Organisational Changes and a New Media Policy: Meeting User Demands at the Royal Institute of Technology

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses why there is a need for organisational changes and a new policy for acquisitions within an academic library when 96.5 % of the media budget is spent on electronic resources related to the 3.5 % spent on print. At the Library of The Royal Institute of Technology the acquisitions and handling of printed material involved more time and personnel compared to that of licensing and administering electronic resources. Given the economic relation between the two expenditures it was clear that this should be reflected in the organisation. A new media plan was developed to form a foundation for better balanced workflows and future organisational changes. The media plan resulted in a new policy for acquisitions and collection management; the most important content can be concluded as follows:

- The library has focus on Demand Driven Acquisition
- Printed material is no longer collected
- E-version is always purchased ahead of print
- Printed material is weeded if the library owns the e-version

As reflected in these core points the main goal for the library is to meet the patrons’ demands for scientific information, provide it as swiftly as possible and present it in the most accessible way. Therefore digital format is always the first choice and print is now only ordered when the library for different reasons is forced to do so. Also it was obvious that the physical library must transform in order to meet the needs of the university. As a part of this process printed collections are to be weeded and partly replaced by digital resources. Altogether these facts made it clear that the library had to move in a new direction.

Implementing the new policy has proven that new objectives and qualifications are required in the transition to digital collections, such as knowledge of new systems and software, licensing skills and technical awareness. And not the least – a distinct leadership and a willingness to convert.

Keywords: Collection Development, Organisational Changes, Demand Driven Acquisition

BACKGROUND

The Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm is the largest and oldest technical university in Sweden with approximately 11 500 first and second level students, 1 900 doctoral students and 4 900 employees. Education and research spans from natural sciences to all branches of engineering and includes Architecture, Industrial Management and Urban Planning. Biotechnology research at KTH is internationally well recognized. Consequently the KTH Library covers a broad span of subjects when providing relevant scientific information to support the research and education within the institution.

The Library is organized as part of one of the ten schools of KTH - The School of Education and Communication in Engineering Science. (The ECE School) The other nine are subject specific and main focus lies on research and education within their different areas.

The ECE School provides support for research and education for the other KTH schools but also conducts its own educational programmes and courses mainly within pedagogy and teaching for higher education. The Library is one of three departments within ECE and is divided into three main units: Library services, Media & IT and Publishing services.
The physical library consists of one main unit situated on campus and a few smaller branch libraries. Several of the latter are being phased out and will integrate parts of their printed collections during the coming year.

As the transition to the digital library has dominated the past years acquisitions of electronic resources are centralised and handled by one unit in order to facilitate and rationalise the process.

**Figure 1:** Total spend on media for KTH Library, 2002-2013.

Last year (2013) 96.5% of the budget was spent on electronic resources, in total €3,376,200 divided on e-journals, e-books and databases. Still €122,877 was spent on print which was equivalent to 3.5% of the total budget. (Figure 1)

The personnel acquiring print and electronic media belong to the same unit with a total of fourteen staff which also includes system librarians and IT technicians. Media & IT has not only the responsibility for licensing and acquiring but also that of delivering and providing the information in the quickest and best possible way. Thus the systems used (i.e. link resolver, discovery tool, library website) are also a concern for the unit as well as cataloguing and metadata.

Only few of the personnel had knowledge about licensing and administration of electronic resources and it was obvious that the situation was vulnerable as in several cases processes were dependant on one person. Therefore it was important that the skills to license and handle e-resources were transferred to additional staff. It was also necessary to revise the policy for collection development and in overall analyse the trends and policies for acquiring media at KTH.

In 2013 a decision was made to cancel all remaining print journals. This had been done several years ago for journals with an online version but nearly 100 titles which didn’t exist in electronic format were still held. Some worries amongst staff were expressed but no reactions from end users have reached the library so far.

We were aware that large parts of the printed collections never circulated. This applies to journals and book series but also to the majority of the printed monographs. With this in mind
we needed to think about what we want the physical library to reflect and what KTH as an institution expected of us. In order to update the collections, make room for the students and at the same time care for the parts of the printed collections that are unique for the library it was clear that a larger library project had to take place. However, this would involve other units and a large number of staff so the decision was made to initiate change starting with the organisation and policies of the media acquisitions.

