Managing Our Collections in a Digital Age

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Managing Our Collections in a Digital Age

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This issue focuses on print collections management in a digital age. While numerous libraries are rethinking print collections as a result of their digital availability, actions at individual libraries aggregate into broad questions about the future need for access to print materials. Even as libraries seek additional flexibility in collections management, this critical concern about access and preservation is faced by all types of libraries, from those that traditionally maintained working collections to those that have made significant investments in preservation.

My objective for this issue is to highlight some key initiatives that collectively provide a broad overview of community directions for print collections management and preservation. Each of the initiatives reviewed is grappling with complexity in an environment of reduced resources for libraries and growing pressure on their print collections in particular. One key common theme is the importance of collaborating across institutions to build sustainable trust networks to ensure that preservation and access to materials are not threatened during this format transition.

Two pieces provide overviews of projects being developed to collectively manage journal collections. Emily Stambaugh of the University of California describes WEST, which is constructing a trust model and sustainability plan across multiple consortia and individual libraries to ensure that print materials are accessible and preserved while vastly increasing flexibility at the local level. Frances Boyle, project manager of the UK Research Reserve, describes this national-level initiative to build a shared research infrastructure for higher education, including assured preservation and access, in partnership with the British Library. The vast differences between the approaches being spearheaded by each, in pursuit of fundamentally the same objective, suggests that choices about the design of trust networks are often contingent on time and place.

But journals are by no means the only content type having their print versions called into question, and these issues face small college libraries and large research institutions alike. Bob Kieft, library director at Occidental College, describes innovative approaches to the development and management of monograph collections, including (at least) one year of patron-driven acquisitions as well as a strategic drawdown in holdings in collaboration with neighbors. Judy Russell, dean of libraries at the University of Florida and former Superintendent of Documents, reviews some of the challenges faced by Regional Federal Depository Libraries as well as opportunities for collaboration that have been identified by ASERL member institutions. It is noteworthy that both are looking to regional collaborative trust networks for collections management and preservation.

Finally, my colleague Ross Housewright of Ithaka S+R describes the challenges that some libraries face in strategic planning around print continued on page 16

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If Rumors Were Horses
Left out last time!!! Steve Sutton, the marvelous, is back at YBP as Senior Manager, Digital Content Sales. You will remember that Steve was at YBP previously as VP of Library Services from October 2008 to February 2010 when he took a detour to be VP Director of University and Library Sales at On Demand Books. I see that Steve is registered for the 2010 Charleston Conference!

And news of another long-time friend and colleague, the energetic Carl Teresa! Carl is now General Manager at Wolper Subscription Services. Carl has lots of experience with our industry. He was general manager of EBSCO’s Tenafly, NJ, office for 13 plus years (Nov. 1997-Jan. 2010) and Vice President, Ballen Booksellers (1975-1997) (22 years!). I remember that Carl and Lenny Schrift at Ballen along with Gary Herald at Ambassador were the first companies to support Against the Grain when we started way back in March 1989! That was the year that Hurricane Hugo hit Charleston.

www.wolper.com/ www.ambassadorbooks.com/

Speaking of Against the Grain — so many people to talk to, to know, to interview and so little time! I will never get to know you all! In this issue we have great interviews with Dave Kochalko (ORCID Director and Vice continued on page 6
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collections given the complexities of campus stakeholder preferences. Sensitivity to user needs and ability to deploy strong rationales for decision-making can help leaders navigate difficult choices.

This Against the Grain issue focuses on managing print collections, but the truth is that each of the profiled initiatives is fundamentally about library strategy and services. In an environment of constrained resources, libraries strive to serve user needs with new formats and innovative support roles, find mission alignment with their parent organizations / funding bodies, and avoid deviating from the vital shared value of preservation. Finding the right balance for print collections is imperative to planning a strategy for the library to meet user needs in a changing environment.

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have at hand, and if our “desktop” and everything we’ve left there, comes with it — well, that’ll be a bunch of steps further toward the kind of environment many have been envisioning for a long time.

So let’s all take a look at Blio. Regard it not as an app that runs on a Windows machine, but recognize it as the next step toward a uniform, multi-platform environment that goes where you go — and that isn’t necessarily or automatically run by either of those twin gorillas, Apple or Amazon.

Google’s a pretty big gorilla too. And Microsoft — a fairly-sized gorilla itself — hasn’t died off — The user is also affected by having to install (and possibly purchase) a different app for every publication and launch a new app when switching publications. Clicking on links within the publication can launch yet another Web site (or ironically, a Web window). The library community is further challenged by serving diverse communities only some of whom may access a portion of the licensed content.

Operating system changes, platform dependencies, and user demands for increased functionality have propelled the proliferation of electronic publishing. But the World Wide Web’s success, especially as an information distribution platform, was due to its ability to circumvent most of these issues and that ability was due to the underlying standards infrastructure. The experience is that we are entering this is one of those watching the trend and who decries the move away from open standards and integrated technology, which he argues drove the success of the Web.

If we’re indeed moving to the “Age of the App” where Internet users have to interact with content via some interface that is not a browser, this will have significant implications for publishers. While I am a big fan of publication-specific apps, such as Slaté, the NY Times, the Wall Street Journal, Wired and others, not every publisher — indeed most publishers — are not in a position to afford such an app. They’d also have to modify the app for the iPad platform, the Android platform, the BlackBerry platform, various e-readers, etc. Plus there are all the devices that may develop next year or three years from now and the dev team’s software upgrades that go on continuously. A figure quoted frequently earlier this year during the American Association of Publishers/Professional Scholarly Publishing meeting was that a good custom-built app could cost upwards of $50,000, not counting the cost of the post-release support and tweaking.

A publisher’s $50,000 investment might have a shelf life of 12-18 months because of upgrades to the platform operating system that require an app update or complete redesign. If building one $50,000 application is on the verge of being too expensive for your organization, building three or four is simply not an option.

The agile approach would be a big impediment for many smaller publishers. Even more critical problem is that the publisher now has an application that works on selected devices but not on others, resulting in only partial penetration within the community for the publisher. The user is also affected by having to install (and possibly purchase) a different app for...