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Biz of Acq -- Is Purchase-on-demand a Worthy Model? Do Patrons Really Know What They Want?

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TNT film, but I heard reactions that varied from how silly to how entertaining. Some librarians loved it; others hated it. The film certainly portrayed a variety of "types" including the more stereotypically bespectacled, stern, prim, humorless type (**Jane Curtain**) in charge of hiring "THE Librarian." Dialogue: "What makes YOU think YOU could be the librarian?" she queried Flynn, the **Noah Wyle** character. "I've read a lot," he replied. She: "Don't do funny. I don't do funny."

Both Flynn and the librarian assigned to watch over him certainly do not play to type. Flynn reminds me of Indiana Jones as portrayed by **Harrison Ford**. Nicole Noone, the librarian character assigned to watch over him is a sexy, arrogant, machete wheeling vixen who cracks at one point "You brains, me brawn." Other memorable lines: "The Librarian is incredible!" "Maybe I wasn't as smart as I thought I was." "No one can read this, except a real Librarian!" "Get your own geek!" "Being a librarian is a pretty cool job!" And my personal favorite, spoken by Flynn's mother (played by **Olympia Dukakis**) to a group of women sending admiring glances toward Flynn: "He's only a librarian now, but he's capable of so much more!"

In the *Daedalus Books Holidays - 2004* catalog, my attention was drawn to a title, *Sixpence House: Lost in a Town of Books*, by **Paul Collins** (Bloomsbury USA, April 2003, ISBN: 1-582-34284-9). "**Paul Collins** and his family aban-

don San Francisco to move to the Welsh countryside, specifically to the cobblestone village of Hay-on-Wye, the 'Town of Books' that boasts 1,500 inhabitants — and 40 bookstores. Antiquarian bookstores, to be exact. Hay's newest residents move into a 16th century apartment over a bookstore, naturally, and proceed to meet the village's large population of misfits and bibliomaniacs. In his job as clerk in the world's largest and most chaotic used-book warren, **Collins** delights in shifting dusty stacks of books around, looking for such ancient gems as *Robinson Crusoe in Words of One Syllable* and *I Was Hitler's Maid*. As he struggles with the finishing touches on his own first book…**Collins** applies to be a peer in the House of Lords and attempts to buy sixpence House, a tumbledown pub for sale in the town's center."

There is further information at **Amazon.com** about **Collins**' work. *Publishers Weekly* adds that **Collins** can be droll and witty in his writing, including funny trivia in his book, e.g., how many book lovers know that the same substance used to thicken fast-food milk shakes is an essential ingredient in paper resizing? **Keir Graff, Booklist (ALA)**, calls **Collins**' travelogue/memoir a book lover's delight. "The narrative is structured around his house-buying attempts and the impending publication of his first book, but the meat of the work lies in his meandering asides and bookstore discoveries."

The December 2, 2004 edition of *USA Today* printed a section for holiday book recommendations and I want to share what **Bob Minzesheimer** wrote about a children's book, *Wild About Books*, by **Judy Sierra** (Knopf, August, 2004, ISBN: 0-375-82538-X). This is "a literary adventure told in verse, triggered by 'the Springfield librarian, Molly McGrew' who 'by mistake drove her bookmobile into the zoo.' Before long, the entire menagerie, from the moose to the skinks, is learning to read. The pandas demand more books in Chinese. Miss McGrew supplies waterproof books for the otter, who never goes swimming without **Harry Potter**. **Sierra's** tale is a witty introduction to the joys of reading and libraries. It's enhanced by the illustrations of **Marc Brown**, best known as the creator of **Arthur**, the studious, bespectacled aardvark."

Quoting from the book jacket of **Wild About Books**, found on **Sierra's** Website (*http://www.judysierra.net*): "In this rollicking rhymed story, Molly McGrew introduces birds and beasts to this new something called reading, finding the perfect book for each animal—tall books for giraffes, small books for crickets, joke books for hyenas. . . . In no time, Molly has them 'forsaking their niches, their nests, and their nooks,' going 'wild, simply wild about wonderful books.'" No mention that Molly is a librarian here, but I think at least one of our grandchildren will be receiving this book for an upcoming birthday!

Biz of Acq — Is Purchase-on-demand a Worthy Model? Do Patrons Really Know What They Want?

