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Evaluating Engineering Reference eBooks

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which allowed librarians to claim ownership of the electronic resources they discovered and wanted added to the collection. Checklists were divided into three sections, an initiation section, one for technology and collection development, and one for the point person. While primarily meant for databases, these checklists were also used for full text resources and can be adapted to eBooks. The most useful application would be for packages or bundles, rather than an individual book. In that case the publisher or vendor should be evaluated for the criteria to see if adding books one by one over a period of time would be worthwhile.

The evaluation begins with the librarian, at the grassroots. These are the people working with students and faculty and who discover a need and often a new product, either through their own professional reading or through a faculty recommendation. The initiation phase evaluated current holdings and collections to evaluate the need for additional resources. At this phase a small group was also formed to evaluate a trial and evaluate the curricular needs for the resource. If it was decided that the resource was a good fit, then the next phase began. At this stage, the Collection Development Librarian and the Electronic Resources team examined funding and all the technical issues involved in obtaining the resource. If a positive outcome occurred, a recommendation was made for funding or the resource may be placed on a tiered list for consideration. The final phase took place after purchase and was titled the point person phase. This involved selecting a librarian to serve as point person to market the resource to faculty and students and to teach other librarians and staff about the resource. If the resource is subscription based, a review takes place prior to renewal time.

The final phase of implementation for eBooks is marketing. As **Robert H. McDonald** and **Chuck Thomas** have pointed out, "Research libraries have done little to embed themselves and their resources into the everyday tools, spaces, and activities important to today's learners."²⁴ Promoting eBooks requires more than a link on a Website and a record in the catalog. While these two components are vital for discovery and use, they are not the only way that our users will know about a resource or discover how to use it. Creating links in online teaching sites, posting information to wikis or blogs, sending out messages to faculty in subject areas when new resources are available are all easy and obvious ways to promote new resources. Tracking the usage and finding ways to observe students and faculty using the resources can also provide insight into how and why certain electronic books may be more useful than others.

Collection development policies and procedures for electronic books encompass more issues than buying print resources and the level of complexity will grow in the coming years. As electronic

books and resources continue to evolve, I think the issues will continue to evolve and become more focused. We need to continue to develop seamless interfaces to make resources useful and discoverable by our communities. This will require the efforts of many people across the organization and profession working together. Paying close attention to how our resources are being discovered will lead us to creating better access points, whether those are through portals for all resources, Websites that are focused on subject areas or through the catalog. The important thing is to keep the discussion open with one another, with vendors and publishers, and with our end user communities so we can serve the needs of those who ultimately use our resources. 🐻

Endnotes

1. "7 things you should know about... E-Books." *Educause Learning Initiative*. November 2006. www.educause.edu/eli
2. **Ferguson, Anthony W.** "Digital Library Selection: Maximum Access, Not Buying the Best Titles: Libraries Should Become Full-Text Amazon.com's." *Journal of Library Administration* 31.2 (2000): 27-38.
3. **Jeffrey Daniels'**, Electronic Resource Manager, assistance was invaluable in creating the checklists and implementing the process.
4. **McDonald, Robert H. and Chuck Thomas.** "Disconnects Between Library Culture and Millennial Generational Values." *Educause Quarterly* 4 (November 2006): 4-6.

Evaluating Engineering Reference eBooks

by **Barbara Williams** (Engineering Librarian, University of Arizona)
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A funny thing happened on the "Road to Damascus." I set out to write an article detailing the **University of Arizona's** experience with **ENGnetBASE**, an electronic database of engineering handbooks. However, by the end of the process, it had become clear that the real story is the importance of getting quality user feedback and using it to make sound renewal and cancellation decisions. Ultimately, based on information we gleaned from our users we chose to cancel **ENGnetBASE**.

Library users want access to electronic content anytime and anywhere. In our assessment of **ENGnetBASE** we learned that cultivating better-informed patrons results in more realistic expectations around the selection and request for electronic resources. Our journey of enlightenment clearly demonstrates that librarians must continuously engage users in a scholarly communication dialogue. When library users understand the implications of the various cost and pricing models, they, too, see the light.

