

Chapter 2

Considerations of a Digital Age: The Hows and Whys of Electronic Resource Management from a Collection Development Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This chapter talks about electronic resources from a collection development perspective. Working from the assumption that most institutions will need some electronic resources to adequately serve their patron population, this chapter explains what issues collection development staff may need to address when electronic resources are being incorporated into the existing collection. These issues include costs and benefits of electronic resources, how the collection development policy will be affected by the inclusion of electronic resources, and faculty/staff reactions to the incorporation of new materials. This chapter also strongly advocates the addition of an electronic resource manager or multiple electronic resource staff members and their close cooperation with the collection development staff.

INTRODUCTION

Electronic resources are not the next big thing in libraries. They are already the thing, less a luxury and more of a necessity. At the San Francisco public library, for example, patrons made a total of two million electronic searches in one year alone (Malnig, 2008); on the cost side, the Association for College & Research Libraries estimates that e-resources made up 44 percent of purchases for

the average academic library, as of 2007, with that number sure to rise (Noh, 2012). With numbers like this, that are ever increasing, it may feel that libraries have no choice: evolve or die. This can create panic among an administration that wants their institution to succeed. However, if a library is considering adding electronic resources to the existing collection, or expanding current electronic resource holdings, there are many things to consider before embarking on what can be a

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costly endeavour. Not all electronic resources are appropriate for all libraries. For example, the University of Idaho began adding E-books to their library's electronic resource collections in 2000, trying to stay ahead of a perceived user demand for E-books, but a recent review of the collection's usage statistics does not provide any evidence of the demand they expected (Sprague and Hunter, 2009). A rush to judgement in this case caused a very expensive error because they misjudged the desires of their patron population.

That being said, for many institutions, electronic resources are still an important step in the evolution of the library. Surveys and usage statistics from the University of Illinois supported their decision to incorporate E-books into their collection (Shelburne, 2009). The reasons for choosing electronic resources are clear: empowering a mobile patron population, facilitating access to materials, and reducing space concerns. However, the concerns of the institution may not be so clear. There may be questions about the cost of materials, duplication of existing materials (or duplication within the electronic resources), and preparation of the library staff and patrons for the influx of new information. A strong collection development policy, updated for the existence of electronic resources, can answer these questions and relieve some of the anxiety associated with adding electronic resources to an institution's collection.

BACKGROUND

What do librarians mean when discussing electronic resources? Simply put, electronic resources, also sometimes referred to as "e-resources", are those resources that are housed virtually and accessed through electronic means. Virtual movie and music collections could also be considered electronic resources. When electronic resource managers (ERMs) talk about electronic resources, they are typically talking about e-books and da-

tabases. ERMs are the people hired to work on the problems that electronic resources cause for libraries. These materials often have complicated agreements that librarians must keep track of, as well as technical problems that ERMs must solve on a daily basis.

While electronic resources have been around in some format since the 1980s, when the first electronic card catalogues were first introduced, some libraries are still fumbling their way around the use of electronic resources. While the public expectation of electronically available material continues to rise, many libraries are lucky if they can get a portion of their funding diverted to electronic resources. This is especially true of public libraries, which frequently have trouble with funding. There, print sources remain strong, with 72% of the reference budget for the average public library paying for print materials in 2003 (Roncevic, 2004 p.5). While trends in public and academic libraries indicate growth in electronic resources, this survey suggests that the growth is slower in public libraries.

It can be difficult for libraries to incorporate electronic materials into their collection for many reasons, including a lack of money or a lack of expertise. Chandel and Saiki note in their article that librarians have been dealing with print resources "for centuries (p. 149)." There are individuals who have been working with print resources for literally decades themselves. Newer and younger librarians may be more familiar with the use of electronic resources, but it cannot be guaranteed that they would have any expertise in negotiations or technical specifications of resources because of the limitations of entry level jobs. The few librarians in between have mainly had on-the-job-training and will be familiar with only certain types of management software and practices, since so much of it is different from institution to institution.

Current hierarchical systems in libraries can also be challenged by the addition of an ERM, as the position often straddles the work of both tech-

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