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*Column Editor's Note: Librarians at **Cunningham Memorial Library, Indiana State University**, planned and carried out a year-long purchase-on-demand pilot project. Books requested by patrons for interlibrary loan were purchased on a rush order basis, if certain criteria were met. Comparing fulfillment rates and turnaround times for interlibrary loan and purchase indicated speedier acquisition of copies and higher fill rates with the purchasing process. In addition, acquisitions costs were lower and circulation higher when books were purchased because of patron requests, compared with other library purchases. — AF*

Introduction

Cunningham Memorial Library at **Indiana State University (ISU)** serves approximately 11,000 students and about 600 faculty members. Organizationally, Interlibrary Loan functions as a unit of the Circulation Department, and Acquisitions/Serials functions as a department that reports directly to the Dean of Library Services. During the winter of 2003, **ISU's** acquisitions librarian and circulation librarian discussed embarking upon a project to provide requested interlibrary loan (ILL) materials via a purchase-on-demand program in order to experiment with faster, more efficient ways to get materials into the hands of patrons for improved customer service. Purchase-on-demand programs are patron-driven selection programs that have the goals of shortening the turnaround time for acquiring ILL requests, and adding titles to the collection that might not otherwise be selected. Since so many items purchased for academic collections never circulate, purchasing items requested for interlibrary loan instead of borrowing them insures that the acquired item will circulate at least one time.

As the discussion about the potential program broadened to include ILL and acquisition staff, concern was expressed about how quickly books could be received via purchase versus the

traditional ILL approach. A brief literature search revealed that few libraries had actually made a book-by-book time comparison between books obtained through interlibrary loan and those purchased. Much of the literature stated the comparison between the two methods of acquisition as a composite time. At this point, discussions favored trying something different and it was agreed to try a two-pronged approach: ILL would order requested books through the traditional means and would also place an order through Acquisitions. Then, the methodologies could be compared simultaneously, by item, in order to judge the efficacy of each approach. Once this methodology had been confirmed and administrative approval for the project was received, discussion turned to what criteria to use for the selection of the materials and how to handle them once they were received.

Literature Search: What Are Other Institutions Doing with Purchase-On-Demand?

The literature revealed that books-on-demand projects have been overwhelmingly successful. **Bombeld** and **Hanerfeld** discussed their project conducted at the **University of North Carolina** at Wilmington "using ILL book requests as the 'trigger' for acquiring materials for the library's collections" (Bombeld and Hanerfeld, 18). They stated that "ILL requests should be considered as one of several collection development methods" (Bombeld and Hanerfeld, 24).

Anderson, et al, writing about **Purdue University Libraries'** books-on-demand program, stated five subject bibliographers, analyzing 800 titles acquired through the program, concluded that, "...the patron-driven 'Books on Demand' program is a valuable complementary collection tool. It consistently adds a very high percentage of relevant scholarly titles to the collection which provides input from patrons who do not ordinarily have a voice in collection development decisions and fills in gaps in interdisciplinary areas" (Anderson, 2).

Public libraries are also using books-on-demand. Hulsey writes about such a project at **Willard Public Library** in Michigan. This library took the novel approach of purchasing out-of-print books from dealers if they could be obtained for a reasonable price and delivered promptly. **Hulsey** noted that these books were sometimes added to the collection but were often sold or discarded (Hulsey, 77).

Ward, **Wray**, and **Debus-López** wrote about books-on-demand projects at **Purdue University** and at **University of Wisconsin-Madison**. They found that, "over two years' experience with each of these programs confirms that on-demand book acquisitions is a viable model that meets the dual goal of filling a patron's immediate need for a recently published book and of adding a potentially high-use title to the collection" (Ward, Wray and Debus-López 212).

Allen, **Ward**, **Wray**, and **Debus-López** looked at a collaborative purchasing model

against the grain people profile

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NAME: Alberta Davis Comer
I grew up in eastern Oklahoma and am of Choctaw and Cherokee descent. My small town did not have a library but the book mobile made a stop there. My dad would drive me (over 6 miles of unpaved dirt roads) to visit the book mobile and I was in paradise; books took me to the most exciting places and times! I have worked in different types of libraries (public, military, academic, and private) and in different places (Germany, Texas, Oklahoma, and Indiana) over a number of years and I find that libraries still take me to the most exciting places and times.

at **Thomas Crane Public Library (TCPL)** in Quincy, Massachusetts, **Purdue University**, and the **University of Wisconsin-Madison**. At **TCPL**, 79 % of purchased items were received in 14 days or less which was comparable to the ILL Department's 73 %. In her article "Books on Demand: Just-in-Time Acquisitions," **Suzanne Ward** concluded that titles whose purchase was initiated through ILL patron requests were "used more frequently than similar books purchased through routine collection development" (Ward, 103). **Ward** stated that 28.7% of the books purchased because of ILL requests had circulated after cataloging and after being used by the ILL patron, while 18 % of books chosen through regular means and cataloged in the same period had circulated.

