation for new titles. This example is relevant as it highlights the need to revisit and review services we in the library world have come to rely on, such as vendor provided MARC records.

Data Driven Curation

As **GVSU** weeded our offsite storage in preparation for a new library on the Allendale campus, we were able to use data-driven deselection on a wider scale than we ever had in the past. The storage facility housed approximately 80,000 volumes of low use titles. This collection was curated down to 47,000 titles after outsourcing much of the data work. Working with a vendor to review the collection against some predetermined criteria, subject liaison librarians were able to focus on a smaller subset of the titles for individual review. The technical services workload of withdrawing 33,000 titles was cut down from an estimated 2,000 hours (for title-by-title record processing) to four hours of work coordinating the information from the vendor and using the ILS to run batch processing. This was an early example of data-driven curation at **GVSU**, and our library faculty and staff are continuing to use these procedures with more and more comfort. In 2018 a review of the materials on open stacks at the **Mary Idema Pew Library** Learning and Information Commons saw many more liaison librarians comfortable utilizing the lists created with specific use criteria. Some sections of the collection required very little work at all from liaisons. Moving forward, we will continue to provide system generated curation lists, and as comfort with this method continues to grow we hope to see even further savings of faculty and staff time.

Shared-print retention initiatives have also provided opportunity for data driven curation. **GVSU** participates in the Michigan Shared Print Initiative. This program compares holdings from multiple universities in Michigan, designating items for each library to retain. Having this information about titles that will be held locally also allows for quicker decisions while curating our own print collections. With this information, we can identify low use titles at **GVSU** for deselection while remaining confident we can still quickly provide access through interlibrary loan.

Conclusion

Five years ago we concluded that outsourcing or batch processing common technical services tasks was a clear time saver. We had also discovered some early success in data-driven curation models. Freeing up faculty and staff time to focus on emerging needs and services was our declaration of a "win" for these processes. As faculty and staff become more and more comfortable with data-driven decisions, we've been able to greatly reduce the amount of time a person needs to spend processing or curating on a title-by-title basis. Having a few years of statistics to reinforce the impact has also increased staff comfort. Not everything we tried continues to be the best decision for **GVSU** now. While these clearly save time, the reality is that budgets continue to shrink and each decision will need to be evaluated in terms of cost versus workload. Changing budgets, as well as new staff initiatives, provide the opportunity for such evaluation. We have discovered that continual review of these types of processes results in the best product we can hope to offer our patrons. 🐾

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should not be overlooked, and contacts made at conferences can prove valuable for the library in the future.

Honesty can make or break a relationship. Trust and honesty are also part of the relationship between libraries and serials vendors. Libraries need to trust that their serials vendor is staying abreast of industry changes and has accurate data since change is inevitable in serials work, whether it is a simple title change or a title moving from one package to another. The world of vendors is a competitive one and sometimes the relationship with a library can put a serials vendor over the top in a vendor choice decision on the part of the library. Most importantly, serials vendors have an ethical obligation to be open and honest about financial viability. This honesty not only improves but assures long term relationships between the library and the serials vendor.

It is a mutual benefit for serials vendors and libraries to have a positive relationship. **Rossmann** (2016) surveyed libraries about their relationships with vendors and an average of five or more people at the library have contacts with vendors. Vendors have a real presence in libraries. Stating vendors and librarians are friends is cliché. Libraries pay for their services. However, many serials-vendor relationships are akin to friendship and there is a level of mutual respect. Libraries rely on serials vendors to have the knowledge to help them find the right products and services and to connect them to resources for what their users want. Libraries and their serials vendors know a lot about one another going into the relationship. This knowledge is the basis of a long term healthy relationship. The important elements of the personal touch — communication, collaboration, trust and honesty, and mutual respect — ensure that the library workflows are efficient and moving in the right direction in this ever-changing world of serials. These are just a few of the ways the human element in the library/vendor relationship can be employed to enhance library workflow. 🌱

Author's Note: These comments are my opinion and not necessarily the opinion of all serials vendors. — **BA**

Doing More with Less ...
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Endnotes

1. **Roth, P., & Daniels, J.** (2014). Doing more with less: Exploring batch processing and outsourcing in academic libraries. In *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference*. Paper from presentation at **Charleston Conference**, Charleston S.C. (2014).