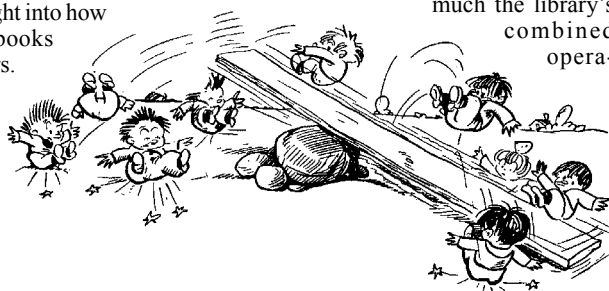
About a year after I arrived at the **University of Arizona**, I discovered that the majority of users from the departments for which I am the library liaison had little understanding of the actual costs of the resources they use. I began the practice of opening my library instruction sessions with a challenge: "Guess how much the library's combined opera-

tions and information resources budget is." Hesitantly, participants called out numbers while I repeated "higher, higher" until someone yelled out an astronomical amount. I would then reveal the true figure. No one (including the instructors) ever came close to the actual figure of \$18M. This sixty-second activity would then evolve into a meaningful scholarly communication conversation and ultimately, led to the inclusion of several specific information literacy learning objectives in several chemical engineering course syllabi.

The **Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology** programs has a criterion that states, "Engineering programs must demonstrate that their graduates recognize the need for, and have an ability to engage in lifelong learning." The **College of Engineering's Accreditation Committee** at the **University of Arizona** has adopted the position that information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. The **Chemical & Environmental Engineering (ChEE)** Department has integrated information literacy skill-building into its curriculum as one pedagogical approach to teaching the acquisition of lifelong learning skills. Assignments in core courses ChEE 201 & 326, and elective courses ChEE 455 & 555, require students to develop information literacy skills as part of the course objectives. One objective specifically calls for the ability to effectively evaluate information resources. Therefore, students in the courses cited above were targeted to evaluate the functionality and general usefulness of **ENGnetBASE**.

The **Engineering Libraries Division (ELD)** of the **American Society for Engineering Education** established a **Best Practices for Electronic Resources Task Force** to compile a list of issues to consider when evaluating electronic products. Their top issues are: Ac-

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cess Authentication, Co-Branding of Products, Copyright Issues, Cover-to-Cover Digitization, Digital Quality, Interlibrary Loan/Electronic Reserves, Linking to Content, Perpetual Access, Purchase Models, Retractions and Corrections (Errata and Corrigenda) and Statistics. Although **ELD** did not formally endorse this list until May of 2005, the document was in circulation prior to being formally adopted. With its listing of best practices for each issue it also serves as a vehicle to begin scholarly dialogue discussions.

In 2004 I arranged to have the evaluation of **ENGnetBASE** formally incorporated into those engineering courses that have information literacy objectives. The purpose was to gather student input and feed that information into the decision-making process to determine if the library's subscription to the database should be renewed.

To evaluate the database, each class was divided into two groups. Each student received the same seven questions, all related to a class project/assignment. The questions were designed to identify specific facts, figures, graphs and charts. One group sat at a table with seven print reference handbooks in front of them, and the other group sat in front of computers linked to **ENGnetBASE**. Each group was given twenty minutes to use the resource(s) in front of them to individually answer the questions. The group that used the print handbooks completed their task before the time was up. The group using **ENGnetBASE** did not find their answers as quickly. The groups then traded places and the results were the same even when the first group knew the names of the books the answers were in. The majority of the students that used **ENGnetBASE** answered fewer than five questions in the same time it took students using the print handbooks to answer all seven. This experiment was duplicated with twelve librarians and the results were similar.

The biggest complaint about the database was its failure to mimic its print equivalent; users indicated it was much easier to find the information in a physical book. The second biggest complaint was the huge number of hits a search retrieved and the subsequent frustration in having to comb through the information to find answers. The reason was that the search box on the main page searched the entire Website. To search within specific books required an additional click to get to the advanced search feature. Spending a few minutes reading the instructions on the main page would have minimized this problem. However, my students like many have a **Google-like** mentality about everything. "If we have to be instructed on how to use a resource isn't that an inherent flaw in the design?" voiced one student, yet echoed by many. Students resented having to stop and read the online help feature to figure out the most effective way to search. Several students referred to the user interface as non-intuitive which speaks to the importance of user-centered designs.

