

Against the Grain

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Progress and Pitfalls in Consortial eBook Acquisitions: The Orbis Cascade Alliance Experience

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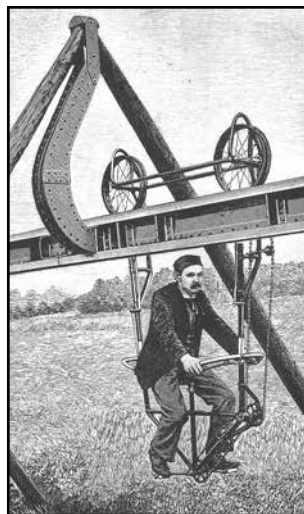
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their print collections over time. These efforts will not be fully successful without robust assessment efforts informing and influencing collection development decisions.

Applications and tools to analyze and visualize data are key to successful assessments. These tools must scale to large datasets, be regularly refreshed with new and corrected data, have security and access controls (where necessary), employ transparent or understandable algorithms, and be queryable to address evolving and novel questions. For example, at **Yale** we migrated from static monthly collection fund reports to weekly refreshed reports viewable through Tableau. Subject librarians who manage allocated collection funds have praised the more intuitive interface and up-to-date financial data in helping them more effectively monitor their allocations and be timelier with acquisition decisions.

At the network level, the **IPLC** is exploring applications and tools needed for collection management and development. A working group is engaged in this research with the goal of developing a suite of collection lifecycle tools to inform collaborative collection efforts. A hoped-for outcome would be a vendor-neutral selection tool, coupled with robust assessment data, to facilitate separate, coordinated, or joint collection building.

Libraries must embrace a world where assessment and applied technologies will play an increasing role in shaping collection workflows and processes. Vendors have a role to play in providing tools and the necessary data to inform local and networked operations. Data privacy (institutional and personal) and algorithm transparency are critical issues that libraries need to address with the vendor community. There must also be an understanding that libraries will increasingly acquire and manage collection materials in a network, say more like the way you think of branch library systems today. Ideally, libraries and vendors can work together to create products and pricing models viable at network scale, and available open access where possible. Libraries can realize workflow and economic efficiencies in how information resources are acquired, described, discovered, and preserved, while also working with vendors in a healthy scholarly communications marketplace where innovation continues, and the issues of data privacy, intellectual property, and algorithm transparency are addressed.



We have moved from the labor-intensive analog days to a digital environment where information resources in all formats (print and digital) can be provided to users at point of need, as well as made available for computational analysis. Libraries will continue to evolve in how they manage collections, working in collaborative networks and in mutually beneficial arrangements with publishers and vendors. Libraries must embrace a culture of assessment, locally and in close partnerships, to guide a wide range of decisions affecting all aspects of the collections lifecycle. The ultimate goal is to maintain

and improve service for our user communities, including the global scholarly community. Libraries are robust, versatile organizations, and we will continue to be so into a future increasingly enabled by data and technology where the services provided through library collections are developed, described, managed, analyzed, preserved, and open. 🐼

*Author's Note: I want to thank **Galadriel Chilton** for generously sharing the collections lifecycle graphic for use in this article. — **DD***

Progress and Pitfalls in Consortial eBook Acquisitions: The Orbis Cascade Alliance Experience

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The **Orbis Cascade Alliance** (“the **Alliance**”) is a consortium of 38 academic libraries in the Pacific Northwest, comprised of a diversity of institutions¹ serving over 275,000 students. In 2011, the **Alliance** began a program to develop a shared eBook collection. Initially built around a demand-driven acquisitions (DDA) plan run through **YBP** and **EBL**,² the program has evolved in recent years to capitalize on new opportunities and respond to challenges that have emerged in managing such a large program.

The \$1M eBook program is centrally funded via consortial dues and is intended to benefit all members. Like funding, management of the program is centralized through the **Alliance** “team” structure. The Ebook Standing Group (ESG) operates under the auspices of the Shared Content & Technical Services (SCTS) Team. Drawing on varied expertise from across the consortium, the ESG

is comprised of around ten members from **Alliance** institutions and the SCTS Program Manager.

