November 2013

Biz of Acq-Selecting and Processing Electronic Resources: How to Plug Libraries into the Workflow

Rob Withers  
*Miami University Libraries, rwithers@lib.muohio.edu*

Sandra K. Paul  
*SKP Associates, SKPAssoc@cwixmail.com*

Albert Simmonds  
*SKP Associates, awsimmo@ibm.net*

Rob Richards  
*University of Colorado Law Library, rrichard@stripe.colorado.edu*

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**Recommended Citation**  
Withers, Rob; Paul, Sandra K.; Simmonds, Albert; and Richards, Rob (1999) "Biz of Acq-Selecting and Processing Electronic Resources: How to Plug Libraries into the Workflow," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 11: Iss. 6, Article 32.  
DOI: [https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3889](https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3889)

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Biz of Acq — Selecting and Processing Electronic Resources: How to Plug Librarians into the Workflow

by Rob Withers (Electronic Information Services Librarian, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio 45056) <rwithers@lib.muohio.edu>

Column Editor: Rob Richards (Technical Services Librarian, University of Colorado Law Library) <rrichard@stripe.colorado.edu>

Column Editor's Note: Electronic resources take up more and more of our time and attention as acquisitions librarians. Because of their particular nature as digital entities, and because of the complex acquisitions arrangements they often require, electronic products are forcing librarians to rethink and reform procedures for selection and integration of materials into the collection. In this month's column, Rob Withers, Electronic Information Services Librarian at Miami University, draws on a new survey of librarians, as well as recent library science literature, to describe how libraries are adapting acquisitions and collection development processes to the digital age. —RR

Libraries have been adding a growing number of electronic resources to their collections, and the availability of resources over the Internet has fueled this proliferation. In his 1996 article, Gene Allen notes that librarians he surveyed predicted that 10 years from the date of his survey, expenditures for electronic resources would be anywhere from 5% to 25% of their budget. Online products do not “play by the rules” set for selecting, ordering, and processing library materials because: technical prowess may be needed to assess the feasibility of a product in a particular environment; the library does not receive physical copies to inspect and process; electronic resources may be bundled together with dozens or even hundreds of products; online products may be purchased by a consortium, rather than by a single institution.

Adding electronic resources to the collection therefore poses a number of questions to those involved with acquisitions: Who should be involved in evaluating resources prior to order placement? How are electronic resources paid for? How are they inspected and checked in when they become available? Who is notified after they have been received? What changes in job descriptions are needed to ensure the ability to select, order, and process these materials?

To answer these questions, this column will rely on a survey of existing literature concerned with processing electronic resources. In addition, responses to a questionnaire posted to AcqNet-L and Cdldev-L will help to explore the ways that libraries are coping with the challenges posed by the addition of electronic resources, particularly Internet resources, to their collections.

Selecting and Ordering

In an article on electronic resources, one librarian stated: “Selections: they’re not just for collection development librarians any more.” Responses to a survey posted to Cdldev-L and AcqNet-L support her statement. A majority of respondents (89%) indicated that collection development librarians selected electronic resources. However, 84% of respondents indicated that other types of librarians could also select items. 72% reported that reference librarians could select. 44% reported that electronic resources librarians could select, 16% reported that systems librarians could make selection decisions, and 17% of institutions reported that selection decisions could be made by other positions. Smaller libraries at which no position dedicated exclusively to collection development

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through technology, and there has been a concern that rights-holders may use some form of anti-copying technology to prevent even legally-permitted copying.

An important change is the provision for compensation to rights-holders when a copy is made for the purposes of private copying, and illustration for teaching and scientific research. Libraries are now also able to make copies of items for the purposes of archiving and conservation purposes. In the initial proposal, libraries would be in breach of copyright for these activities.

There are quite a number of detailed changes in other articles, but in the main these do not have a substantive impact on libraries and information services. One final addition to the Amended Proposal is the establishment of a Contact Committee, set up with representatives of the competent authorities of the Member States, to monitor progress with the implementation of the Directive, provide a forum for the exchange of information, and to examine development in the sector. This approach is similar to the mechanism set up under the Data Protection Directive and is very much to be welcomed.