Criteria Used

The purchase-on-demand pilot project was scheduled for calendar year 2004. After deciding that books would be the only type of material ordered, the date of publication played the primary role in deciding whether to order the book. Only trade publications published in 2000 or later would be ordered. Also, the price of the book was important, with $100 being the limit on any one title. Acquisitions determined that **amazon.com** would be the vendor used for the project, but only books that **amazon.com** had categorized as being available in 3 days or less would be ordered. When ILL received a request, the staff checked **amazon.com** for price and ship date. If these met the set criteria, the ILL staff copied the request order and gave it to Acquisitions. At the same time, the ILL staff ordered the book through **OCLC**. ILL tracked the date when the item was ordered and when the information was given to Acquisitions (these were usually done on the same day). If the **amazon.com** book arrived first, ILL did not cancel the traditional ILL request, and if the ILL request arrived first, Acquisitions did not cancel the purchase order.

Why Choose Amazon.com as the Project Vendor?

Amazon.com was chosen as vendor for this pilot project for several reasons. One of the goals of the project was to see if we could add a bookstore-like feature to our array of library services, and our main objective was to obtain copies quickly. **Amazon.com's** suppliers are **Ingram** and **Baker & Taylor**, distributors that have warehouses strategically placed across the country. Quick turnaround times are guaranteed for newly available trade publications. According to **Spector** in *Amazon.com: Get Big Fast*, the two distributors have between them at least 400,000 titles stocked in their warehouses on any given day. Since **Indiana State University**, which is located in Terre Haute, IN, is near **Baker and Taylor's** Momence, IL warehouse, staff of the Monographic Acquisitions Unit knew that books would be delivered quickly, especially if ordered within a certain time frame. They found that if items with an "available in 24 hours" designation were ordered by 3:00 P.M., with second day shipping requested, the books would often arrive in the next morning's mail. By tapping into this "online bookstore," a library would be able to add a service feature that is immediate, for a cost-effective result that allows the patron's participation in the collection development process.

Procedures for the Project: Using the Project as an Analysis of Current Workflow

Once Acquisitions received a request from ILL that met the established criteria, the order unit supervisor placed an order through **amazon.com** immediately, using a university procurement card and asking for next day shipping. The staff person responsible for monographic receiving was notified of the title so she would know the processing queue to assign as soon as the book arrived. After receiving the item, this staff person forwarded it to the mono-

graphic cataloging department, and the item was cataloged and sent for processing.

Early in the project, ILL expressed concern about the amount of time the procedure would take and suggested that books be delivered directly to ILL staff who would property-stamp the books, check them out to patrons, and return them to Cataloging when they were returned. After consultation with the Cataloging Department, an agreement was reached where the Cataloging and Processing units would each have 24 hours to finish their part of the operation.

Once the purchased book reached ILL, it was processed as if it had been received from another library. An ILL band was placed on the book and the patron was notified of its availability. Initially, patrons were not informed that the copy had been purchased. This decision was made because of a concern that patrons could use the service as a way to stretch departmental book budgets. However, some patrons questioned why they were receiving a purchased book instead of a borrowed one. They were then told about the project. If the title had already been received from another library, ILL noted the date it was received by their department and returned the purchased copy to cataloging for full processing. If the purchased copy was received first, ILL would hold the borrowed book until **OCLC** could be updated and then returned the book to the lending library.

It was observed that this project would provide an ideal opportunity to track productivity of individual units, since the time the items remained in each unit would be tracked through the library's ILS. It could be expected that staff performance would be excellent because of their awareness of the project. The project also allowed study of interdepartmental workflow. Both successes and unanticipated problems were observed.

The Outcome: Successes and Unanticipated Problems

The results of this project showed an excellent measure of success. Between January and December 2004, a full 35% of the total items requested were acquired through **amazon.com** when exhaustive attempts to obtain copies through the interlibrary loan method failed. An additional 48% arrived by both methods, but the purchasing method yielded the faster result. 10% of the total items requested arrived faster through the interlibrary loan method, 5% of the titles arrived at the same time, and finally, a small number (approximately 2%) did not arrive by either method, yielding a fill rate of 98%. Another positive result was that a full 80% of the total items acquired circulated at least once more after they were added to the general collection.

With regard to turnaround time, purchasing the item yielded the best result overall, with an average of six days, in comparison to the average ILL turnaround for this group of requests, which was nine days. This shows an improve-

ment in speed of 33%. Even so, it was determined by studying the tracking history in the library's ILS that the turnaround time would have been shorter if the book had not gone to processing, which was the original plan for the project. In the area of cost, the average direct cost per item to purchase the books was $24.71. According to **ARL's** somewhat dated 1999 study that measures the performance of interlibrary loan operations in North America, research libraries spend an average of $18.35 to obtain an item on interlibrary loan, with an average turnaround time of 16 days and an 85% fill rate. For just a little more money, the library is purchasing a book that will become part of the collection rather than spending money to borrow. In addition, the item is guaranteed to circulate, and collection development information is obtained in a completely patron-centered way.

