Charleston Library Conference

Let's Get the Dialog Started: Keeping E-books Current

Gail Johnston
Texas A&M University, gail_johnston@tamu-commerce.edu

Tamara Remhof
Texas A&M University, tamara_remhof@tamu-commerce.edu

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Gail Johnston, Associate Director of Libraries, Texas A&M University-Commerce Libraries
Tamara Remhof, Head of Technical Services, Texas A&M University-Commerce Libraries

Abstract:
E-Books have been around for more than ten years and this panel discussion with librarians and vendors Matt Barnes, Vice President of Marketing, ebrary; Ken Breen, Senior director of e-Book Products, EBSCO Publishing; and Kari Paulson, President, EBL-Ebook Library, focused on the currency of them. Specifically, how to keep them current and who is responsible for replacing ones that are obsolete. The cost of e-books was not discussed because of the different funding structures vendors use with their customers. The session sought to get people thinking about what to do with e-books that are no longer relevant and could be a liability if the information in them is outdated or obsolete and to determine who is responsible for making sure libraries have current information available for their customers.

The age of the information in e-books can be a liability for libraries especially when searching for medical or legal information. This concern about the currency of e-books came up when Texas A&M University-Commerce (TAMUC) was developing an upper level nursing program. Academic libraries with medical programs usually want books that are no older than five years. However, a search of the TAMUC online catalog revealed over 200 online resources older than six years. A literature review indicates that most libraries are now grappling with the problem of e-books with outdated or superseded information. However, the literature also indicates that librarians have more questions than answers.

Hightower and Gantt, (2011) pointed out that the currency of the collection is critical especially in the health sciences because outdated information is misleading and potentially dangerous. This means libraries have to develop a policy for weeding e-books, even though shelf space and disrepair are not issues. It is more important that customers have access to information but the age of the e-book collections may interfere with the customers' ability to find relevant information because the e-books are still in the catalog creating information clutter.

One of the problems with the aging collections is how they were purchased. E-books purchased as part of a shared collection in a consortium cannot be easily removed. Libraries can take them out of

their catalog but they are still available in the database (Hightower and Gantt, 2011.) The question becomes who is responsible for weeding e-books?

The vendors can do an automatic weeding of older editions. However, that can lead to problems because the older editions may have readers' notes attached to them and the notes do not move to the newer editions. Also, research libraries need the older editions to support their student and faculty research. Not having the older editions would mean the citations they use based on the older editions would go to broken links. Librarians know what their customers need so they have to take responsibility for weeding e-books just as they do for weeding the print collections.

One option vendors can offer libraries is using visibility settings. Libraries can control what their customers are seeing through their database administrator who can change the visibility settings in the vendor database. Unfortunately, this does not help with shared collections purchased through a consortium. Turning off the view for one library will turn it off for all libraries in the consortium and not all libraries may want to restrict access to the e-book. One solution may be to put a notice in the database that a newer edition is available, this way the customer would be aware that more current information is available.

Ultimately the responsibility for weeding e-books falls on libraries. They must evaluate their e-book collections and librarians must work together to create best practices for evaluating and weeding e-book collections. It is also important for librarians and vendors to work together to create a workflow that is efficient for both libraries and vendors. This efficiency would ensure that customers have access

to the resources they need without all the electronic clutter that obsolete and inaccurate information creates in the catalog.

Reference
Hightower, B.E., Gantt, J.T., (2011). Weeding nursing e-books in an academic library. *Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services,* 1-5. doi:10.1016/j.lcats.2011.08.003