Collaborative Collection Development, Patron Driven Acquisitions and What Happened to the Art Books

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I would like to begin by first giving some background about the CTW Consortium. It’s a consortium of three liberal-arts schools in CT: Connecticut College in New London, Trinity College in Hartford, and Wesleyan University in Middletown. Our schools have a combined student FTE of 9800, almost all of whom are undergraduates. The consortium was established in 1987 to share the costs of an online library catalog and to share physical collections using a daily delivery service. It wasn’t until 2007 that we began thinking about building our collections together, largely as a cost-saving measure. It was then that we applied for a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to explore collaborative collection development.

We were awarded a three-year grant in March 2008. With this funding, we were able to hire a full-time collection development co-ordinator to oversee all grant-related projects. At the beginning of the program we were mostly concerned with print books and we looked to Yankee Book Peddler, our primary U.S. book vendor, to see how the consortium might build its collections together.
Through YBP’s GOBI (Global Online Bibliographic Information) database we could take advantage of GobiTween which allowed us to see each other’s purchasing activities and therefore have greater control over duplication. The top frame is a GOBI notification slip and the bottom frame is the GobiTween record showing a purchase made by Connecticut College.
From this two and a half year summary, you can see we did pretty well using GobiTween. 75% were unique titles, 19% were duplicates and 6% were triplicates.

About a year into the program we began talking about sharing e-books. Each of the three schools was already subscribing to ebrary's Academic Complete as well as the e-book collection of the American Council of Learned Societies. We had access to ebooks through full text databases and we were also buying reference works title by title.
For the pilot project, we evaluated four e-book aggregators—ebrary, NetLibrary, EBL and MyiLibrary. Our main criterion, amongst many, was that the aggregator provide patron-driven acquisitions or PDA, and at that time MyiLibrary was the only one that did so. With the decrease in our budgets, our administrators became very interested in the "just in time" acquisitions model rather than the traditional "just in case" model.
When we set up the PDA parameters, we used LC classes and subclasses that supported the curricula of our three schools. The books had to come from university presses or select academic publishers, be published in 2008 and beyond, be in English, and cost less than $250 for multi-user price. We excluded textbooks, manuals, abridgements and reprints. We did not include art and photography classifications in the pilot project. I’ll come back to this and explain why.

We set up a deposit account with MyiLibrary – 25 thousand dollars would hopefully see us through the year. We had no idea how quickly or slowly our patrons would be purchasing books for us. The ebooks that met our parameters were loaded into each of our catalogs. There is no indication for patrons as to whether or not the e-book is already owned by the library.
A MARC URL opens to a MyiLibrary description page pictured here. When a book is opened, that counts as a session. Two sessions equal a book purchase. That’s MyiLibrary’s purchase trigger. Going to the description page and opening the table of contents does not count as a session. During the first year, we loaded 5600 titles into our catalogs and purchased 224 ebooks or 4% of the loaded titles. This depleted our deposit account. The relatively low number of purchases indicated that we had set reasonable parameters.
It also showed us that e-books are not inexpensive. CTW was charged multi-user pricing because we are three separate institutions. Multi-user is calculated at 1.9 times the cloth price. For CTW, our average e-book price was $135, which is not bad when it is split three ways, but prices are based on the cloth edition and we normally buy paper when given the choice. On average the ebook costs four times the paper edition price. It can be much higher when there is a dramatic difference between cloth and paper editions. 47% of the e-books we purchased were available in print as paper editions. Considering the high cost of electronic as compared to paper, when does it make financial sense to share a print copy rather than an e-book? In January, we put a second deposit into our account, but not until we renegotiated a single-user price. MyiLibrary came around and realized that we didn't need to be paying multi-user pricing, when universities four times CTW’s size were being charged the single-user pricing. The single-user price is only slightly more than list price of the cloth cover.
Lastly, some numbers on the usage of the e-books that we purchased: 50% were opened two or more times; 15% were opened only one time, and 35% were not opened again. We were a bit dismayed by the 35%. We attribute that to the oops factor. Someone opened the book, looked at one page, realized it’s not what they wanted and closed it. We tried to have the purchase trigger changed to three sessions to accommodate this, but MyiLibrary said no.