However, in spite of all the successes during the course of this project, several unanticipated problems occurred. An initial concern of ILL staff had been what to tell patrons when the book was purchased, not borrowed. As explained earlier, they were concerned that if patrons knew books that fit specific criteria were purchased, some faculty patrons might take advantage of the program. To avoid this possibility, it was initially decided that purchased books would not go through processing but would come directly to ILL personnel, thus avoiding the telltale signs that the book belonged to **ISU**. However, once the project was underway, an internal decision was made to process books fully before sending them to ILL for patron usage. After this decision was made, patrons were told that **ISU** had ordered the book and the patron could pick it up at the circulation desk. No mention was made of the ILL request initiating the purchase.

At the beginning of the project, it was decided not to exclude popular titles from the project; however, patrons ordering popular novels triggered another unanticipated problem. Usually, popular novels are ordered by one specific librarian who then assigns most of them to the browsing area. No provision had been made to have this librarian review the novels, so the books were cataloged for the regular stacks. Once a staff member noticed this oversight, these novels had to be pulled from the regular stacks and reviewed, and most were then designated for the browsing area. It was decided that if the project were to continue, a procedure would be developed for flagging certain types of items for collection location decisions.
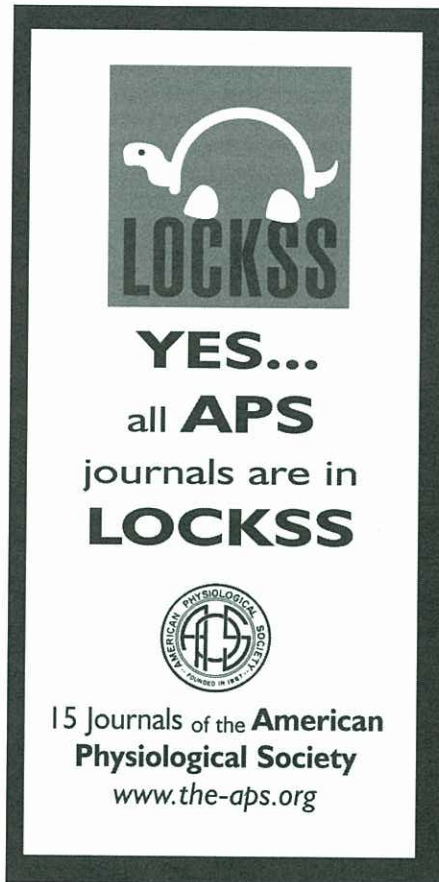
A third unanticipated problem was what to do if the requested book was part of a series not currently owned by the library. The decision was made to order the book as long as it fell within the set criteria of publication date, price and availability. Again, if the project were to be continued on a permanent basis, a method of forwarding information to subject liaisons regarding potential standing orders would be needed.

While ILL participates in this project, a change made to their procedures is that if a book is so new that lenders say "no" to requests, ILL no longer tells the patron to try again in a few

months. Instead, ILL recommends the book for rush purchase. Acquisition staff review the request and, if it falls within the library guidelines for purchase, place a rush order. The patron is notified once the book is received and processed. If the purchase-on-demand program continues, this procedural change will become permanent.

Conclusion: Why Can't a Library Be More Like a Bookstore?

It is important to note that, as publishers often cannot afford to keep large backlists of titles, they will be producing shorter runs of more titles in an effort to stay viable. This increases the importance of purchasing titles as soon as they are released, to insure that the library will be able to acquire them. **Spector** talks in his aforementioned book about **Bezos'** incredulity at the

Depression-era business models publishers continued to follow, which allowed for large backlists of titles and the return of unsold titles by bookstores. The **amazon.com** business model has been a catalyst for change in this area. With the arrival of online bookstores, publishers have better ways to predict the need for a title at the moment of its release. This may mean that new and faster-moving library acquisitions processes must be devised, to avoid losing the opportunity to buy books.

If it is true that, at least some of the time, interlibrary loan service is used by library patrons because they are not able to determine if anything in the collection will meet their needs, a possible solution is to make purchase-on-de-

mand function as a component of reference service. This would lessen the need for ILL services, which are slower and much more costly. If funds are set aside for document delivery services and for the purchase of books on a "rush" basis, then interlibrary loan staff can spend time with more difficult requests, finding ways to shorten the turnaround time on these hard-to-find items. **Hulsey** demonstrates the success of this approach in a public library setting in his article entitled, "Purchase-On-Demand: A Better Customer Service Model." There is no reason why this model would not work in an academic setting also.

Many initiatives currently underway in academic libraries across the country attempt to make library online catalogs more like **amazon.com**. The aspects of **amazon.com** and other online bookstores that would make an online catalog a more responsive tool may also make the purchase-on-demand model a highly viable service for academic libraries. Purchase-on-demand is not a new concept. **Nora Rawlinson's** *Library Journal* classic entitled "Give 'Em What They Want" showed it to be a useful collection development model over twenty years ago. If patrons knew then what they wanted, certainly they do still. 🌿

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