Against the Grain

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Changing Library Operations--The Dangers of eBook Plug & Play--Managing the Orbis Cascade Shared eBook Collection

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Changing Library Operations — The Dangers of eBook Plug & Play

Managing the Orbis Cascade Shared eBook Collection

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As the **Orbis Cascade Alliance's** demand-driven eBook program approaches the end of its fourth year, we find ourselves confronted with a different set of complex challenges than when we began as a pilot in July 2011. These challenges have shifted the focus of the Ebook Working Group (EWG) considerably over the past year, with our energies increasingly being redirected into areas of collection management and spend stabilization, and away from subject profile building and content proliferation. Since library literature has been understandably preoccupied with the latter, this article will focus upon the former and hopefully provide insights for those grappling with similar situations. It will also highlight two major shifts that occurred midstream: they included publishers removing, or reclassing, existing content; and our decision to move forward, at the request of our membership, with a consortium-wide subscription to **ebrary's** Academic Complete that would serve to supplement our existing pool of DDA offerings.

Ramping Up

As far as our initial collection development was concerned, in the early months of the pilot the focus was on building the content pool and making it as useful as possible for our diverse membership (37 libraries, ranging from community colleges to **ARL** institutions). Although we had deliberately chosen the summer, a traditionally slow time for academic libraries, to launch the pilot, before long we came to realize that our more comfortable learning curve came at the price of publisher concern about the low level of purchasing. Since the pilot's primary goal was shared ownership of eBooks, in September 2011 we decided to lower the purchase trigger from 10 to 5 short-term loans (STLs) and also to retrospectively load 10,000 titles with publication dates of 2009 and 2010, resulting in a five-fold increase in the size of our content pool. These two decisions would have significant consequences for our budget over time.

With the endorsement of the **Alliance** governance, the pilot transitioned to an ongoing program in July 2012, with a FY2013 budget of $750,000. Before the fiscal year had ended, however, we were faced with the certainty of overspending our allocation. Raising the purchase trigger or even suspending purchases altogether would not solve our problem — we had to reduce the size of our content pool. Even though a $1 million budget had been approved for FY2014, immediate action was required if we wanted to be able to add new publishers to the program, a desire consistently articulated by our member libraries.

In the early heady days of DDA, whether on a local or consortial scale, growth had been the byword. Many conference presenters gave the impression that as long as one implemented a profile which ensured that only suitably academic material would enter the pool, a DDA program could be left to run itself. In this collection development utopia, there was no need to weed titles — there was no cost to unused eBooks, and older titles were likely already to have been purchased if they had been deemed valuable by users. Unlike their print counterparts, eBooks did not claim precious shelf space, so where was the need for collection management?

The Brave New World of eBook Weeding

Even as the **Alliance** had been on the forefront of large-scale consortial DDA, we now found ourselves facing new challenges as we attempted to rein in spending without negatively impacting our users. In this way we entered the brave new world of eBook weeding.

In consultation with **EBL**, who provided us with cost projections under various scenarios, the EWG settled on a strategy which involved removing most unpurchased titles published prior to 2011 (the pilot's original cut-off date) and raising the purchase trigger to 15 STLs. As with any conventional deselection project, it was important to communicate with stakeholders regarding our strategy. A key opportunity presented itself in the annual summer meeting of **Alliance** members, during which the collection development and public services librarians would be gathering to hear updates on the eBook program.

It was then that the differences between weeding criteria for print books and DDA eBooks became obvious to all, which is not to say they were accepted by all. It is counter-intuitive to a collection development librarian to deselect a title that has seen recent use. To the inevitable proposal that we weed those books that have seen little or no use, we had to gently point out that such a strategy would yield us very little in financial savings. We carefully presented the case that this deselection project would allow us not only to keep up with the new imprints coming in weekly through our profile, but it would also allow us to cautiously add new publishers if we moderated our spending through a higher purchase trigger. Most seemed to accept, albeit reluctantly, the necessity of this course, but it may have reinforced the belief by some that eBooks are ephemeral and a poor substitute for print.

