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From Field of Dreams to the Godfather: Collection Development Today

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From Field of Dreams to the Godfather: Collection Development Today
by Curt Holleman (SMU, Dallas, Texas) <chollema@mail.smu.edu>

I want to begin in the days of yesteryear when we actually thought that our mission in life was to build collections for all time. Do you remember the time when directors of libraries actually boasted about volume counts? As in, “We are the seventh biggest library in the ARL.” Or, “We now have 3,245,971 volumes in our libraries.” Do you hear much of that anymore? Maybe when the library passes a threshold, like its three millionth volume, or its five millionth volume. More often you hear the sentiment: “I just wish that we could outlaw volume counts.” I have heard directors of small libraries say this, and I have heard collection development librarians at major libraries say the same thing. Why? Because we no longer see ourselves as building lasting collections. Instead we want credit for our new document delivery initiatives, and we certainly want credit for our fulltext electronic journals online.

I have named the good old days after the movie, Field of Dreams. In the movie, the hero, relying on the mantra, “Build it, and they will come,” builds a baseball field in the middle of Iowa. When I saw the movie, the audience was moved to tears of rapture, followed by loud sniffing, when this baseball field in the middle of nowhere magically fills with people at the end of the movie. I was not so moved, but, then, I had not yet thought about the analogy with library collections. If I had, I would have been sobbing for joy along with my fellow moviegoers.

“Build it, and they will come.” In a world like that, what did collection development librarians think about? They thought about collection evaluation, and they developed a tool called the ARL/RLG Conspicuous so that every library could evaluate any of thousands of subject areas on their scale from one to five, minimal to comprehensive. They thought about balance; they tried to collect materials from the political left and the political right so that their readers could see all sides. They thought a lot about approval plans; how to obtain easily the books that they wanted both from the United States and from around the world.

My personal favorite from the old days was the topic of fund allocation: it engaged the best minds in collection development, and in its heyday we saw thousands of crazy allocation formulas flying around. It no longer seems to be a very popular topic. Finding the best allocation

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If Rumors Were Horses

The fabulous Adrian W. Alexander has been named Executive Director, Big 12 Plus Libraries Consortium, Linda Hall Library, 5109 Cherry Street, Kansas, MO 64110-2498. His phone number is 816-926-8765, and fax number is 816-926-8790. Adrian’s email is <alexandera@ill.lib.missouri.edu>. Congratulations Adrian!

Information Quest, Dawson’s great innovative source for periodicals information, is merging operations in Westwood, Mass. with Faxon’s Information Services Group. This means that Information Quest is beyond the development stage and is into the marketing and sales mode, under the direction of our own Dan Tonkery. David Cheatham is Director of Research and Development for ISG and will report to Vern Cain. Jan Peterson is Vice President of Publisher Relations, Faxon ISG and will report to Dan Tonkery.

We told you back in November that Ron Akle had been named President of SilverPlatter Information’s U.S. region. Well, Ron has also recently been named CEO of SilverPlatter.

From the law-lib listserv, and Judy Meadows, AALL President – The AALL (American Association of Law Librarians) has been closely monitoring the Kramerbook/Barnes and Noble situation and “is concerned with

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Field of Dreams
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cation formula today would be a little like finding the best use for a 286 computer. It
would be impressive, but nobody would be
very interested.

"Build it, and they will come." Is this to-
totally outmoded advice? I don’t think so. In
fact, I think that Harvard, the Library of
Congress, and many special collections still
follow it. But most of us live in a world
where this has been discredited in favor of
concepts like: access over ownership; just-
in-time, not just-in-case; and "People don’t
read anymore; they hate having to find stuff
in libraries. Give them online journals; that’s
what they like."

For a time, document delivery seemed
to be the answer. Beginning about five or
ten years ago, library directors started to
take pride in building up their interlibrary
loan staffs at the expense of collections.
There was a facetious definition of a col-
collection development librarian: the collection
development librarian is a librarian who
would rather provide for the patron he/she
ever met than the one he/she has standing
before him. Interlibrary loan and document
delivery are most emphatically for the pa-
tron that you have met.