Access and selection of eBooks is managed through the shared Alma ILS, which includes a consortial “network zone” (NZ), and Primo discovery service. Bibliographic records for discovery are centrally loaded into the Alma NZ, and therefore facilitate discovery and access for all **Alliance** member institutions via Primo. For each title accessible through the eBook program, a public note displays in Primo, distinguishing between “discovery” (not yet purchased) and purchased titles.

Managing a consortial process of selection, acquisition, and access to a shared collection requires the integration of several moving parts. New complications for the ESG developed as the eBook program expanded and plans diversified, especially in the 2017-18 year. Along the way, the group learned many les-

sons about implementing and simultaneously maintaining various eBook plans at a consortial level, which we outline below.

Acquisitions Models

Several models of eBook acquisition are available to consortia, but not all models are suited to every situation. Examples include DDA, evidence-based acquisition (EBA), package subscription, front and back-list purchases, and collection purchases. Selecting a plan or approach to meet participant needs is essential. As a result, a periodic review to ensure plans continue to meet needs over time is an important aspect of developing and maintaining a consortial collection.

Pitfall: It can be easy to initially underestimate how complex a seemingly simple plan may become when implemented in a consortial space.

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Takeaway: Carefully evaluate consortial needs and project how a given model will function within the consortial context. It is important to be as specific and detailed as possible when requesting proposals from vendors and publishers. Evaluation of potential plans should consider member needs and account for the capacity required for ongoing central management.

Bibliographic Records Management

Ease and effectiveness of centrally managing bibliographic records have always been a keystone of the **Alliance** eBook program. Alma import profiles for each plan were created to retrieve and load new records from selected collections in **OCLC WorldShare Collection Manager**. The **Alliance** has found this workflow to increase efficiency as it automates record delivery and reduces manual processing of records.

Pitfall: Assuming that high quality metadata would be available within an acceptable time frame from any participating publisher via services like **OCLC WorldShare Collection Manager**.

Takeaway: It is important to clearly specify the metadata standards and workflows upfront. Do not take it for granted that publishers will have the same knowledge of and commitment to high-quality metadata as book vendors. Confirm that bibliographic record delivery from a given publisher can be accommodated by consortial workflows.

Budgeting

Cost predictability is essential in any plan. When multiple institutions of varying size and individual missions are participating in the same program, it is helpful to keep budgeting as simple as possible.

Pitfall: Budgeting for real-time demand-driven purchasing across many institutions is tricky and requires constant attention, especially as content, pricing, and access models change over time. When high access and short-term loan costs became unsustainable under the DDA program, the **Alliance** began to move toward other models (e.g., EBA) for consortial purchasing.³

Takeaway: Demand-driven pricing may not be effectively scalable within a consortial environment. Consortial acquisitions should be implemented to streamline workflows. It is not enough to save money for a plan to be successful; the plan needs to reduce work, as well.

Multipliers

Along with the centralized management of the program, the benefit of leveraging the buying power of many institutions into a low “multiplier” is a principal value of a consortial eBook plan. A multiplier is how many times the list price is multiplied by for each title (i.e., the number



of “copies” the consortium needs to buy for shared access).

Pitfall: Lack of clarity when communicating expectations of value and having a proposed multiplier come in too high.

Takeaway: To make the proposal process as successful as possible, clearly identify and agree on the acceptable threshold for consideration before approaching content providers. Multipliers in the single digits seem to be the norm. When a multiplier in the double-digits (e.g., 10x) is proposed by a content provider, then it is difficult to seriously consider the offer.

Number of Plans

When managing a program on behalf of several dozen institutions, it does not take more than a couple of concurrent plans to multiply the complexities of program management considerably. Within the context of an ongoing eBook acquisitions program that is constantly adapting to changes in technology, publishing, and user expectations, it is important to keep the plans manageable at the consortial scale. It is also worth noting that if plans are dropped and new plans are implemented to take their place, the old plans may still result in continuing central management (including statistics gathering, link maintenance, de-duplication of new plans, etc.)

Pitfall: Over the course of a continuous program, old plans, failed pilots, and outdated acquisition models will create a growing snowball of maintenance issues that require ongoing attention.