As we were preparing to undertake the content removal project, action by two of our participating publishers signaled that matters were not exclusively under our control, a lesson we have since had several occasions to relearn. During the summer of 2012, **Cambridge University Press** changed the access model for over 1,000 of its DDA titles from unlimited simultaneous users to a more restrictive "textbook" model; **Taylor & Francis** similarly designated a number of its titles "textbook" while allowing for the continuation of the less restrictive model on these books at a 50% higher price. The Working Group decided that a "textbook" pricing model was not appropriate for our DDA program and chose to remove the affected Cambridge titles. In the case of **Taylor & Francis**, there was a different outcome: we agreed to pay the premium for unlimited simultaneous access while committing to monitor the financial consequences of this decision.

The Local/Consortial Intersection

As an increasing number of consortial DDA programs have developed, the issue arises of the interplay between the local collection, whether print or electronic, and the shared collection. When the **Alliance** DDA pilot began, two member libraries already had local DDA programs with **EBL**, and more entered into programs at a later date. Duplication control is accomplished by **YBP** managing all the profiles. On the other hand, libraries may choose to buy print duplicates of those **Alliance** DDA titles, whether purchased or not, that had seen significant use by its own constituents. Monthly usage reports are posted on the **Alliance** Website as aids to such decision-making.

The content removal project provided further opportunities to coordinate local and consortial collection decisions. The Working Group posted library-specific spreadsheets of

all the titles designated for removal that had generated loans by that library's users. If they chose to do so, libraries could acquire these titles in print or electronic format, thus ensuring that their users did not lose access to content they had found valuable. In addition, consortial DDA titles that were nearing their purchase trigger were pre-emptively bought for the shared eBook collection when the STL history showed loans generated by several **Alliance** libraries. In such cases we felt that the books had proven their worth to the consortium and deserved to be owned collectively.

As a fiscal control measure, the content removal project was a success, even though its implementation had unfortunate public service consequences because of technical processing delays beyond our control, resulting in the removal taking place in the middle of a school term rather than in the summer as originally planned. Content-wise, we were able to add new publishers to the DDA, but the higher purchase trigger meant that the program was tilting more to access than to ownership. Meanwhile, with the **Alliance** embarking on an ambitious plan to migrate collectively to a consortial, next generation ILS, the prospect of further increases in the annual eBook program budget beyond $1 million was dim. The question thus became: how to grow the eBook program in a way that maintains the shared ownership component while keeping within a flat budget?

A number of our member libraries already subscribed to a general eBook package such as **ebrary's** Academic Complete or **EBSCO's** Academic Collection. We decided to explore a consortial subscription to one of these products and in Summer 2014 chose Academic Complete, in part because **ProQuest's** ownership of both **EBL** and **ebrary** held the potential for better integration of our DDA and subscription collections. By this means we greatly increased the number of eBooks available to the **Alliance**, including from many publishers who do not offer their titles in a consortial DDA model.

Many titles in Academic Complete (AC) are considered backlist titles, while the DDA program continues to focus on frontlist titles from a small group of publishers. Although the Working Group had planned to undertake a mass removal of all unpurchased titles from the DDA that were duplicated in AC, some technical roadblocks with our ILS have to be overcome before this can occur. We will be working with **YBP** to refine our DDA profile so that it excludes new titles that are being added to AC.
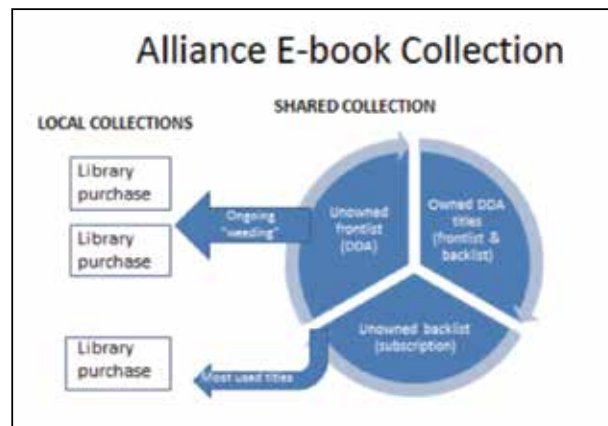
The Role of Publishers

