

BEST PRACTICE AND COOPERATION IN RESOURCE SHARING AMONG ACADEMIC LIBRARY CONSORTIA: METHODOLOGIES AND INNOVATIONS IN AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, ASIA AND THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

The author's presentation begins by establishing the fiscal context in which academic library resource sharing exists. This consists of a brief examination of the difficult economic factors confronting libraries and the efforts to reconcile these factors with resource sharing goals and objectives. Included in this examination is an overview of the changes in the materials supply industry that have resulted in fewer viable vendors and aggregators, increased costs, and an attendant irresistible pressure to transfer these costs to libraries. The author draws on his experience in working and consulting with academic library consortia in Australia, New Zealand, Asia and the United States on behalf of the materials suppliers that serve them to discuss examples of best practice and cooperation in resource sharing, including interlibrary loan. The presentation provides an environmental scan of methodologies used by consortia, and developed by suppliers, to meet critical and growing collection development and management expectations. These include the introduction and evolution of approval or profiling methodologies and their use in calibrating the identification and purchase of print and digital material by subject (including by subject classification systems like DDC and LC), publisher or interdisciplinary study, and the reduction of unwarranted and expensive duplication across the consortia's holdings or its access. Innovative methods including e-approvals, patron-driven selection, and linked and coordinated profiles across consortia is described. The author examines the current research in evaluating the cost and efficacy of current interlibrary loan methods and the attempts to discover a useful formula for the return on investment in current schemes. Cost-effective alternatives to traditional interlibrary loan structures are posited and tests examined. These include the rapidly emerging print-on-demand facilities proliferating around the world ranging from very large operations to stand-alone kiosks, and the creation of discovery platforms for digital material. The author describes cutting-edge research and development of new discovery platforms intended to reside in library and consortia catalogues consisting not of purchased material, but instead of profiled metadata describing digital and print resources available for purchase on demand and how this new method can cut material costs, improve the speed of delivery of interlibrary loans, and provide a more comprehensive resource by creating a convenient repository for local and national digital resources in addition to those produced commercially. Finally, the presentation examines initiatives by consortia in Australia (WAGUL, ARLAC),

New Zealand (CONZULAC), Hong Kong (HKMAC), Singapore (Singapore Polytechnics) and the United States (CIC, etc.) to date and offers prescriptive examples for the next steps in resource sharing.

1. THE FISCAL LANDSCAPE: DIGITAL AND PRINT

In the past twenty years, I have worked with over 90 universities, their librarians, academics and researchers in designing, creating and maintaining collection development structures, including cooperative models, like approval profiles, retrospective projects, opening day collections and the like. In all that time, libraries have lurched from one fiscal crisis to another—perhaps it has simply been one long crisis. Ten years ago, Steve O'Connor and I wrote a paper delivered to an ARL conference in Atlanta called “*Collaborative Purchasing: a Model for Financially Straitened Times*” [1]. In it we described the woeful and declining state of English language monograph purchasing by libraries and discussed practical solutions, such as shared and consortia profiling, to combat, or at least mitigate, the looming financial and intimidating structural causes of the crisis.

The facts are sobering. The percentage of English language monographs, serials and digital resources purchased by academic libraries worldwide is diminishing even more rapidly. The cost of this material continues to increase as does the cost of its delivery—digital resources platforms and the metadata needed to populate and support them are most definitely not cheap. Library budgets are shrinking or remaining static. Increasing numbers of students and academic staff have created enormous pressures on libraries. For example, some universities in Australia have increased student numbers by over 50% in the past fifteen years without concomitant funding. CAUL, the Council of Australian University Libraries, in their Statement of the Global Economic Crisis [2] of April last year, made a number of predictions including a contraction of libraries for the foreseeable future, unpredictable exchange rates, movement toward high-use collections, more outsourcing to vendors, uncertainty around long-term commitments and an acceleration of the move toward electronic resources.

In the United States, the situation is much the same. Both public and academic libraries are seeing huge increases in patron use as the economic downturn leads its victims to access employment resources found in libraries and go back to school to improve their chances in the shockingly bad job market. The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) has looked at issues and trends in scholarly communication and published an environmental scan called *Transformational Times* [3]. In it, the ARL reports that nearly all members will be cutting journals, databases and other content acquisitions which will cause new stresses on the publishing industry. They, too, are hampered by long-term journal bundle commitments and are predicting more serial cancellation spirals. They predict more dire consequences for the print monograph and increased movement toward digital resources. The ARL identifies small publishers and members of scholarly societies as potential casualties of these trends and urges, without any specific recommendations, that new kinds of educational outreach be created to help them.

