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## To Get or Not to Get the Kaust Library E-Resources Acquisition Experience

Rindra M. Ramli

*King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, rindra.ramli@kaust.edu.sa*

Ola A. Kabli

*King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, ola.kabli@kaust.edu.sa*

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# TO GET OR NOT TO GET: THE KAUST LIBRARY E-RESOURCES ACQUISITION EXPERIENCE

RINDRA RAMLI

KING ABDULLAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, SAUDI ARABIA

[rindra.ramli@kaust.edu.sa](mailto:rindra.ramli@kaust.edu.sa)

OLA KABLI

KING ABDULLAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, SAUDI ARABIA

[ola.kabli@kaust.edu.sa](mailto:ola.kabli@kaust.edu.sa)

## Abstract:

In the challenging times of budget cuts and reviews, libraries are faced with issues such as justifying acquisition, negotiating deals and reviewing current subscriptions (pertaining to electronic resources) among others. With the rapid growth of electronic resources, libraries have to continuously assess their acquisition models and policies to constantly ensure that they are balancing their budget and users' needs as well.

This paper highlights the role played by Technical and Digital Services (TADS) section of King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) library (Saudi Arabia) in acquiring the electronic resources (electronic books, electronic journals, databases, image and reference) for the community. It will describe the processes during the early days when KAUST library was inaugurated; how electronic resources were acquired and what went through during those days. The paper will elaborate further how the acquisition model has evolved and the various important roles played by the library staff in ensuring that acquisitions/subscriptions are justified, within the budget and provides ROI for the library.

King Abdullah University of Science and Technology is a graduate research university which opened in September 2009 with its first cohort of 800 graduate students (25% female) taught by 100 faculties. The focus of study and research in the university are: Mathematics and Computer Science, Physical Sciences and Life Sciences. The university library started with 10 staff. The library has a "state-of-the-art learning and information resource center supporting graduate education and advanced scientific research" (KAUST, 2010).

**Keywords:** Electronic Resource Management, ERM, Acquisition, Technical and Digital Services

## Introduction:

Collection development and acquisition of electronic resources have become an integral part of library activities. Conger (2004) stated that collection development involves the selection activities performed by library staff in order to meet the needs of the library's community while acquisition tasks consist of negotiating "the expenditure and resource delivery that best meet the library's larger purpose" (Conger, 2006). The complexity of the activities involved in the collection development and acquisition has brought libraries to consider various policies, processes and workflows to maximize the return of investment to the acquisition of these electronic resources.

The challenges faced by libraries have increased many folds as compared to the days of acquiring print materials. Due to the rapid growth of electronic resources, libraries have to contend with licensing issues, price negotiations, information access and technology issues. For instance, licensing matters such as who can access (as well as restrictions), how can information be accessed and what can be done with the information are just some of the major points that can make or break the acquisition of an electronic resource. In addition, libraries also have to negotiate with the electronic resource publishers over annual increase in prices against their limited financial budget. These are just some of the issues faced by libraries nowadays.

### **Objectives:**

The objective of this paper is to describe the roles and tasks performed by the Technical and Digital Services staff within the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology's (KAUST) Library in acquiring the electronic resources (electronic books, electronic journals, databases, image and reference) for the community. It will depict the close collaboration between Technical and Digital Services staff with the other library sections namely: Research and Administrative sections in the library. In addition to that, this paper will further elaborate how the acquisition model has evolved and the various important roles played by the library staff in ensuring that acquisitions/subscriptions are justified, within the budget and provides return on investment for the library.

### **Background:**

King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) was inaugurated in September 2009 with the mission of addressing scientific challenges in the field of energy and environment (Flannery & Smith, 2014). The university is located some 80 km north of Jeddah, along the shores of the Red Sea. KAUST has an endowment fund of \$10 billion which the sixth largest in the world (Mervis, 2007). The university itself will be similar to a university town encompassing houses, apartments, public schools (from Nursery, K1 – Grade 12), recreation facilities, shops, diners, medical, fire and security services plus public transportation. (Al Zahrani, Branin, & Yu, 2012).