Lastly, the inability to use the browser's

against the grain people profile

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BORN & LIVED: I was born and raised in Detroit Michigan until I was 11 when my family moved to the township of Ypsilanti, MI.

EDUCATION: I received my undergraduate degree from **Michigan State University**, and my masters from **Wayne State University**.

FIRST JOB: My first professional librarian position was as a Public Service Librarian in Flint, MI at **GMI Engineering and Management Institute**, which later was renamed **Kettering University**.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: When I left **Kettering** I came to the **University of Arizona** as a Science-Engineering Librarian. I am active in the Engineering Libraries Division of the **American Society for Engineering Education**. In 2005 my colleague and I sponsored a drumming activity for women enrolled/teaching in science and engineering programs. The following year we organized a pre-conference drumming/leadership workshop for the **Living the Future** conference in 2006.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Anything written by **J. California Cooper** and **Bebe Moore Campbell**.

PHILOSOPHY: Life is short so be your authentic self.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE OUR INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:

I think our profession will play more of an official consultant role with faculty/researchers and students. Entry level librarian positions will require more advanced computer skills. We will continue to facilitate access to information but I believe we will become much more involved in identifying and or aggregating content and then participating in the development of platforms to access those materials. 🌱



back button to return to the previous page where the search was initiated was considered "a rookie mistake." Not being able to use the browser's back button meant one could not modify a previously executed search. This problem was immediately fixed in the succeeding iteration of the software. Generally speaking, most of the problems, to one degree or another, have been resolved in subsequent iterations of the database, as one would expect.

However, after our in-class information literacy-focused discussions regarding **ENGnetBASE** as related to some of the issues from **ELD's Best Practices for Electronic Resources**, the students were able to provide more relevant feedback. For example, a number of students did not understand the fairness of a subscription-pricing model whereby the library would not own access to any materials once the subscription ended. In their minds the types of activities they would use **ENGnetBASE** for would be primarily to gather facts, figures, graphs, etc. This is information that does not need updating on an annual basis. I learned that a number of students received handbooks

as high school graduation gifts; these were passed on to them as heirlooms. Handbooks were once considered the definitive resource in their field. Also, many of the department laboratories have old copies of various engineering handbooks on hand for anyone's use, or they can be found on a number of instructors' office shelves, which students can borrow.

Our conversation evolved into a debate on the types of resources that added academic value to the learning experience, and those that added convenience. This dialogue introduced me to a genre of information resources that was not on my radar, such as software products that blend technology and information content, such as the line of **AspenTech** products. **AspenTech** produces software that allows students to simulate theoretical concepts; some of their software provides access to content previously owned by other entities. These products are widely used in corporate settings, and one's ability to use these types of products gives one a competitive advantage against other candidates when competing for jobs. Not surprisingly, this discussion became

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one of competing interests; students began to question the value of **ENGnetBASE** in lieu of what they considered more important resources. Their final recommendation was that librarians should figure out a way to get **ENGnetBASE** to substantially reduce their subscription cost if we are never going to own the material.

In some ways **ENGnetBASE** was a victim of the newfound knowledge the students gained during this evaluation process. Previously, I repeatedly heard from those I worked with that they wanted the library to convert our print material into electronic when possible. Now I hear from my more vocal users that we should prioritize what we convert to electronic from print and concentrate on purchasing more software-related resources that blend software and technology, material not traditionally purchased by libraries. The truth of the matter is that prior to evaluating **ENGnetBASE**, neither my patrons nor I seriously considered the appropriateness of the library purchasing electronic content that was more for manipulation purposes than content retrieval.