The global economic crisis is not yet over. In the reissue of their “Statement on the Global Economic Crisis and its Impact on Consortial Licenses” of June of this year, the International Coalition of Library Consortia (the ICOLC), stated quite explicitly that it, “...*did not overestimate the severity of cuts to*

library and library consortia funding levels in its original Statement [of January 2009]. Furthermore, we believe the worst may still be before us.”[4]

This paper is but a cursory look at best practice and cooperation among academic libraries, but I hope it might go some way toward mitigating an otherwise dismal outlook. My intent is to stimulate discussion and to provide some modest food for thought regarding how best practice in collection development and selection principles, having chiefly evolved and been applied in a print environment, are being adapted to and integrated in the more lightly explored territories of relevant electronic, non-book and other non-traditional content. To say that the situation at present is fluid would be a huge understatement. The landscape that confronts us challenges us to examine our past practices and the tools we use in new ways. Librarians are certainly more than bibliographic hospice workers, making sure that the patient is as comfortable as possible prior to death.

1.1. Return on Investment

Measuring return on investment, or ROI, is one of the elusive metrics of best practice. In attempting to determine ROI, libraries hope to impress administrators and funding bodies that they are worthy of continued support. Sometimes the effort backfires. A few years ago, the University of Wales, Bangor's, effort was summed up in the comments section of the final report in this way, “[the Library] *is hard to justify in value for money terms*” [5]. More encouragingly, the British Library, in their publication, “Measuring Our Value” [6], boldly claimed that for every £ 1 invested in the Library, it returned £ 4.40 in value. An Elsevier White Paper [7] said of a study done at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign that US\$4.38 was returned in value for every US\$1 invested. This result was tested in an international study of eight libraries from North America, Africa, Asia, Oceania and Western Europe. Interestingly, three of the eight showed a return on investment of less than \$1 and two were as high as \$13.16 and \$15.64. Most of these studies primarily measure return in terms of grant monies and other tangible outcomes. Clearly, the methodology is still flawed and the results are skewed by the research focus or absence of research focus of the institutions, comparing STM research to Humanities and Social Sciences, and their sources and availability of funding. A true measure of best practice has so far proved to be but a shimmering mirage [8].

2. CONSORTIA

Over the past fifteen years, the emergence of consortia in the academic market worldwide has been impressive. From OhioLink, the CIC and OCUL in North America, to ARLAC and WAGUL in Australia, to CONZULAC in New Zealand, to the geographically-based consortia in the UK, to the Singapore Polytechnics, academic libraries have sought to improve discount with their vendors by defining and controlling market share. The hapless vendors were given no choice but to deal with these new giants on the giants' own terms. The result has been a sharp increase in discount to libraries and a shortening of vendor margins.

With the notable exception of OhioLink, which, among other things, provides incentives for its members to avoid duplication, the question of collection development has been largely missing in this scenario. A year after writing that paper with Steve O'Connor, I gave a presentation at the Collaborative Collection Development Conference sponsored by CAVAL in Melbourne called, “*Beyond the Buying Club: New*

Club: New Strategies for Profiling and Collecting Relevant Content [9], in which I argued that, having formed consortia, libraries should utilize the strategic advantage of these large combinations to impose rational decisions regarding the purchase of content and its distribution among the members. At the time, this didn't make much of an impression. However, in recent years the practice of collection development has undergone a bit of rehabilitation in some, but not all, quarters. In Australia, the importance of collections was reinforced a few years ago with the creation of the Collections Council of Australia to represent the shared interests of archives, galleries, libraries and museums. Among its terms of reference are to advance the stability and sustainability of the collections sector and promote benchmarks and standards for the care and management of collections. Sadly, the CCA lost its funding from the Cultural Ministers Council in October 2009 [10].

3. VENDORS, SUPPLIERS AND AGGREGATORS

Library collection development is now so intertwined with vendors, suppliers, aggregators and third-parties such as bibliographic utilities that it could define the word symbiotic. It is fair to ask how best practice might be imposed in an environment that is so fluid and, in some cases, is approaching near-monopoly. A dizzyingly vast amount of opinion has been expressed over the years suggesting that libraries are "cutting a stick to beat themselves with" in demanding more and more of their vendors—particularly with regard to price and value-added services. Vendor margins are now razor thin. Yet they still find themselves in the middle—squeezed on one side by the demands of publishers and on the other by the increasing needs and expectations of their library customers. Some vendors have disappeared or been absorbed. A few survivors have taken on massive debt in chasing the market share that will enable them to achieve new economies of scale and fight on. Others are playing a more tactical and reactive game by positioning themselves to quickly take advantage of market factors, new technologies and opportunities when they appear. Still others still are simply floundering and hoping to hang on a while longer. More than ever, libraries need to take an approach of enlightened self-interest to the partnerships they form with vendors. If they do, they can significantly influence the research and development that will define their collection development aspirations into the future.