Faculty members, researchers and students are distributed across 3 science and engineering divisions: Mathematics and Computer Science, Physical Sciences and Chemical and Life Sciences. Demographic study revealed that in December 2010, the student body were made up of 36%(Saudi Arabia and Middle East), 34%(Asia), 21%(Americas), 5%(Europe) and 4%(Africa) (Al Zahrani et al., 2012).

### **University Library**

The academic library is located strategically in the central area of the university. The library building was awarded the best new library buildings by American Institute of Architects in 2011. On the website (AIA), they described the library building as:

*“a place of gathering and learning, and at this university the library serves this function, providing informal settings for scientists to share thoughts and ideas. Group study areas and informal lounges are located throughout the library, and a café is integrated at the entry, blurring the boundary of formal and informal knowledge sharing”. - (Architects, 2011)*

The library began with a mixture of internationally talented librarians and para-professional coming from different corners of the world which includes the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, The United States, Singapore, Canada and India. Staff are divided into three divisions: Administrative, Technical and

Digital and Research Services, each headed by a manager who reports to the Library Director (Al Zahrani et al., 2012). The library's main priorities are to serve the needs of the faculty body, students and researchers. Students wanted "a comfortable, attractive library facility for study, for collaborative work, and for events and programs, such as research poster sessions" (Al Zahrani et al., 2012). Faculty, on the other hand, "wanted networked access to the current journal literature of science" (Al Zahrani et al., 2012).

### **Early Days**

Electronic resources acquisition for KAUST library began even before the physical library building was built. In 2008, a survey was conducted on the faculty members during a meeting in London (Alzahrani & Ramli, 2013). The outcome of this survey was that the library proceeded with the "acquisition of electronic resources products" based on a substantial budget that was given for the subscription and "purchase of perpetual content" (Alzahrani & Ramli, 2013). It is important to note that during this process, there was no involvement from any KAUST librarian (Alzahrani & Ramli, 2013). On top of that, the library "did not have much bargaining power in terms of negotiating the prices and license agreements" (Alzahrani & Ramli, 2013). It was probably due to absence of professional librarians that resulted in the high prices of the electronic resources.

When the library started in 2009, all three divisions namely Administrative, Research and Technical and Digital services worked together in the collection development and acquisition of the electronic resources. On the surface, Research takes care of assessing and evaluating the recommendations made by the faculty members and students as well as negotiating the prices and license agreement terms. Technical and Digital services ensure that the access to the approved electronic resources is made available in the integrated library system. In addition to that, they (Technical and Digital services) prepare the documents that expedite the payment processing such as obtaining all quotations and invoices from the relevant electronic publishers as well as raising the purchase orders. Administrative section assists in the payments by liaising with the Finance Department of the University. To prevent any illegal collusion, all 3 managers have to review and approve after each major decision before sending all documents for payments to Finance department.

### **Technical and Digital Services (TADS) Role in Electronic Resources Acquisition**

There are a number of roles and tasks undertaken by the Technical and Digital Services Staff. Technical and Digital Services staff that carry out these prominent tasks include the Manager, the Access and Digital Services Specialist (ADSS), Systems Librarian (SL), the Electronic Resources Acquisitions Coordinator (ERAC) and Metadata Specialist (MS). Among the tasks handled by them are:

- Creating purchase orders and processing payments
- Approving the purchase orders for payments
- Enabling access to the subscribed electronic resources
- Maintaining e-resources administrative and contacts information in the library system
- Documenting and updating all license agreements (soft copies and hard copies) in library's intranet, Sharepoint
- Creating the acquisition (Technical aspects) policy on electronic resources
- Maintaining and troubleshooting any access issues

## **Budget Allocation**

The Library Management Team (Library Director and the managers from the Research and Technical and Digital Services) would meet before each Financial Year to discuss the budget allocation for the library. One of the components would be to discuss and agree on the budget for the acquisition / cancellation of electronic resources. Once the decision has been reached, Research Services and Technical and Digital services would work closely to ensure that the library “purchases”, enable the access, maintain and monitor the usage of these electronic resources.

