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Acquiring Minds Want To Know:
Is Full-Text Half Full Or Half Empty?

By: Joyce Ogburn

No Abstract

Profiles Encouraged:

Deana Astle

First appearance: Martinez, California somewhere between VE day and VJ day. My mother was told she could stay in the hospital for as long as she could stand the tarantulas which wandered off the banana boats and into the corridors through the French doors which opened on to the California hills.

Present domicile: Clemson, South Carolina.

Formal education: Shaker Heights High School outside of Cleveland; A.B. in English Literature from Brown University; MLS from UCLA; MA in English from the University of Utah; two years of geology at the University of Missouri when I briefly considered changing careers.

Family: Three brothers, two nieces, eight nephews, one great-niece, a passel of squirrels, and a multitude of wild birds.

Proudest moment: When I realized, after the work Chuck Hamaker and I did on serials pricing and the scholarly communication chain, that one or two people can indeed make a difference if they care enough and keep at it.

Current position: Assistant Dean of Libraries with responsibilities for Facilities, Preservation, Assessment, and Information Access. I am currently chair of the University's Assessment Committee and am preparing for the upcoming self-study for reaccreditation.

Pet peeve: When people are so sure of themselves that they either will not or cannot discuss opposing issues logically and rationally.

Best advice: Remember, the only way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time.

If I had but means enough and time... I would travel the world, with special attention to the out-of-doors. Australia's Alice Springs and Great Barrier Reef are particularly intriguing.

What I do outside of work: Read (mysteries, science fantasy, feminist history/sociology, Jewish and middle east history, etc.), hike, daydream by lakes and mountain streams, sing in a community chorale, crochet, garden, play the dulcimer, and collect frogs.

Acquiring Minds Want to Know

Is Fulltext half full or half empty?

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Fulltext has become a more prevalent offering in electronic resources. In some cases the original publisher may produce material both in print and electronic form or in electronic form only, while maintaining control over the contents. In other cases, another party may obtain the rights from the publisher to republish the material in a composite database. In all of these cases, the resources may be marketed as having fulltext of information. However, folks who have examined fulltext resources in detail have discovered that there are definitely different varieties of fulltext.

Electronic fulltext products may deliver the text of articles without the accompanying images or pictures, graphics, or citations; or with different names; or without all the articles from the same title or from the same issue. Sometimes entire issues may be missing. On the other hand, fulltext products may provide an expanded package of information and articles that surpasses print subscriptions in terms of contents, access, indexing, convenience, and at a price advantage over print publications. Consortia in particular may find great benefits in negotiating terms for access, searching, downloading, and pricing of fulltext resources over purchasing print titles.

The presence of variety among versions and formats of a title is nothing new. A print resource may have one set of contents, the CD-ROM version may have one kind of search software and coverage, tape another, and Internet yet another (or maybe several) versions. Sometimes librarians feel compelled to purchase multiple versions of resources to provide the kind of coverage they feel patrons need. Fulltext electronic products have not necessarily fully duplicated print versions.

The **Virtual Library of Virginia** project (known as VIVA), has purchased access to some fulltext resources. When VIVA started it was assumed that libraries participating in the project would be able to cancel some print subscriptions when the electronic fulltext products became available. Preliminary studies of the products indicate that the text can be much less than full. The VIVA project is not discovering something unique. There is understandable concern among VIVA librarians that if titles were to be cancelled because access to electronic fulltext equivalents was purchased, libraries would no longer own the resources, patrons might have inadequate coverage of titles that they regularly consult, that there might be accreditation consequences of not having titles in collections, or that other consequences of relying on less than full electronic text might arise.

Asking good questions can help librarians sort out what to do about fulltext. Is it a product that is an enhancement or supplement, or is it a different animal altogether? If it is different, should librarians give up title dependency (i.e. the desire to have a title by title, issue by issue, and article by article reckoning of contents), or be willing to accept the fulltext product as a package that provides far more information and articles than a librarian could purchase with equivalent "print" dollars? Should librarians continue to buy both the print and electronic versions and accept them for the strengths and weaknesses (perhaps complimentary) that they both possess? Should librarians commit large sums to buying basically the same information, albeit in different formats? Should librarians accept terms from publishers that require the purchasing of both formats or suffer price increases or not receive refunds when print versions are canceled?

Publishers will continue to try to generate revenue while experimenting with electronic publishing. However, it is up to librarians to decide whether to accept the terms offered by publishers or to negotiate terms that are suitable to the library. Librarians can also questions content and ask that fulltext live up to what the name implies.

I am a strong advocate of establishing principles before making decisions. What existing principles apply to fulltext and electronic resources? What new principles need to be developed, or how do we need to adopt existing principles? Fulltext products may be inconsistent in content or change without notice. Fulltext products challenge existing principles of holdings, titles, cataloging, and control over collections. Librarians may need to decide whether to relinquish these principles in favor of those that support buying more information, provided electronically, at an advantageous price, complete with ambiguity and uncertainty. Librarians need to decide whether they can learn to live with this new kind of animal.

Maybe librarians will just argue that the case for buying (supposedly) fulltext in lieu of print just doesn't yet hold water. 🌳