ATG Special Report -- Some Considerations in Selecting Scientific Journal Backfiles

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identification of novel uses of technology in support of managing library operations is very crucial. Therefore, the leadership needs to A) foster the culture of identifying innovative use of technology; B) encourage staff to look into new technologies and their applications; and C) recognize and reward those employees that identify ICT solutions.

As an additional and widely demanded measure, academic libraries should also expand their efforts in identifying open access sources enabling them to provide access to contents for those who are researching to identify innovations. There is a limitless number of open access repositories, publications and sites conducted and supported by governments, academic institutions, professional groups and individuals. Libraries should make the most of these sites and compliment their existing collection with contents from open access sites.

The role of educating administrators and policy makers about the importance of avoiding funding cuts for academic programs and library collections is the responsibility of everyone in the academic community. These efforts should not be limited to only local administrators but rather it should be carried out at all levels of local, state and national governments. I feel certain that national professional library organizations, such as American Library Association (ALA), understand their critical role during these challenging times. Instead of seeking a bailout, rely on educating policy makers about the importance of investing in knowledge acquisitions, and making information available to researchers, educators, and knowledge seekers. In a time when everyone is fighting for a share of the funding, library leadership should fight for their fair share as well.

The role that library collections and librarians play in aiding the floundering economy should not be underestimated. The best remedies for an ailing economy are education and knowledge. This does not mean that educational programs and access to knowledge are not important during economic prosperities, but that these resources are much more essential and have a substantial impact in periods of economic strife. Unfortunately, society does not generally understand the importance that libraries play in upholding the basis of human civilization, communication, knowledge and innovation. Perhaps, the kind of care that librarians provide to the ailing economy could be equated to that of nurses in assisting patients through illness. With all things considered, now is a time to act, preserve, and persevere. Let’s do our part to help aid the recovery!

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Library users expect us to provide them with access to more and more of their content in electronic format, including journal backfiles and archives. Researchers already liked to trace the history of their topic by looking up the articles cited in the articles they were reading. Beilstein and Gmelin have always indexed chemical information back to the 1770s, and GeoRef indexed geological information from 1785 to the present. Now, several other indexing and abstracting services have added earlier content to their databases, including Biological Abstracts, Chemical Abstracts, Web of Science (Science Citation Index), COMPENDEX (Engineering Index), and INSPEC (Physics Abstracts, Electrical & Electronics Abstracts, and Computer & Control Abstracts). The searching of these databases by our users now also creates a demand for the earlier journal literature. But, the budget to pay for that earlier content competes with the budget for recent content, and priorities must be made. This article covers some of the issues in selecting the earlier content and is intended for both librarians and publishers.

For librarians, a determination needs to be made in what is requested the most, what is available, and what is affordable. Most likely, users are requesting what is already available in the library’s collection in paper format, microform, or storage. But, if the organization’s research focus has changed over the years, users may even be requesting articles not in the original collection. At the University of Akron (UA), we have a strong research interest in polymers. UA belongs to the OhioLINK consortium, which includes most of the colleges and universities in Ohio. OhioLINK has loaded the full-text of many publishers’ journals on its own server; although, for the American Chemical Society (ACS) journals, it has loaded only the metadata, and we access the full-text at the ACS Website. The OhioLINK server makes it easy to obtain usage statistics, and it is no surprise to us that the journal, Polymer, has the highest usage. Therefore, I assumed that there might be a great interest in the backfile for this title. The journal, Macromolecules, actually may be used more, but I do not have ready access to the ACS electronic journal statistics, and even though OhioLINK tracks the usage on this title through the metadata on its own server, many users access it directly at the ACS Website. OhioLINK purchased the ACS backfile, and so I did not need to consider that publisher for purchase or lease, or make the extra effort to get accurate usage statistics for ACS journals.

The next step is to determine if the backfile for the journal, Polymer, is available. Indeed, it is available, but in a package with 107 other Elsevier materials science journals. Most of the scientific publishers make their backfiles available in packages with one or two exceptions, such as Lancet for Elsevier, and Angewandte Chemie International Edition for Wiley. It is likely that you will be paying for titles that have lower usage along with the highly used titles. To make a fairer, but certainly not perfect comparison, you should look at the usage on all of the titles in one package and compare it with the usage on all of the titles in another package. You might also look at the number of years available in the backfile for the highest used titles. And, if available, you might look at the usage on your paper, microform, and storage collections and interlibrary loan statistics.

For The University of Akron, the table on the next page shows which 30 journals had the highest number of downloads on the OhioLINK server in 2006. The publishers appearing most often in the list of the most downloaded journals are Wiley, Elsevier and the American Psychological Association (APA). The OhioLINK server already includes the backfiles of the APA journals.

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Endnotes


Therefore, a determination should be made of which packages include the non-APA journals downloaded most and what their cost might be. Fortunately, both Wiley and Elsevier allow you to purchase their backfiles with a one-time fee that includes permanent access, and so they were easier to compare than if they had a pricing model different from each other.