## **Processing payments and purchase orders**

The Electronic Resources Acquisition Coordinator (ERAC) works closely with the Subject Specialists (Research) to process the payments. Prior to processing the payments, the Subject Specialists will assess and evaluate electronic resources recommendations from the faculty members, researchers or students. In addition to that, subject specialists will also evaluate usage statistics for electronic resources that are up for renewals. They (subject specialists) will then submit their reports to the Research Services Manager. In turn, the manager will assess the report and approve/disapprove the recommendations of the Subject Specialists.

Approved electronic resources titles are passed on to the Electronic Resources Acquisition Coordinator. Before requesting for quotations and invoices, Electronic Resources Acquisition Coordinator will need to check and ensure that the electronic resources publishers are registered in the Procurement system. All their (electronic resources publishers) details such as contact and wire transfer information must be correct and updated to ensure that payments are processed expediently. If they (electronic resources publishers) are not registered yet, he/she will need to request for the publishers information and their wire transfer document. Upon receiving these documents, the Electronic Resources Acquisition will pass them over to the University's Procurement Department for registration.

Electronic resources publishers are then contacted to obtain quotations and invoices. Prices indicated must tally with the negotiated figures. In addition to that, product details and subscription period are also imprinted on both the quotation and invoice. When these documents are in order, the Electronic Resources Acquisition Coordinator would create the purchase order (PO) that needs to be approved by the Manager of the Technical and Digital Services. The approved purchase order would be automatically emailed to the respective electronic resources publishers. The details of the purchase order and the invoice are also emailed to the Access and Digital Services Specialist.

Approved purchase orders and the invoices are passed to the Library's Administrative section. The documents are sent over to the University Finance for payment processing by them (Administrative section). Should there be any discrepancy in contact or wire transfer details, the Electronic Resources Acquisition Coordinator and the Finance Officer will need to work together to resolve the issue.

## **Provision of access to electronic resources**

The approved Purchase Orders will be communicated to the Access and Digital Services Specialist. With this information, the Access and Digital Services Specialist will contact the respective publishers to request for information such as:

- Subscribed titles for both electronic journals and electronic books
- Website URL for access
- Administrative URLs and related information from the publishers
- Links to online guides / tutorials
- Provision of IP authenticated ranges for access activation

KAUST library uses Innovative Interface's Millennium Electronic Resources Management system (ERMs) to upload and maintain all the subscribed electronic resources. Electronic journal titles are uploaded via the library's electronic journal management system as well as the coverage load updated via the Millennium's Electronic Resource Management. The Access and Digital Services work together with a library assistant to check and verify that the titles are uploaded correctly by referring to the license agreements. On another note, the Metadata specialist will obtain the electronic books MARC record files from OCLC as well as from the electronic resources publishers. The MARC files are uploaded via the Cataloguing module.

The process of uploading and verifying electronic journals and electronic books can be arduous, time-consuming and resource-intensive task. Close attention to details are needed to ensure that the titles appear in the public interface of the library system. Any discrepancy will be reported to the Access and Digital Services Specialist. In turn, the Access and Digital Specialist will work closely either with the electronic resources publishers or the Systems Librarian to resolve the issue.

The Library's Systems Librarian also plays a key role in the provision of the electronic resources. The systems librarian oversees the smooth running of the integrated library systems and work closely with the other staff to ensure that technical issues are resolved expediently. KAUST library uses the suite of Innovative Interface's Millennium products that ensure the seamless access of the electronic resources. Among them are the Electronic Resources Management modules, CASE Electronic Journals Management system, federated search system, link resolvers as well as the mobile devices connectivity apps and social networking tools (Web 2.0). In the KAUST library context, the Systems Librarian's responsibilities include (among others):

- systems implementation, maintaining, upgrading
  - technology exploration and evaluation
  - miscellaneous technology support
  - communication and coordination
- (Yu, 2011).