Booklover — One Day

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Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is one of the **Nobel Laureates** whose name recognition is huge. In spite of the weightiness of his subject matter and the efforts made to subdue him and his works, this is quite an accolade. Truth: in drilling down the list of **Nobel Literature Laureates**, I have been skipping over his name as I have found it daunting to tackle his work. It is January 2019, time to get over it and check a book out of the library. I found two pieces of his work at the main branch of the **Charleston County Library**. *Cancer Ward* and *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* were wedged between *Blood and Milk* by **Sharon Solwitz**, a Pushcart Prize recipient, and *Chum*, *A Novel* by **Jeff Somers**. Association by alphabetical order is quirky and interesting to me — just something to ponder.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, is my choice maybe because the book is only 159 pages and that seems doable to overcome daunting, or maybe because the book has a woven gold thread bookmark — a delightful accent for a library book. Another delight, it was a fast, entertaining and amazing read. But I jump ahead.

Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn won the 1970 **Nobel Prize in Literature** “for the ethical force with which he has pursued the indispensable traditions of Russian literature.”

The intensity that surrounded his life began in the womb. His mother, **Taisiya Shcherbak (née) Solzhenitsyn** was widowed shortly after learning of her pregnancy.

Born in 1918 in Kislovodsk, Russia, he was raised by his mother and an aunt in very humble circumstances. Nevertheless, **Taisiya** was an educated woman and encouraged **Solzhenitsyn's** studies in literature and science. **Solzhenitsyn** married in 1940 while at university. Five years later, he would be arrested while serving in the Red Army in East Prussia for writing derogatory comments in communications with his friends. This would escalate to charges of creating anti-Soviet propaganda under Article 58, paragraph 10 of the criminal code. In July of 1945 he was sentenced to work camps for eight years. His experience in the camp located in Ekibastuz, Kazakhstan was the experiential “inspiration” behind *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, the novella published in 1962 — interesting that this was my choice.

John Bayley's introduction presents the reader a beautiful ten-page window into this quasi-autobiographical work: “For the greatest strength of *Ivan Denisovich* is its exemplary force, its total commitment to a vital and heroic purpose. Russian speakers, readers of *Novy Mir*, were at once bowled over by the confidence, forcefulness and brilliance

of its style, a wholly new amalgam of simple Russian narrative (**Daniel Defoe's** *Robinson Crusoe* affords us some sort of English parallel) blended with colloquialisms, pungent slang and prison-camp jargon, the whole giving that unmistakable impression of the new which is decisive in the authority of a literary masterpiece of this kind. Ordinary reportage about the real nature of the camp system would have had some effect on the reading public, of course; but the shock achieved by **Solzhenitsyn** was a literary shock as well as a social one.” He continues.... “There is something altogether admirable about **Solzhenitsyn's** obsession with discovering what went wrong in Russia, and devoting his great literary talents to an elaborate postmortem. Yet it must also be admitted that *The Red Wheel* was, in a sense, out of date before it appeared, whereas *Ivan Denisovich* still has the air of changeless freshness — the shock of the present — which it had when it first broke upon the Russian public.”

H.T. Willetts provided the English translation for *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* as well as a few other of **Solzhenitsyn's** works.

Now for a few intriguing excerpts of **Ivan Denisovich Shukhov's** day from the early morning when he rises to eat, then assembles for the morning work detail, to the minutia of the arduous labor, assembling to return for the evening mess, and then to retire. Every detail and thought is shared.

“Can a man who's warm understand one who's freezing? The frost was cruel. A stinging haze wrapped around him and set him coughing. The air temperature was twenty-seven below and **Shukhov's** temperature was thirty-seven above. No holds barred!”

“For two months the Power Station had stood abandoned, a grey skeleton out in the snow. But now Gang 104 had arrived. What kept body and soul together in these men was a mystery. Canvas belts were drawn tight round empty bellies. The frost was cracking merrily. Not a warm spot, not a spark of fire anywhere. All the same — Gang 104 had arrived, and life was beginning all over again.”

“**Shukhov** was eating his supper without bread: two portions with bread as well would be a bit too rich. The bread would come in useful tomorrow. The belly is an ungrateful wretch, it never remembers past favours, it always wants more tomorrow.”

“The end of an unclouded day. Almost a happy one.

Just one of the three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days of his sentence, from bell to bell. The extra three were for leap years.”

The day is over. 🌱