Timetable for implementation

Every six months a Member State in rotation takes the responsibility of acting as the President of the European Commission, and currently it is Finland, which was keen to have pushed through the directive as part of its commitment to information society developments. Approval of the Directive will have to be made by the Council of Ministers of each Member State responsible for what is called the Internal Market. A Council Working Party was set up earlier in the year to work through amendments suggested by the Parliament and other groups.

At a meeting in September, discussion was mainly focused on Article 6 and it seems that libraries and other user groups’ concerns were taken on board by almost all national experts, so that a favourable new wording of Article 6 is likely to be proposed. The next meeting of the working party on the Directive was held on 28-29 October in Helsinki, and under discussion were the evolution of conditions of contracts and licenses concerning digital use, technological protection systems and rights management information, liability and the institution of blocking illegal distribution of protected works, and the question of applicable law in the digital environment.

A status report will be presented at the Internal Market Council on 7 December. It seems now that the Finnish presidency will not be able to reach a political agreement or common position in this year and that the dossier will move on to the Portuguese presidency, though little change in direction or commitment is likely. The Portuguese presidency plans to reach a political agreement/common position in March 2000. This means that it is likely that the Directive will have to be implemented by Member States in 2003.
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ment existed were most likely to report selections made by
someone other than a collection development librarian. Some larger
university and public libraries mentioned that assistant directors par-
icipated in selection decisions, as well.

Selection decisions undergo at least some review at all respond-
ing libraries: 30% reported that selection decisions were “sometimes”
reviewed and 61% that they was “always” reviewed. The person or
persons responsible for reviewing decisions vary enormously. As one
person noted, the need to “worry about implementation, access, copyright,
and quality control” often means that different individuals with
different perspectives must assess each electronic product. Of those
libraries responding to the survey, 45% indicated that decisions are
reviewed by a committee. At smaller libraries serving colleges and
community colleges, this percentage was lower—17% and 33%, re-
spectively, whereas 72% of larger university libraries used a com-
mittee to evaluate decisions. Of those institutions not relying on a
committee, 14 required approval from a department head or direct-
or, one required approval from a systems librarian, and one required
approval from an electronic resources librarian. Make-up of the com-
mittees that approve orders varies, but may include systems librarians
(17%); electronic resources librarians; acquisitions librarians (2%). Of those
dependencies, the primary criteria used to determine which decisions are
reviewed are cost (75%), compatibility with library hardware/software
(62%), cross-disciplinary coverage (55%), and consortial purchases (58%).

Evaluating electronic products is difficult without using the prod-
uct. As one librarian observed, assessing electronic products can re-
quire gauging layout, graphics, audio/video components, ease of use,
and response time. She suggests that many librarians rely on thirty-
day trials. The results of our survey indicate that 95% of users sometimes
take advantage of trial offers. Only slightly less popular are
demonstrations, which 86% of libraries used. Approximately a third
of responding institutions, particularly those with less extensive collec-
tions, sometimes visit other libraries that have the product. One insti-
tution occasionally uses interlibrary loans to obtain multimedia products.

A variety of pricing structures exists for electronic resources: lib-
raries may pay for a single item, a package of items, or a combina-
tion of print/electronic subscriptions; they may purchase individually
or as members of a consortium; and they may pay for a site
license, or for a product limited to a certain number of simultaneous
users. The types of funds used to pay for electronic products are as
varied as the purchasing options. Libraries rely on a mix of funds to
pay for electronic products. Of those libraries responding to the
survey, 70% had a fund or funds devoted to electronic resources.
In several instances, these funds were used for all electronic products,
but most libraries utilize these funds for resources which cross dis-
ciplinary boundaries or are general reference resources. Also used are
serials funds for a particular discipline (37%), monographic funds for
a particular discipline (33%), general serials funds (34%), and
general monographic funds (23%). As one author speculated in her
1998 article, most libraries rely on electronic funds for package deals
including items relevant to many fields, but ordinarily use discipline-
specific funds for other resources. Two-thirds of libraries surveyed
used a combination of these types of funds; 29% used a separate
electronic resources fund for all purchases, and 5% relied on serials
funds. Institutions relying solely on one fund tended to be smaller,
but did include eight university libraries. Surprisingly, although elec-
tronic purchases are essentially serial in nature—in that they require a
continuing commitment of funds—nonetheless monographic funds are
widely used for such purchases.