However, I have recently become a new convert, and agree with those who see the purchase of blended software as a legitimate

expense that should be covered by information resource budgets. Currently, I am working on a project with a colleague to coordinate the purchase of a campus site license for **ChemOffice Ultra**. **ChemOffice Ultra** includes **ChemDraw**, **Chem3D**, **BioDraw**, high level applications such as **E-Notebook**, **Inventory**, and **BioAssay**, and the databases **ChemACX**, **ChemINDEX & NCI**, and **Ashgate Drugs 2.1**. In this instance our library paid for a site license for **ChemOffice Ultra** for one year, with the understanding that we would use the year to collect usage statistics by colleges. Our expectation is that once the colleges see the usage numbers and cost savings of a campus site license they will be on board. Researchers and faculty often buy software directly from vendors using their grant funds and doing so can sometimes bypass their campus purchasing or procurement departments. Therefore campuses do not always have an accurate picture of the amount of money they are collectively spending on subject specific software. Typically, an accurate financial picture for the whole campus is only available from the vendor, as we discovered at my university.

Of course, deciding to aggressively pursue these types of products has considerable implications on libraries' information resource budgets as well as many of the current scholarly communication issues. Yet, I have noticed that students and faculty are a bit more ac-

commodating with pricing models for subject specific software packages that favor access over ownership. Why is that? Some say it is because these types of products add academic value and others point to the fact that students become more marketable by using the same subject specific software packages they will be using when they enter the workforce in their respective careers. One associate dean said having campus-wide access to certain subject specific software packages is an asset when trying to recruit new students.

It may be unfair to judge a book by its cover, but when it comes to format preferences for engineering reference material the jury is still out at the **University of Arizona**. When stacked side by side with other resources, the current pricing models are not enticing. Issues around the benefits of the portability of the information also received a lackluster reception. I will never be able to convince my users of the benefits of **ENGnetBASE** until we get a budget that can accommodate all of their other subject specific software requirements, and this may be a good thing. Now when I send out correspondence designed to solicit information on resources needed, I receive well thought-out replies rather than utopian statements. Engaging in intellectual exchange paves the path to mutual understanding and informed decision-making. 🍷

ATG Interviews Buzzy Basch

President, Basch Subscriptions

by **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: *Buzzy, congratulations! But, why did you sell? And what is Prenax?*

BB: **Prenax** is a Swedish-owned subscription service located in Stockholm with offices located in Stockholm, London, Paris, New York, San Francisco and now Concord, New Hampshire. For the past ten plus years their focus has been business-to-business subscription services. My reaching an agreement with them was based on a number of factors. First of all they are financially sound, their corporate and country culture give high priority to people, both employees and customers, a personal high priority for me and at **Basch Subscriptions**. They want to be more involved in the library community which makes **Basch** a natural fit. Also, my recognition should something unplanned happen to me, I wanted to insure my very loyal staff continued to have jobs.

ATG: *Is the sale final? When was it final or when will it be final?*

BB: Yes. The sale was finalized March 21st.

ATG: *How many library clients does Prenax have? How about Basch's clients? Are they largely medical and corporate? Is this a good fit with Prenax?*



BB: The **Prenax Group** is a global business-to-business subscription management company headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden. Founded in 1991, **Prenax** maintains operations in Sweden, the United States (New York, Boston, San Francisco), the United Kingdom, and France. Their acquisition of **Basch Subscriptions** will allow two successful businesses to grow into serious players in the

subscription business. I see in the international span and the size of the **Prenax Group**, opportunities to broaden and strengthen service options for our customers. The commonality of focus and service orientation were key to the decision to join. Both companies excel in providing premier service. **Prenax** and **Basch Subscriptions** have both been recognized for service excellence and each company is blessed with talented and motivated teams and a loyal customer base. State-of-the-art Customer Service will remain the premier focus for both operations.

ATG: *What will you be doing? What will change at Basch Subscriptions? Will the name change?*

BB: The name will not change. We plan on my running **Basch** as a separate division of **Prenax**. I am the President, **Judy McQueen** is Vice President, and **Mats Edlund**, **Prenax** CEO is director. **Mats** is a comfortable savvy young man with a sound understanding of publishing, library needs and issues, as well as technology. I will be on the **Prenax** board of directors. All of this was a significant factor in the acquisition decision.

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