In our day of accountability, who could
object? You are no longer buying on specu-
lation; you are simply funding the supply
of direct demands. There is no doubt that
the non-collection paradigm has found its
place in many small libraries and some large
ones. But like all simple solutions to com-
plex problems, the just-in-time solution seems
very good for some things (like eso-
teric science journals) and
very poor for other things
((like most books). Lib-
raries most
definitely have moved toward satisfying far
more of their demand in the just-in-time
mode, but it no longer seems to be an ever-
ingrowing trend that will end with the death
of collections.

There are just two things I remember
about The Godfather. One is a character
waking up with a dead horse’s head in his
bed. He didn’t like that. The other is Mar-
ion Brando’s saying, "I will make you an offer
you can’t refuse." If I recall, the recipient(s)
of this offer didn’t mind it so much that they
didn’t take it. I call today’s world for librar-
ies the world of The Godfather. We are
getting offers that we cannot refuse. This is
especially true of small and medium-sized
libraries, and the chance to get huge data-
bases for practically nothing is taking the
luster off the document-delivery paradigm
for many libraries.

I am talking about consortial deals. In
fact, the most spectacular consortial deals
are not even for normal consortia. In the
state of Ohio, forty institutions will receive
all of Elsevier’s periodicals electronically
over a period of three years for the tidy sum
of $23 million. The state of Georgia sup-
ports a project called Galileo with $9 mil-
ion per year, and it sends multiple databases
to libraries of every kind across the state.
I don’t imagine that many libraries eligible
to receive these databases through the state
find it in their hearts to refuse them.

In Texas, we have our own humble project
called TexShare. Through a combination
of state funding and monster dis-
counts, we receive the two major UMI data-
bases that normally would cost as
$30,000 to $40,000
for a mere $5,500. Smaller libraries get them
for even less. Now you could quibble and
complain, as a librarian on the Internet re-
cently did, that UMI’s ABI/INFORM re-
cently removed half a dozen important
fulltext titles retrospectively. And I admit,
it is unsettling that the vendors who supply
current fulltext articles from multiple pub-
lishers have a loss rate of perhaps five per-
cent a year of their fulltext titles. If you de-
pend on electronic fulltext for your access
to a periodical through a major vendor, you
will have to scramble any time that one of
their deals with a periodical publisher falls
through. Even so, I was surprised as I sat in
a meeting in Austin last month and heard
several small libraries reject the fantastic
discount on UMI that TexShare offered.
They truly refused the offer you can’t refuse.

At SMU we get involved with ever-
changing groups of
libraries in our quest for consortial
deals. One of the
greatest offers ever
was on Project
Muse. Project
Muse is an electronic database of Johns
Hopkins University Press journals. One
might question the value of having all of
the Johns Hopkins journals together in one
place, but it is hard to fault their electronic
interface. It is a pleasure to work with.

Project Muse offers a discount on the
paper journals for libraries purchasing elec-
tronic access. For us, the consortial discount
was so good that we would pay less for the
paper and electronic together than we were
paying for the paper alone. Pay less; get
more. This was a true no-brainer; it was the
deal we couldn’t refuse. Unfortunately,
Johns Hopkins University Press now makes
libraries choose either the paper discount
OR the consortial discount.

We got together with another group of
libraries to purchase Academic Press’s
product called IDEAL. IDEAL is perhaps
typical of many consortial offers today. It is
an extremely good deal for the smaller lib-
RARY involved in it, and more like a normal
purchase for the larger library. Basically, ev-
ery library in the consortium ends up with
the same electronic product, but they pay
according to how many journals they were
subscribing to at the start. In our consor-
tium, we ended up with 124 journals. Some
libraries had only been subscribing to two
or three of them, and they are paying some-
thing like $500 for journals that are worth
more like $100,000. This is an offer that they
cannot refuse.

IDEAL has a very complicated system
of discounts and add-on costs, but basically

The deals that we are getting with the
new technology are indeed too good to refuse.

If you are marooned somewhere
without a consortium, find one.