Since then a project regarding the campus environment has been initiated at KTH. One goal is to find further space for students and investigate how the learning environment can be developed to suit the needs of future educational practises. The project also, amongst other things, aims to create spaces for meetings between researchers in order for them to benefit from each other’s knowledge. All this will affect the physical library and the printed collections as well as the librarian’s future role. With the latter I mean that new services such as research mapping and analysis of cooperation possibilities are examples of what the library could offer researchers apart from covering their needs of scientific information and providing service regarding publishing issues.

**METHOD AND RESULTS**

As described above we were aware that we needed to revise our work within Media and develop a new policy for how we obtained scientific information. At this time (early 2013) some printed material was still being collected by librarians, selection being based on the core research areas of KTH. Furthermore many faculty requests for additional e-resources had remained unattained due to a cautiousness concerning budget.

As a starting point a work group with four staff was formed of whom two were working with e-resources and licensing and two with cataloguing and acquisitions of printed media. The work group was given the assignment to form a media plan which was to contain the policy for acquisitions, collection development and weeding. The content and issues were discussed with all staff that expressed an interest in the matter before decided upon by the library management. The process took approximately four months and resulted in a concise but significant document.

The most important result was the decision that all acquisitions were to be demand driven and that e-version always was to be purchased ahead of print. The main reason was that we wanted to focus on optimal relevance, delivery and accessibility for our end users. Furthermore we no longer were to collect printed material. Therefore, if a publication isn’t available in electronic format we prefer interlibrary loan instead of purchase. One of the core points is also that patrons shouldn’t have any concerns regarding how or from where the library obtains material – they simply need something and we fulfil that request. It was clear that we divided interlibrary loans and purchase suggestions both in theory and in practice. This is reflected in the organisation and needs to be adjusted by integrating the two functions.

In the transition to acquiring e-only the staff needed new skills mainly within systems and software but also in understanding the complexity of the e-book market. This competence was available in-house and a number of workshops were organised with the goal to further spread the knowledge. Time that before was spent on purchasing and cataloguing single printed books is now used to check e-book availability, activate in knowledge base and so on. Some staff experienced the latter workflow more time-consuming than the former but at the same time they developed new skills and competencies. Now and then requests for single e-books can lead to larger e-book bundle purchases within relevant areas. In these cases a deeper understanding of publishers and licensing is needed and seminars covering the topic were also offered. To have in mind is that many skills come from years of experience and all is not done at once.
The library also needed to try different models of Demand Driven Acquisition (DDA) to cover the information needs for those of our users who didn’t contact us directly. Initially this was done through a smaller pilot project with two aggregated e-book vendors. After evaluation we could quite easily draw the conclusion that we rather purchase e-books with perpetual access directly from the publishers. The main reason is that this content in general has no limits for printing and downloading which is not the case on aggregated platforms. Surveys and interviews with our users have shown that the latter platforms are not so well-seen. Engineering students mainly use e-books but not necessarily licensed material since they download the file they find first. In a smaller former project a working group which included several students could inform us that their normal search for an e-book (usually a textbook) would be done in Google (not in the library discovery tool) containing the title of the book and the word “pdf”. In the majority of all cases they would find a file to download. However, e-book models are continuously developed and some publishers now include textbooks as a part of their DDA collections. Currently we offer full access to two major publisher platforms containing e-books relevant to KTH. After one year statistics will be analysed and titles with the highest usage purchased.

Questions arose if there was a need to reach the researchers in order to inform them of the new ways of acquiring media resources. One of the benefits with demand driven acquisitions is that the purchases are automatized, at least to a certain extent. Therefore we have chosen to respond to queries that may arise rather than to market the process.

CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the new Media plan has overall been successful but there are many workflows yet to be improved. New skills are developing and competencies are spread amongst colleagues but this is a process to be seen in a long perspective. We also have a far way to go handling the printed collections - not least when it comes to weeding.

Moving towards a new library system might give us possibilities to handle some of the difficulties we have stumbled across. Since we focus on delivering rather than collecting information we also hope that a next generation library system will give us better tools to fulfil the needs in an even more efficient way.

The project has in a positive sense forced us to ask questions concerning the future of the academic library, Which are the needs from the surrounding researchers and the institution? What do they require of a modern research library today and the next coming years? When we have statistics and facts showing on less and less circulation, a growing number of full text downloads from the electronic collections and when nearly all physical visitors are students not using the library for lending books but as a place of study – well, then we have to adopt. The library is not a place for building collections but a section within the university that offers services to facilitate research, publishing and education. This has to be reflected in the way we act and in our organisation.

FURTHER READING