The days of the "gentleperson" bookseller like John Secor, John Coutts or Miles Blackwell are rapidly shrinking to a vanishing point in our rear view mirrors. Many providers are now owned by private equity firms and are under pressure to increase value and show a profit large enough to quicken pulses among the venture capitalists on Wall Street, Silicon Valley and beyond. Others, chiefly publishers, are subsidiaries of public and private universities that labour under their own financial constraints and cautions. Increasingly, these commercial entities will seek to transfer this pressure to libraries in the form of reduced discounts, higher prices, additional fees, reduced expertise and attenuated service. When HKMAC tenders again it will be confronted by a commercial landscape significantly different than the one it encountered in 2007. Librarians must provide the expertise needed to enable the best vendors to thrive and grow while making certain that their institutions enjoy the best value for money, the highest quality and the most comprehensive service possible.

Librarians, as custodians of our culture, need to remain vocal in making their expectations known to vendors, publishers, aggregators, their larger academies, and their private and public funding bodies. World class collections are not created in a vacuum and they do not spring forth spontaneously.

Libraries need to first fully examine and then marshal their considerable talent and resources in support of a disciplined approach to digital collection development. The expertise and innovation that resides within libraries and the academics and researchers in the university needs to be recognized, nurtured, rewarded and practically employed.

Print-on-demand technologies hold great hope for publishers, vendors and libraries. For publishers it offers a new production and business model that solves the vexing question of how many copies to print. Too few and they lose sales when the title goes out-of-print, too many and they end up pulping books—a costly enterprise. Print-on-demand means that books are not printed unless they are sold. Publishers can simply provide a digital file instead of maintaining a warehouse and outsource the production and distribution to third parties.

For vendors, especially those with a global reach, print-on-demand has the potential to literally help them survive. Apart from the cost of the books themselves, the biggest cost to vendors is shipping—most commonly air freight to international destinations. If titles can instead be printed and shipped from local or regional facilities, the cost of shipping will be greatly reduced. One huge benefit to vendors and our planet is that the print-on-demand capability will greatly reduce the carbon footprint caused in global shipping.

For libraries, print-on-demand can mean that they can get printed books more quickly. Print-on-demand facilities, as warehouses of digital content, also have the potential to serve as a convenient solution to the question of how best to preserve local digital content. It has enormous implications for interlibrary loan as well and, as current research is revealing, could change ILL models significantly.

4. PROFILING METHODOLOGIES

Many academic and scholarly librarians have done an excellent job of imposing collection development discipline to their print collections. This discipline is largely informed by what is considered relevant combined with what is considered affordable. Professional collection development is an exercise that is not easily measured or reduced to a metric. It is the considered application of a body of expertise confined within a methodology. Successful methodologies, such as profiles and approval plans, are well-known in the Asia-Pacific region and throughout the world, and have been described and evaluated exhaustively in the literature. However, librarians often struggle with the integration of e-books, journals, subscriptions, AV material, web content, RSS feeds, podcasts, wikis, and other content within these traditional, and still useful, structures. When unmediated by trained collection development librarians, the effect on library purchasing and collections can be profound. For example, when left to academics alone, collections are often very deep in those research areas that interest individual academics, but very shallow elsewhere. This is seen in its most extreme form in the lack of support for core undergraduate material—an area where the print or digital monograph is just as important as it ever was.

Carving is one of the oldest sculptural techniques. It is a subtractive process; starting with a solid block, the sculptor removes material using chisels and other tools to reveal the finished form. Profiling is very similar. Successful profiles are best described by what they deselect. Done correctly and evaluated

regularly, what remains after the application of this subtractive process is the bibliographic residue--the content of most useful or interesting to the institution. Ideally, this is a collaborative process where the selectors' instructions regarding subject, press, format, etc. inform the vendors' structural methodologies. Modern profiles are themselves a product of the librarian as selector or bibliographer model of discovery and acquisition. They can only completely flower where a shared understanding of bibliography, description, publishing and classification are present.

As academic libraries move more and more of their acquisition and access purchasing toward digital resources, those that want to maintain collection development discipline over their collections correctly ask if profiling methodologies developed for print can usefully be modified for digital and other objects. When stretched beyond their historical use, some of these profiling methodologies are showing a bit of wear and revealing their structural limitations; others have vanished. For those still standing, their underlying architecture is now going on 20 years old or more and is perhaps pushing the limits of capacity.

The sheer amount of digital communication, much of it stubbornly resistant to the application of traditional metadata and methods of description, is daunting. One of the hallmarks of approval profiles has always been the timely receipt of profiled titles or notification of wanted titles immediately upon their publication. Timeliness and currency remain important factors in satisfying users and in streamlining library workflow. However, very few publishers produce their print and digital analogs simultaneously. Often the digital version follows months, or even years, later—after the print book is out-of-print. Do libraries wait for the e-book or do they buy the available print version? Vendors, used to selling precision, now grapple with how to accommodate the nuance wanted by selectors without the “book-in-hand” to which they are accustomed. For material that is “born digital” the problem is compounded. Profiling has an important role to play in identifying this material and in making it discoverable to researchers and archivists, but the basic structure of vendors' methodologies has to be flexible enough to accommodate major change.