Publisher initiative continues to play a role in ongoing collection management of our combined DDA/AC eBook program. In Summer 2014 a series of significant STL price increases prompted a review of the DDA content pool, during which it was discovered that a number of unpurchased titles had increased in price subsequent to entering DDA, to the point that they now exceeded the

original $250 price cap. These, together with other unpurchased titles published before 2012, were the focus of the Working Group's second content removal project. As before, lists of titles slated for removal were shared so that member libraries could make local purchasing decisions based on their users' behavior. Titles with 12 or more STLs from 6 or more libraries were pre-emptively purchased for the **Alliance** collection. In all, nearly 5,000 titles were removed and 269 titles were purchased. This time, record removal was achieved before fall term began in most member institutions.

Another instance of publisher action creating the need for local collection management decisions occurred when publishers withdraw titles from the AC collection. By and large these removals take place semi-annually, and the Working Group has responded by alerting member libraries of the titles scheduled for removal. Although it is a small minority of AC titles that is affected, the potential for removal of any AC title remains, requiring diligence in monitoring changes in AC content, even as the Working Group continues to monitor significant pricing and other changes in the DDA pool.

As the **Alliance** shared eBook collection continues to evolve, the interplay between the consortial DDA and subscription collections on the one hand, and local collections on the other, becomes ever more important. A highly simplified schematic representation of this relationship might look something like this:

Just as in our local collections, where collection development and collection management go hand-in-hand, so it is with our consortial eBook collection.

Increasing Complexity, Increasing Diligence

As many institutions have come to realize, demand-driven eBooks bring additional layers of complexity to issues of collection management that can have profound implications for budgets, staff time, and research. Running contrary to our misperceptions about dated material not being used, older unpurchased material continues to see short-term loans, and without adequate steps to curtail or control this moving wall of potential expenditure, libraries could find themselves with quickly depleted deposit accounts for demand-driven content. Moreover, tracking the publishers' removal of titles in ways easily communicable to selectors can be difficult and lead to an erosion of confidence in the viability of eBooks as a long-range collection development strategy. If a selector passes on acquiring a print copy of a key title because of its inclusion in a DDA pool, which is later removed, then this can have repercussions for collection building and trust. Libraries should strive for clarity and transparency in this process and build clear channels of communication with selectors so titles scheduled to be removed can be purchased via other means if necessary. Finally, whether you are talking DDA or subscription products, collection development librarians must keep abreast of changes involving publishers and eBook aggregates, such as the **University of Chicago's** mass withdrawal of content from Academic Complete. As the market adjusts and reacts to the disruption of eBooks, libraries will need to stay diligent and realize that DDA eBooks are not the plug-and-play solution we expected (or hoped) them to be, and that with their many benefits and advantages come a new set of budgetary challenges. 🐟

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so diverse and innovative that success is much more a function of the quality of the initial idea and the energy and talent brought to bear on its realization than it is a matter of organizational structure." An extensive bibliography as well as detailed results of the library publishing survey are provided as appendixes to the report. **CLIR** is an independent, nonprofit organization that forges strategies to enhance research, teaching, and learning environments in collaboration with libraries, cultural institutions, and communities of higher learning. It aims to promote forward-looking collaborative solutions that transcend disciplinary, institutional, professional, and geographic boundaries in support of the public good.

Stay Tuned! We will have a panel on this report.

We are pleased to welcome **Ada**, the newest member of the Special Collections at the **College of Charleston** and the **Fairchild** family. She was born on June 1st (her due date!). Our congratulations to **Mary Jo**!