So what happened to the art books? They were they excluded from the pilot project because we discovered that quite a few of the illustrated e-books had problems.
Some ebooks had images that had been withheld. Other ebooks had images with such poor resolution that details were often illegible at 100% and would pixelate when they were enlarged. We also noticed that media such as CDs or DVDs, which accompanied the print version, were not included with the e-version. E-books were being described as if they were print books so why wouldn’t we expect the exact same content, with print quality images? Considering the high price of ebooks, it didn’t make sense to buy print copies to make up for the ebook’s missing content. Without knowing beforehand whether or not the images would be included and what the quality of any images would be, we decided it would be more cost effective to keep art books out of the PDA pilot project.
While we were evaluating e-book aggregators, we asked the representatives these questions. Why weren’t they telling us when images were redacted? What was the image resolution? Was associated media included? Why wasn’t any of this information readily available? Everyone’s response was that it wasn’t up to them, the aggregators. The aggregators download content files (images or texts) as they are received from the publishers. It was up to the publishers to provide this information. But why weren’t they doing it? To us it seemed like it should be easy enough to do. Well, as it turns out, it’s not that easy to do. It took us a while to understand why.

Publishing in print and electronic formats simultaneously is very complicated. There are a lot of players and a lot pieces to consider especially on the electronic side of the business. There are publishers, distributors, scanning companies, aggregators, vendors, stores, amazon, google, Apple. And there are the devices to read the ebooks – computers, ipads, ebook readers, smartphones and do they work with epdf, epub, or some other format. I hardly need to tell you that the ebook business is complex and constantly changing, or as one publisher told me, “It’s a moving target”.

Regarding image redaction -- publishers are within their rights to withhold content. The permissions they receive for print doesn’t necessarily guarantee permissions for electronic. We learned that Yale University Press has a standard redaction process for all images (artworks, paintings, photos) but does preserve charts and graphs. Any publisher restrictions like this would apply to all aggregators.

So you would think that those ebooks with redacted images would cost less. An editor at Wesleyan University Press, or Wes Press, said that unfortunately those books need to be scanned twice – first the full scan, and the next to remove the images. The cost of that process leaves the full price unchanged. I also asked her why publishers aren’t informing customers that ebook content is not the same as the print book. Up until now, there wasn’t a way to do it, but that is changing. Wes Press was just notified a few weeks ago by their e-distributor, that the press needed to fill out an image redaction field (this is new) in the e-distributor’s database. That information in turn is formatted into ONIX (Online Information Exchange). You can think of ONIX as the MARC counterpart for the publishing industry. ONIX for Books provides a format for passing metadata about books between publishers, book retailers and other interested parties in the publishing industry and it has recently been expanded to include better support for ebooks, including a field for image redaction. There has already been some mapping done between ONIX and MARC21 fields, so that may be the key link for sharing metadata between publishers and libraries.

Regarding image resolution -- we originally thought that low resolution was a way the publisher could circumvent rights issues; however, we never heard anyone come out and clearly say that. What I’ve come to understand is that it’s really hard to determine what the
YBP suggested that for the time being we make use of the ebook previews that the aggregators make available in GOBI. EBL’s preview allows five minutes to browse the ebook which seems to be enough time to check out the image quality. I’ve gone back multiple times to the same title without being turned away. The chief drawback of browsing previews is the amount of time needed to inspect multiple titles.

For CTW, we’ll have a lot to think about as we assess our pilot project and plan our next steps. Since we began the project with MyiLibrary, the other three aggregators began offering patron driven acquisitions, so we’ll be looking at their platforms again. Although I’ve been describing issues raised by a consortial PDA, I think many of them are the same for individual libraries. I hope that I’ve been able to offer some new information that you’ll find useful. Thanks for your attention.
Thank you!

Questions about this presentation?
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