Most libraries cannot use funds from the materials budget for
software/hardware. In his study of 15 Midwestern university librar-
ies, Norman found that only 22% of libraries could purchase hard-
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So why, you may ask, am I filling a column in
2000 with all this information? The reason is because the new Directive will create a
framework for licence agreements for downloading and using electronic
material, and even though it may be several years before the law has to
be complied with, it would make good sense to start now, rather than
change the agreements, and internal procedures, in a couple of years’
time. If you want to monitor developments, then you need to book-
mark just one Web site, and that is www.eblida.org. EBLIDA is an
umbrella organisation for library, documentation and archive
organisations in Europe, and also provides the Web site for the Euro-
pean Fair Practices in Copyright campaign.

Other news

The management of electronic journals is still very much a hot
topic in the UK. A new email list has been set up in the UK especially
for those involved in developing electronic collections of information
in the UK (and beyond). Topics include collection development strate-
gies, identifying/assessing/acquiring content, collaborative collect-
ing at local/regional/national levels, and other topical aspects of elec-
tronic collection management. More information can be obtained from
alia.wise@kcl.ac.uk. The UK Serials Group ran a very successful
conference on the promotion and management of electronic journals
in October 1999, and some of the papers will appear in Serials in due
course. The general view of the publishers and librarians present was
that electronic journal availability and use was much greater than might
have been anticipated at even this time last year. The UKSG Annual
Conference will take place at the University of Keele on April 10-12,
2000. (www.uksg.org). Finally, I had hoped to be able to comment on
the merger of the subscription agency activities of Swets and Blackwells,
but the agreement has still not been finalised, though it is anticipated that this
will take place towards the end of November.
Most libraries have now joined Minnesota in including electronic resources in their integrated system and in their technical services workflow. However, integrating electronic resources with print resources raises new questions: How and by whom are they checked in? How is an electronic item inspected for defects? And who is notified of its arrival and expected to process it?

Some libraries opt not to “inspect” electronic resources at all: 16% indicated that they did not inspect such resources, while another 36% indicated that they only spot-checked resources. Such libraries often indicated that they expected selectors to have inspected items for defects prior to placing an order, or that they were informed of problems by feedback from public services staff or users. However, many other libraries do systematically inspect their receipts, and several libraries noted that they had a schedule for checking links on materials. Libraries that do systematically inspect electronic receipts rely most often on selectors (55%), systems personnel (43%), reference librarians (37%), heads of collection development (35%), and electronic resources librarians (10%). Used by less than 10% of responding libraries were acquisitions librarians, media librarians, and catalogers. Some libraries responding to the survey have firm guidelines for the inspection of materials. One library noted that a trial of the product was required before it could be ordered. Another library requires a selector to be designated as a “point person” who evaluates the product, creates information manuals for the product, trains staff for other librarians, and remains the in-house expert on that product once it is available at the library.

Cataloging issues relating to electronic resources affect acquisitions because “there is no longer an assumed path to cataloging after acquisitions of a remotely accessed title, as there has been for all but a subset of print materials. There is not piece received to trigger cataloging, and not all remote resources are cataloged.”

Following check-in, libraries can and do exercise a number of options for making electronic resources available, and consequently, for routing materials out of the acquisitions and/or serials department. Close to two-thirds of responding libraries continue to catalog their electronic resources in their OPACs, and an even greater majority (93%) made their electronic resources available via library Web pages. University libraries (90%) were most likely to rely on Web pages, while only 50% of colleges and 66% of community colleges did so. Subject pages developed by users are also frequently used by 45% of all responders; again, university libraries were more likely to use them (49%) than community colleges (33%) and colleges (20%), or other institutions. This overlap is not surprising. The University of Minnesota relies on Web pages and catalogs to provide access to electronic titles. Some librarians at that institution want to continue adding links to the Web page because users find it convenient; in addition, despite attempts to review holdings, each review still identifies items that have not been cataloged. Other