The Elsevier Materials Science backfile includes Polymer, Biomaterials, Progress in Polymer Science, European Polymer Journal, and Journal of Colloid and Interface Science and cost $46,220 to purchase in 2007 for our size institution. The Elsevier Organic Chemistry backfile includes Tetrahedron and Tetrahedron Letters and would cost $32,270 to purchase in 2008, but only includes eight titles altogether, and the other titles are used a great deal less. Angewandte Chemie International Edition could be purchased outside of a package from Wiley in 2006 for $11,000. The Wiley Polymer backfile includes Journal of Applied Polymer Science, Journal of Polymer Science Parts A and B, Macromolecular Rapid Communications, and Macromolecular Chemistry and Physics and cost $22,000 to purchase in 2006. The Wiley Materials Science backfile includes Advanced Materials and cost $11,000 to purchase in 2006. Therefore, the three Wiley backfiles could be purchased for approximately the same cost as the Elsevier Materials Science backfile, and the Wiley backfiles would include seven of the most downloaded titles, whereas the Elsevier backfile would include only five of the titles. Why was the Wiley Materials Science backfile considered at all, when it included only one of the most downloaded titles? Several of the other titles in this collection were deemed important from experience and are also of current interest to the university, including Journal of Biomedical Materials Research Parts A and B (657 downloads), Journal of Vinyl & Additive Technology (26 downloads), Polymer Engineering & Science (374 downloads), and Polymer Composites (119 downloads). The latter three journals are published by the Society of Plastics Engineers (SPE), but provided electronically by Wiley and are on the OhioLINK server for the years 2004 to the present, whereas the Elsevier journals go back to 1995. If the SPE journals went back to 1995, I believe their usage would have been a great deal higher. Actually, it was a difficult decision to make about which to purchase first, Wiley or Elsevier, since they were so similar in cost. Of the titles in the top 30 downloads, Polymer started in 1960, whereas the Journal of Polymer Science started in 1946, Journal of Applied Polymer Science started in 1959, and Macromolecular Chemistry, the predecessor to Macromolecular Chemistry and Physics, started in 1947. So, the Wiley journals might be considered the start of the polymer literature, or at least the start of journals devoted entirely to the subject of polymers. Macromolecules began publication in 1968. Most other polymer journals began their publication in the 1960s or later.

Another consideration is whether you already have the backfiles of the highest used journals in any other format, such as paper or microform. Of the scientific journals in the above table, we do not have any holdings for Journal of Power Sources, whereas this publication began in 1976, and our electronic access starts with 1995. Our paper and electronic access to Advanced Materials started with 1998, whereas this title began in 1989. So, electronic access to the backfiles of these two titles would give us access to several years we could not access before, except through interlibrary loan or pay-per-view. Advanced Materials was included in the Wiley Materials Science backfile that we purchased first. Journal of Power Sources is included in the Elsevier Chemical Engineering backfile that I hope to purchase next. In 2006, we purchased all three of the abovementioned Wiley backfiles, and, in 2007, we purchased the Elsevier Materials Science backfile. OhioLINK has had access to the American Chemical Society, Royal Society of Chemistry, and Springer (which includes Kluwer).
You may consider purchasing more than one backfile from a publisher at the same time in order to save money, and we were able to save five percent of the cost by purchasing all three Wiley backfiles together. But, trying to find the $80,000 to purchase Elsevier Chemistry (Complete), which includes Chemical Engineering, Inorganic Chemistry, Organic Chemistry, and Physical and Analytical Chemistry, in the same year would be difficult, even though it would save $42,000 over purchasing them separately.

As mentioned earlier, Wiley and Elsevier allow you to purchase their backfiles for permanent access with a one-time fee, as does Springer. Some publishers allow you to lease each year, or purchase, but with a continuing access fee. I would like to purchase the Taylor & Francis Chemistry backfile, but finding the $65,000 would be difficult, and I dislike the idea of paying a $750 annual maintenance fee, in addition. Lease the “A-Pages” backfile at $809.5 per year is also a considerable amount of money. Even though our users request a significant number of interlibrary loans for articles in this collection, it would be difficult to justify the cost of purchasing or leasing the backfile. Furthermore, the Chemistry backfile includes Parts A and C of the Journal of Macromolecular Science, but not Part B. Part B is included in the Physics backfile, which would cost an additional $45,000 to purchase or $5,450 per year to lease.

Before discarding or sending the paper formats to storage of titles which you have purchased electronically, compare the paper format with the electronic to ensure that all of the content is there. The American Chemical Society journals, Analytical Chemistry and Environmental Science & Technology, do not have the “A-Pages” online for the earlier years. The “A-Pages” contain the news, features, and departments, and have a separate numbering scheme and table of contents from the research articles. And, the supporting (supplementary) information for all of the ACS journals is not yet available online for the earlier years.