Takeaway: Any plans should be carefully considered. It is not just a plan’s ability to meet immediate needs that determine its suitability, but a projection of long-term maintenance requirements should also be part of the calculus.

Platform Migrations

Though an inevitable and necessary aspect of a technologically-mediated content program, the impact of timing and planning of migrations can be critical. For example, shortly into a new plan year, an unexpected publisher platform migration undermined a large part of the program. This migration resulted in access problems for members across the consortium, as well as the provider’s ability to respond to issues in a timely manner.

Pitfall: Assuming that the platform would be stable and that any change would have a long lead time.

Takeaway: Before starting a plan, make sure to discuss each content provider’s plan for their technology maintenance or upgrades. Be clear that major disruptions (such as a platform migration) will require a long lead time to mitigate impact on users. Expectations around clear communication and reasonable timelines should be discussed and then documented. For example, spell out specific expectations for URL redirects to maintain stable access through the transition.

Staffing

Because of the centralized management of the program, turnover in both central consortium staff and group members created confusing gaps in knowledge or ambiguity around program parameters. In the misunderstandings that inevitably arose, it was difficult to determine at some points why a given plan was not meeting expectations.

Pitfall: Assuming that institutional memory would provide ongoing context and fill in any gaps.

Takeaway: Document everything! While documenting the program seems obvious, many assumptions or details may be easily overlooked during planning and implementation. It is difficult to determine what may be the most important bit of information in the end, so record all elements of the program and resolve ambiguities as the program evolves. Take nothing for granted!

Statistics

An essential part of the eBooks program is usage statistics, both for each member institution and for the **Alliance** overall. Many of the plans incorporated usage into the selection model. But the **Alliance** relies on the usage data to help determine the contribution of each member to the eBook fund.

Pitfall: Not every content provider’s platform includes a consortial dashboard. The ability to provide not only scheduled statistics but a variety of data display options, such as customizable time periods or subject groupings, may be a requirement for the consortium.

Takeaway: A key consideration in any plan is determining how usage will influence selection to benefit a consortium’s users. Reviewing a sample of a given content provider’s multi-institution usage reports should inform the decision. Clearly stating the consortium’s requirements to content providers in advance of implementation will help ensure usage data will be supplied in a timely fashion. Consider drafting model language for license agreements specifically about usage data that can be available when proposals are requested.

For example: Specifying that usage data will be made available at both the aggregate (i.e., consortial) and individual institution levels; Requiring that usage of titles purchased outside the plan will be excluded; Detailing timelines for usage data reporting including the time it will take the provider to compile consortium-wide usage data and how much time the consortium will be allowed to review the data prior to selecting titles for purchase.

Scope of Content

Because of the diversity of institutions represented in **Alliance** membership, content must be scoped very carefully. Parameters should be simple enough to be shared broadly within the organization (e.g., with subject liaisons who are not members of the ESG), so that individual institutions can coordinate local collection development.

Pitfall: Believing that certain categories (e.g., “textbooks,” encyclopedias, etc.) may be

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today, as they look to build their larger collections.

After two years of loading holdings and integrating eBook collections into **GOBI** workflows, the library has seen benefits of this integration. The selectors appreciate that they can now see what has been purchased or is part of an eBook collection, the questions to Acquisitions have greatly decreased, and selectors are spending down their budgets without fear of unnecessary duplication. Having eBook collections integrated into the monograph vendor workflow also gives the library a better way to view their English-language collection more holistically regardless of format, making it easier to identify and address gaps in the collection. The library is now working towards a new set of profiles that will address these disparities and better serve the users in the future. By consolidating and centralizing, they believe they have improved the efficiencies for all. 🐾

excluded without category parameters or specific titles lists of what is being excluded.

Takeaway: When dealing with content providers, a clear scope of content included in the plan is important to define before implementation. Consider documenting specific title lists of either included or excluded titles; clearly defined publication ranges (especially if an acquisition program doesn't run concurrent with a calendar year); and a thorough understanding of how a publisher eBook platform does or does not mirror print publication lists and schedules.

Conclusion

A consortial eBook acquisition program is an exciting way to build a shared collection and rethink collection development. The ability to achieve further efficiency through a shared ILS and NZ really enables a consortium to push the boundaries of traditional monograph acquisitions. Through discounted purchasing, consolidated data analysis, and streamlining record loading, the consortium achieves economies of scale at many points throughout the selection-to-acquisition process.