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Endnotes


7. Margaret Ann Johnson, “Managing the Acquisition of Electronic Resources,” Technicalities 18 n. 6 (June 1998) 11.


11. Margaret Ann Johnson, “Managing the Acquisition of Electronic Resources,” Technicalities 18 n. 6 (June 1998) 12.


15. DurANCEAU, 93–94.

16. DurANCEAU, 94.

17. DurANCEAU, 95.
librarians object to separating information by format and find the Web page list, now close to 500 items, cumbersome to maintain.15

One way of reducing the time and effort needed to maintain Web pages which list electronic resources is to export data from cataloging records and use it to dynamically generate Web pages which list electronic products. A small number of the institutions surveyed for this article (7%) do so, and another 7%, including the author’s institution, are working to develop such products. At a recent ALA discussion on electronic serials, the audience leaned toward using a combination of dynamically generated Web pages and catalog records. They felt that users would prefer to find information displayed in a grouping that might prompt use as opposed to finding individual items in the catalog.14

A wide variety of staff positions is needed to support electronic resources and maintain the means of accessing them. Not surprisingly, the survey used in this article found that a broad cross-section of library staff may be notified upon arrival of an item. The survey results indicate that those notified include the selector who ordered it (55% of libraries), the systems office (42%), and head of reference (37%), head of collection development (35%), and electronic resources librarians (10%). Notified at less than 10% of responding libraries were catalogers, faculty members, media science librarians, and administrators. Two-thirds of the libraries responding to the survey indicated that they notified librarians in more than one of these categories upon receipt of electronic resources. Two libraries issued a library-wide electronic mailing.

Impact on Personnel

The explosion of electronic resources being incorporated into everyday library work has changed work routines, and, in some places, has resulted in the creation of new jobs or the re-structuring of already existing positions. Ellen Fannie Duranceau’s informal survey of postings to listservs in 1997 revealed advertisements for newly created technical services positions, including “electronic access librarian,” “Electronic Publishing and Collections Librarian,” and “Scholarly Communication Librarian.”15 Of those libraries responding to the survey done for this column, 35% of libraries report such changes, most often in acquisitions (10% of respondents), serials cataloging (7%), electronic resources (7%), cataloging (3%), serials acquisitions (5%), or collection development (3%). Another trend is writing new responsibilities into library positions. As examples of this trend, Duranceau’s 1997 study also mentions serials librarians with electronic resources added to their job descriptions, and acquisitions librarians who are asked to assume responsibility for licensing and negotiating.16

An instance of such a change is the recently created Acquisitions Coordinator at the University of Wisconsin. This trend is ongoing; several respondents cited examples of new or re-written positions for which they were planning or seeking approval.

Conclusion

Electronic products do not fall neatly into traditional definitions of information products; digital resources, therefore, compel libraries to change practices and staffing in order to accommodate these new resources. For example, electronic products blur the lines between monograph and serial, and addressing the issues of copyright, access, and quality control raised by electronic resources does not fall exclusively into any one traditional library unit. Dealing with electronic resources is a trial and error process; a variety of approaches are currently evolving. One observer notes that the challenges presented by adjusting workflows to integrate electronic resources provide the potential for “confusion, ambivalence, and tears.” These challenges have doubtless had such effects. However, as this article demonstrates, it is also true that librarians and library staff from many parts of the library are successfully working together to meet these challenges.

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Webworthy

Column Editor: Pamela M. Rose (Web Services and Library Promotion Coordinator, Health Sciences Library, University of Buffalo)
<pnrose@acsu.buffalo.edu> http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~pnrose

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Cancer

The second leading cause of death in the nation affects everything from art to finances to wills. The University of Pennsylvania Cancer Center maintains Oncolink, which offers a wealth of information to patients and their doctors, information which not only informs treatment choices, but also provides financial assistance (American Vatical Corporation which purchases Life Insurance Policies for cash), aesthetic relief (Confronting Cancer Through Art), conference information, and book reviews. http://oncolink.upenn.edu/

Chronology

Need to know the exact time, to the fraction-of-a-second? Check the National Institutes of Standards and Technology Official U.S. Time site, where you can select a time zone, drop over to the exhibits area and find out what Daylight Saving Time is and why we use it, or wander through a complete history of time. Note that Coordinated Universal Time, one of the zones available, is continued on page 84