Pricing Models for Electronic Resources: What's on the Menu?

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Publishers and librarians alike feel inundated by the ever-increasing number of available pricing options for e-resources. This multiplicity can prove challenging to publishers and vendors who are trying to determine the best way to generate new income, maintain their current customer base, and launch new products. Meanwhile, many of their primary customers, libraries, are bemoaning the confusion and staffing issues related to understanding, negotiating, and managing so many different models. Yet this situation can’t be bad for everyone in the long run. It takes two to tango, and if these agreements don’t suit both publishers and libraries, they will soon cease to exist.

In many ways confusion and multiplicity equals opportunity. Sure, when I go to my favorite Chinese restaurant, it is hard to choose from among the literally hundreds of items on the menu. I may not be exactly sure of all the differences among all the options (waiter, can you tell me the difference between General Tso’s Chicken and Szechuan Chicken?) and it may take me a while to decide what I want, but that doesn’t mean I’d necessarily be better off at a different restaurant with a smaller menu and fewer choices.

In this issue of ATG, four experienced professionals help us make sense of today’s lengthy menu of pricing options by examining them from multiple perspectives. Christine Fischer, Head of Acquisitions at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, guides us through the major choices, highlighting the most significant pricing models, bundling practices, and consortium issues.

Rick Anderson, Director of Resource Acquisition at the University of Nevada-Reno, views

If Rumors Were Horses

Just back from a great workshop in Columbia, SC, called Conquering the Tenure Terrors. The workshop was organized by the vivacious Karen Brown <KWBrown@gwm.sc.edu> (USC) and Vice Chair of South Carolina Association’s College and University Section) and the equally lively Kate Boyd (Chair of the Section and Digital Collections Librarian, USC). The keynote speech was by the astute Dr. Patricia Senn Brevis (Vice President, Nehemiah Communications, USC) <patricka@nehemiah.sc>. There were many great friends there including Joyce Durant (Francis Marion University), Bill Sudduth (USC), Jess Holley (Clemson), Mary Smalls (South Carolina State), Jane Tuten (USC-Aiken), and many, many others.

Speaking of Pat Brevis (above), turns out she is a long-time friend of Becky Lenzini <rlenzini@earthlink.net> and Ward Shaw from back during CARL/UnCover days. Remember those? It was just at the beginning of unbundling of the article from the journal. I even remember Becky and Ward struggling to think of a name for the company. How the years fly by!

Sad news about the death of the kind, gentle, and hard-working Vicky Speck. Vicky was a long-time member of the Charleston Conference Planning Group and worked for many years on the Charleston Conference Proceedings with Rosann Bazirjan. We will miss her. May she rest in peace.

Vicky was such a quiet, reserved person that many of us didn’t know her very well. But Rosann Bazirjan <rbazirjan@unecg.edu>, who worked with Vicky for many years to publish the Charleston Conference Proceedings, took the time to remember Vicky in this issue, p.12.

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Electronic Resources Pricing: A Variety of Models

by Christine Fischer (UNC Greensboro) <christine_fischer@uncg.edu>

Building and maintaining library collections is increasingly complex. Determining pricing for physical resources actually housed in the bricks and mortar facility is relatively simple. In contrast, libraries must select electronic resources that range from databases to online journals to eBooks, and these information tools are purchased using pricing models that tax every library with their variability. Are we to be charged by use, individual title, or package? Is our institution quoted a charge based upon enrollment as a whole or the number affiliated with the program for a specialized resource? The possibilities seem to be growing as libraries, publishers, subscription vendors, aggregators, and others continue to respond to the changing information resource and access environment.

Cheaper by the Dozen?
Journal titles can be selected individually.

With a thorough knowledge of the library's user community, this option seems reasonable. Focus can be given to the particular disciplines or subject interests that engage patrons. With un...