5. DIGITAL CONTENT AND COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

Before looking at best practice and trends for collection development with respect to digital content, it is worth considering that even STM publishers derived only 10% of their sales from e-books in 2009. Yet most scholarly publishers now have to have both print and digital infrastructures. Some are going it alone while others are turning to third-parties to outsource some of this work. The printed book is not yet dead, but it is on life support in academic and scholarly libraries. As a consequence, the business models that publishers and vendors have reliably used over the years are now under unsustainable pressure.

So, in practice, how are libraries buying e-books? Academic libraries now employ four basic approaches for purchasing e-books.

5.1. The Big Deal

The first and oldest method is the package or big deals offered by publishers and vendors. These are relatively cheap to purchase on a per book basis, but can be duplicative across a library or consortium

and usually feature very little in the way of professional collection development. A broad subject or publisher package doesn't count. The use of e-books by patrons purchased in packages is also relatively low.

For many libraries and consortial brokers such as CAUL in Australia, this is just fine. The CIC libraries in the United States report that they are happy with the big deals, can afford them, and see no need at present to apply a more refined collection development approach to their purchasing. Others have had a different view for some time. Librarians have long complained that they have no control over the content of these deals and that they often lack current content.

Support for this approach can be found in the ICOLC I referenced earlier, where they recommend strongly that "*Tailoring content to need and pricing accordingly can be very helpful*. For example, customized approaches that look to usage patterns as the basis for an adjustment may be equitable for all parties. In the case of tiered pricing schedules, applying this flexibly to core content packages in combination with more affordable pricing for single titles may create another affordable option. Multiple, creative options are needed so that library consortia can work with their members to fashion the optimal purchase level.

5.2. Title-by-Title Purchasing

The second method is title-by-title purchasing. It is expensive when compared to package deals, but is controlled by a collection development discipline imposed by selectors similar to that of print material. This method is often guided by existing print collection development policies. In general, titles acquired in this way have greater patron use than those from packages.

5.3. Patron-Driven Purchasing

In recent years, we have observed a great variety of patron-driven methods of acquiring e-books. Typically, e-book access, supplied by aggregators, is provided in the library's catalogue and titles are purchased based on "hits" or use of the titles. Seminal work was done on this method by Swinburne University in Australia and documented in an article by Gary Hardy and Tony Davies called "*Letting the patrons choose - using EBL as a method for unmediated acquisition of ebook materials*" [11]. In subsequent practice, however, the need for some mediation was painfully evident as budgets were blown out and inappropriate material was purchased. That mediation is governed in the first instance by controls and caps on spending for these projects and in the second instance by the application of collection development principles or profiling in defining the scope and nature of the titles eligible for purchase. The advantage for libraries is that, by definition, all titles selected and acquired are used by patrons.

5.4. E-Book Approval Plans

The fourth method is the most recent and, as yet unproven, and brings collection development full circle—the e-book approval plan. Efforts are underway at Arizona State University and a few other places to see if approval methodologies, given the challenges I described earlier, can cope with e-books. If they can, e-book purchasing will be cheaper, more easily distributed across libraries or members of a consortium, and strictly controlled by collection development discipline. Indeed, the patron-driven models under development could also be encompassed in an e-book approval plan by

incorporating profiled access to e-book titles in lieu of purchase or by making e-metadata available to selectors and users as an outcome of the vendor's profiling process.

5.5. The Future

Finally, best practice for consortia may well include new methodologies for acquiring and profiling electronic journal content—down to the article level. Mid-sized and small academic publishers are looking hard at how to increase their market share, while libraries, as mentioned, tire of the Big Deal. In combination with third-party organizations, work is being developed to apply descriptive profiling terms to journal articles so that libraries and consortia may be more precise and nuanced in what they discover, acquire or access. Much of this work is, at present, “blue-sky” and confidential, but holds great promise. It also dovetails nicely with Principle 3 of the ICOLC's statement referenced earlier, “*We encourage publishers to allow their content to be made available through numerous vendors appropriate for their subject matter. We also encourage online providers and aggregators to allow their metadata to be included in emerging discovery layer services on a non-exclusive basis. Multiple access platforms will permit libraries and consortia to select content and discovery tools that are suitable and affordable for their constituents. We encourage vendors to provide options that match the range of needs that libraries have for any particular content as to degree of importance, currency, interfaces, access, archiving, preservation and metadata. It is in the common interest of publishers, database vendors, consortia, libraries and information consumers to work collectively to provide affordable access to licensed content, while preserving the businesses integral to our collective success.*”

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