Along with the possible efficiencies comes the potential for added complexity. The pitfalls and lessons learned by the **Alliance** ESG highlight the

importance of a team committed to investigating issues and identifying solutions to mitigate the impact on the larger consortium of members and users.⁴ Careful planning, detailed documentation, and constant communication are critical to avoid problems with acquisitions at a consortial scale. 🐾

Endnotes

1. www.orbiscascade.org/member.
2. **McElroy, E.** and **S. Hinken.** (2014). "Pioneering Partnerships: Building a Demand-Driven Consortial eBook Collection." *Against the Grain*. 23(3).
3. **Robbeloth, H., Ragucci, M., and DeShazo, K.** (2017). "Evidence-Based Acquisition: A Real Life Account of Managing the Program Within the Orbis Cascade Alliance." *The Serials Librarian*. 73:3-4, 240-247.
4. The authors wish to acknowledge the collaborative efforts of the 2017-18 ESG members in responding to issues and identifying solutions to keep the Alliance eBook program moving forward during a very complex period: **Abigail Bibee** (Reed College), **Faye Christenberry** (University of Washington), **Andrea Eickholt** (ESG Chair, Eastern Washington University), **Jesse Holden** (Orbis Cascade Alliance), **Tom Larsen** (Portland State University), **Lorena O'English** (Washington State University), **Alexander Rolfe** (George Fox University), **Michelle Weston** (Western Washington University).

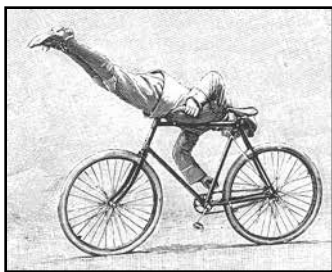
Doing More with Less, Revisited: Batch Processing, Outsourcing and Data Driven Curation, Five Years Later

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Doing more with less — this is a common theme we hear in libraries. In 2013, we presented at the **Charleston Conference** on this topic, followed up by an article in *Against the Grain*.¹ From 2010 to 2013 **Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Libraries** spent time exploring batch processing and outsourcing technical services and collection curation. We outlined projects utilizing these techniques, talked about our approach and reflected on early results of these projects. When recently approached to explore the topics of outsourcing, curation automation, and efficiencies in technical services it seemed like a wonderful opportunity to revisit some of the examples five years later. Pre-processing services, data-driven curation of the collection, vendor provided MARC records, and "internal outsourcing" were examples we felt could use a fresh look.

We have lived with our theory of "Good Enough" for some time and continue to find it useful. With limited resources we need



to determine how to allocate a finite amount of staff time and operating budget. For us this theory of "Good Enough" is the attempt to balance the investment of people and budget versus the impact any particular service or procedure may have for our users; the larger the impact, the more likely we are to dedicate time and money. It's common for service-minded professionals to want to do their very best at every task for our patrons. This drive is one of the key factors in a great library and a positive work culture. But with widespread dips in enrollment translating into budget constraints, it is simply impossible to be the very best in every service we offer. Libraries must continue to ask ourselves, our faculty, and staff what can we get done with the resources we have? What is the alternative for this project if we cannot be "perfect"? For **GVSU**, this thought process boils down time and time again to what will ultimately benefit our patrons the most. Library leadership

must continue to balance the resources at hand to provide the best possible service to our patrons. The examples that follow are updated, and show how **GVSU Libraries** streamline or outsourcing work.

Pre-processing Services

In our presentation and article from five years ago, we provided examples of why pre-processing services from vendors can be a way for libraries to save time and get materials to users in a much shorter time frame. These services include application of call numbers, barcodes, RFID tags, and property stamps on materials. Having the vendor do this processing work allowed us to keep up with the incoming materials, while only having one cataloger and ten to twenty hours of student help per week. We saw our processing time per book drop from eight to ten minutes per item to two to three minutes per item on average. Over these past five years, we've seen our books budgets begin to decrease due to the need to allocate funds away from print materials to support other formats and resource types as well as budget cuts. These reductions in funds, and

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