The Access and Digital Services Specialist and the Systems Librarian also collaborate to establish off campus access via WAM proxy. All electronic resources details are entered by the Access and Digital Specialist into the Administrative module. Testing and verification would be conducted by Access and Digital Services Specialist to verify that users can access to the electronic resources off-campus (subjected to the license agreement clauses). Through the WAM system, the Access and Digital Services Specialist updates the level of access (authorized users) for each subscribed electronic resources.

### **Administrative Information – Publishers and Electronic Resources Products**

Presently, the Access and Digital Services Specialist uses the Millennium Electronic Resources Management System to update and maintain relevant information. This include electronic resources contact information (for example sales representative, technical support and credit controller information), activity logs, electronic resources administrative information (for example:

administrator URL), negotiator information and renewal alert ticklers. All these information are exported to an Excel Spreadsheet on a regular basis and uploaded into the library's intranet Sharepoint workspace.

In addition to that, the Electronic Resources Acquisition Coordinator compiles all the transaction details between the library and all electronic resources publishers in an Excel Spreadsheet file. Information within the file includes:

- Publisher's name,
- Product title,
- Purchase order number
- Prices
- Payment status
- Access status

This file is uploaded and updated in the library's Sharepoint workspace. Reports are created from data culled from this file. These reports are then used by the library management team to analyze and monitor the amount spent on electronic resources.

### **Electronic Resources License Agreements**

Though the Technical and Digital Services is not directly involved in the negotiation process with the publishers, nevertheless, the section (Technical and Digital Services) assist the Research Team in updating the license information into the library system and the library's intranet. Data such as authorized users and uses, appropriate use of the electronic resources, termination and indemnification clauses are among the data stored in the Millenium Electronic Resource Management system and the library's intranet. The tasks of uploading and updating this information are done by the Access and Digital Services Specialist with the help of a library assistant. The stored information would be referred to by the Research Team when they are renewing and renegotiating the agreements with the publishers (on an annual basis).

### **Acquisition Policy – Electronic Resources**

The Technical and Digital Services section came up with the Electronic Resources Acquisition Policy. This policy provides some basic guidelines for library staff during the evaluation and assessment phase of the electronic resources. Among the salient points of this policy are:

#### **Access/Information Searching and Retrieval**

- Off-campus access for KAUST faculty members, students and affiliated researchers
- IP authentication – Not via hard tokens, username/password, e-vouchers
- Compatible with the computers used in KAUST community
- Usability Features and Ease of searching/browsing Title/Author/Keyword/Phrase Searching  
Filtering of results: sorting, ranking Online tutorials/demo/guides/handouts Web2.0 features (Optional but plus point)
- Information retrieval: Saving, printing, downloading, emailing
- Compatible on Mac and Windows OS
- Compatible on defacto internet browsers: Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Safari, Opera
- 24/7 Availability

After-Sales support:

- Trials (Recommended but not compulsory)
- User Training and Technical Support
- Maintenance Notification
- Statistical Reporting
- Marc records provision
- Data security / integrity

These guidelines would assist the library staff in the verifying the technical feasibility of acquiring the electronic resources. It also helps to avoid any misunderstandings and identify technical issues during the implementation stage of the electronic resources.

### **Regular Maintenance / Troubleshooting / Inquiries**

One of the main responsibilities within the Technical and Digital Services is the regular maintenance of all the subscribed electronic resources. The Access and Digital Services Specialist has the task of ensuring that the all links are working as well as informing the library users on the maintenance schedule of any affected electronic resources.

In the event of a technical disruption, the Access and Digital Services Specialist would need to contact the publisher's technical support representative either via email or phone. The standard time of resolving common and straightforward access issues is between one to two days. For complex issues, Access and Digital Services Specialist and Systems Librarian may need to work together with the University IT department and the respective publisher's technical support to resolve the issue. Library users are notified of the progress and resolution of the issue.