In many cases, Springer puts all of the content under one title, even though the journal may have had several title changes. That makes it difficult for users to find, if it is not under the title that is cited. As an example, all of the years for Russian Chemical Bulletin are available at SpringerLink under that title from 1952 to the present, but it is cited as Bulletin of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Division of Chemical Science from 1952 to 1991. In 1992, it changed the title to Bulletin of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Division of Chemical Science. In 1993, it became the current title, Russian Chemical Bulletin. Because many links existing to the ISSN to find the full-text, they will not find the earlier years of this title because each title change also had a change in the ISSN. Those databases which link with DOIs may work, however, including Beilstein and CrossRef.

There are various rationales for why a publisher may offer backfiles in packages rather than as individual titles. The packages usually include all of the title changes and many of the cessations, and it is much more efficient to sell several titles at the same time, than to sell titles one-by-one. However, as a librarian, I think I would save money by purchasing titles individually because I would purchase the titles which are requested the most from a variety of publishers, and as my budget permitted each year. As it is now, I shall purchase only those packages which contain a large number of titles that I want, and as I can afford them. I prefer to purchase backfiles with a one-time fee, giving me permanent access, without annual access fees. I need to obtain special funding to purchase the backfiles, that special funding is not available every year, and when it is available, the amounts vary from year to year. If I need to pay annual access fees, then eventually I may need to make a choice between renewing a current subscription and renewing access to a backfile.

I would like to have the pay-per-view option without jumping through hoops, such as registering and requiring that I remember a login ID and password for something that I am not going to access very often. I would also like to pay a reasonable price for this article. Wiley increased their pay-per-view price from $25 to $29.95 this year, and Taylor & Francis increased theirs from $32 to $35. I would like to see Portico (www.portico.org) and JSTOR (www.jstor.org) offer the...
column editor’s note: The following interview is fictional. The names of the library, its director, the issues involved, and the decisions made by the librarians and the college during the project, of course, are real and (as far as possible) perfectly accurate, but the interview itself never happened. It is rather a construct, a literary devise used to highlight and explain the catawba library renovation experience. — SM

Several of us here at against the grain recently visited catawba college in Salisbury, North Carolina and its newly renovated and expanded Corriher-Linn-Black Library. We had heard that the renovation was somewhat peculiar — somewhat out of the ordinary. In short, we had been told that the project was largely successful but clearly unorthodox — different from the way libraries were usually remodeled. We wanted to see for ourselves. From what we could discern before our visit, it seemed that Catawba's entire approach to its project invited two key questions. First, can you renovate your library on a shoestring and create something beautiful? And secondly, can you break all of the standard renovation rules and get away with it?

We didn’t think so, but we couldn’t wait to find out. On a crisp autumn morning we drove up to Salisbury, a small town in the heart of the North Carolina Piedmont, just north of Charlotte to visit the library and to interview its director, Steve McKinzie. Catawba boasts of a solid curriculum, a nationally-recognized theatre department, a burgeoning athletic program, and now a newly reworked library.

We caught up with the director in his library office that afternoon, an office tucked away on the corner of the library’s main floor.

ATG: Well, Steve, thank you so much for being willing to be interviewed — to take on some of our questions.

SM: On the contrary, it is an honor to have anything to do with Against the Grain. You’ve a great publication. It is great to have you here.

ATG: Well, we are certainly impressed with what we’ve seen here so far. We just now took a tour with one of your librarians. The building looks great. You’ve a large mezzanine crammed with soft comfortable seating — a spacious information commons and a good many group study rooms.

SM: Yes, beauty and warmth were some of what we were after. We are all pretty pleased with the results.

ATG: Can you give us a sense of the project’s scope? Try to give our readers an overview of what has been involved. How large was the library? How big is it now? Was it expanded?

SM: Well, what we did was capitalize on the building’s strengths. As you noted, we’ve a large open reading room area just as you enter the library. It now houses our information commons and reading area that sometimes doubles for receptions. As for the size, the library is about 25,000 square feet — rather small in a way, although the renovation actually expanded our square footage. There had been a small area in the lower level that had been home to computer services. They moved out just prior to the renovation. We took over their space. We’ve a basement, a main level, and a mezzanine.

ATG: Did you say 25,000 square feet? That is really rather small for an academic library. It seems much bigger than that.

SM: Well, you’re right. It does seem larger. That’s by design. We’ve very tall ceilings on our main level, as you noticed, and we’ve a number of tall windows. We took that airy sense of space and highlighted it by adding glass along the mezzanine. We also made sure that the mezzanine study rooms had glass doors and walls, what our architect called a “store front design.” That brought in light from the outside and illuminated the building. It was all part of an effort to capitalize on our strengths and to give our public space — the soft seating in the mezzanine, the information commons in the main level, the Wentz reading room — a sense of warmth and size. On