In addition to that, Technical and Digital Services handles email / phone inquiries. Questions related to electronic resources are forwarded to Access and Digital Services Specialist. The most common issues affecting the library users are:

- Inability to access to a particular e-resource
- Procedure on accessing a e-resource
- Saving and downloading article(s)
- Exporting citations into citation management software

Any scheduled website maintenance conducted by the electronic resources publishers are communicated to the users via email or posted onto the library's website. This is to ensure that our users are not taken by surprise with the sudden downtime. It is also important to note that the business operating days/hours are not the same with the Western countries where most of the electronic resources publishers are located. In Saudi Arabia, the business week starts on a Sunday till Thursday. Friday and Saturday are weekends in Saudi Arabia. The Access and Digital Services Specialist need to consider this factor especially when scheduled maintenance is conducted on Saturdays through to Sundays. Ample 'warning' needs to be sent out the faculty members, researchers and students to ensure that research work are not affected by this activity.



## **Lessons learnt and challenges faced:**

### **Dealing directly with electronic resources publishers**

One of the most important changes that the library did in the area of electronic resources acquisitions was the change in policy of dealing with publishers. Initially, the library conducted all their business dealings which include price and license agreement negotiations via an appointed vendor. After much deliberation among the library management team, it was decided to deal directly with the publishers. One of the advantages was that the library got much faster response on technical issues such as access matters as well as negotiation power.

Dealing with publishers directly helps in creating a close rapport and better communication between the library staff and the publishers. This facilitated in better understanding of the library needs and expectations. This would not have happened if the library continued dealing via an intermediary (vendors).

### **Communication**

Communication is essential to the success of the entire electronic resources acquisition process. As mentioned by Wilkinson and Lewis, "acquisitions personnel must communicate with publishers and vendors about the resources being requested, the costs, the number of users, the technical requirements and the licensing agreements" (Wilkinson & Lewis, 2003). On top of that, the team would also need to notify technical requirements to the IT/Systems team, procurement team, Research Team among others.

As in the case for KAUST library, Technical and Digital Services staff is required to communicate extensively during the acquisition process. Take the example of the Electronic Resources Acquisition Coordinator, he/she will have to liaise closely with the manager, subject specialists and the electronic publishers on matters of placing the orders, obtaining quotations and invoices as well as raising the purchase orders. On top of that, Electronic Resources Acquisition Coordinator will need to inform the Access and Digital Services Specialist and Metadata Specialist on the titles of the subscribed electronic resources (electronic books and electronic journals) that need to be uploaded to the library OPAC system.

Access and Digital Services Specialist would need to communicate with the library staff and users to inform them whenever a new electronic resource has been added or removed from the collection. In addition to that, he/she need to constantly update them on access issues as well as procedures of accessing these resources. Apart from that, he/she need to communicate regularly with the publishers on matters such as technical issues, title lists, access block due to excessive download among others.

### **Delays**

Delays are sometimes unavoidable in the acquisition process. At best, all affected library staff need to constantly follow-up with the various relevant parties to ensure that there are no back logs of tasks. For instance, if documents such as wire transfer information, invoices and publisher's information are not delivered in a timely manner, this will affect the payment process as well as the activation of the electronic resources. On another note, Access and Digital Services specialist would encounter time delays of updating and uploading the titles should the requested marc files or title lists for the subscribed electronic books and the electronic journals are not sent to him/her

promptly. As such, both library staff needs to be vigilant and persistent in obtaining the required documents.

### **Conclusion**

Collection development and acquisition of electronic resources has become one of the main components of the library budget. The activities associated with this are very fluid and library staff has to constantly upkeep and upgrade themselves on related matters. They would also need to stay relevant in this field by attending courses, conferences, reading related books/articles and constant networking (exchange of ideas). In line with that, the Technical and Digital Services staff are constantly learning and improving their various areas of work in order to meet the demands of this ever-changing landscape of electronic resources management.

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