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Successful E-Resource Acquisitions: Looking Beyond Selecting, Ordering, Paying, and Receiving to Discovery and Access

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Abstract

E-resource acquisitions began as a complex process and libraries struggled to manage it. When e-resources first arrived, librarians spent considerable time determining how to acquire these resources. A movement ensued to generate the best methods for selecting, ordering, negotiating licenses, choosing content, and paying. Libraries were prompted to develop new workflows. Time has passed and acquisitions functions have mostly been standardized. However, with the acquisition of e-resources comes the challenges of discovery, access, and user needs. Now that many libraries feel more comfortable in acquiring e-resources with the help of technology, cloud-based services, and task coordination, they are moving beyond acquisitions and focusing on discovery and access. It takes much time and great effort to efficiently manage e-resources so that there is seamless discovery and access.

The transition from print to electronic is a continuous process for most libraries as they allocate funds for electronic serials and books. Workflows are being developed that incorporate, not only new technology, but also, new staff skills and knowledge. This paper will introduce new workflows and technologies that VCU libraries have adopted to provide discovery and access. A discussion of how workflows have changed since the implementation of Alma and Primo and the influx of e-resources is included. Ideas for identifying successful methods for moving e-resources beyond acquisitions will be shared. Readers will be exposed to a number of ideas for improving the management of e-resources and opportunities that are available for adding value to their library.

Introduction

For many years the acquisition of resources has been the focal point for most libraries. Workflows focused on acquiring content that was considered suitable for the collection, which was mostly print. MARC records, OCLC WorldCat, and OPACs were the mechanisms for acquiring, organizing, delivering, and documenting collection information on library users' behalf. Technical services staff developed skills for successfully acquiring these resources and have become quite proficient in acquisitions. They know how to efficiently order, quickly receive, and accurately describe materials for users to easily locate them in the catalog. Many years of development have attributed to some of the most efficient acquisitions workflows. Technical services staff have discovered inconsistencies, resolved problems, refined workflows, strengthened standards, and enhanced operations. Unbeknownst to the users, they have relished in some of the best services that libraries could offer.

Libraries are changing and technical services will be at the pinnacle of this change. Technical services divisions are transitioning from acquisition of content to discovery and access. Movement is shifting from the traditional role of ownership to access. New technologies are bringing opportunities for libraries to develop roles that will identify, preserve, and deliver electronic resources in response to users' needs. This paper will provide a snapshot of activities and technologies that the VCU Libraries have implemented in their shift from acquisitions to delivery and access.

Tradition Dissipating

The traditional technical services models that libraries are acquainted with are quickly dissipating caused by the erosion of e-resources, budding technology, and tech-savvy users. These dramatic changes are rapidly transforming technical services. Focus is moving away from acquiring and building collections to providing access through new discovery tools. Focus goes

beyond selecting, ordering, receiving, paying, and transitions to discovery, access, and users.

Emerging E-Resources

Around 2003, many libraries started acquiring vast numbers of e-resources and technical services has never been the same. E-resource acquisitions began as a complex process and libraries continue to struggle in managing it. Management of this emerging format became another responsibility for technical services staff and engulfed much more processing time than print. Workflows were complex and inefficient. With the rapid acquisition of e-resources and with most libraries not having the advantage of new hires, staff were inundated with unfamiliar tasks. The linear workflow for acquiring print resources was used on e-resources and found lacking in efficiencies. Considerable time was spent determining how to acquire them. Libraries had to consider IP addresses, authentication, license negotiations, pricing, and other business and technical aspects that affect successful acquisition. There was a prompting to develop new workflows. A movement ensued to generate the best methods for selecting, ordering, negotiating licenses, choosing content, and paying.

With extreme determination and hard work, acquisitions staff managed to cope with the electronic workload increase as print activities decreased. Technical services began experimenting with new workflows to subdue the electronic beasts that were disrupting existing technical services models. Over the years, workflows have been standardized and efficiencies created.

Librarians realize that even with successful acquisitions workflows, challenges still arise with e-resource management. Prices fluctuate. Access comes and goes. Publishers and platforms change. New technologies emerge. Users' needs shift. There will never be a perfect workflow for managing e-resources, but libraries are putting forth their best efforts to make processes work efficiently. These challenges are not all bad. Some present opportunities for reconceptualizing the management of information and how that information can be discovered and accessed.

Time Has Passed

Over ten years have passed since the influx of e-resources brought havoc to acquisitions workflows. Since this time workflows have been developed to incorporate e-resources into the daily routine of technical services. What was once a convoluted acquisitions process has turned into a standardized process except for the budget predictions that haunt libraries every renewal cycle. New technologies have been implemented to incorporate e-resource acquisition into workflows. Staff are now comfortable with the acquisition of these resources and have developed skills for successfully researching e-resources, negotiating pricing, reviewing licenses, identifying publisher platforms, and providing IP. They know that processes can shift each time an e-resource enters into the acquisition workflow. There is an understanding that effective acquisition may require the expertise of a group of staff and collaboration. Staff have always been good at embracing change and can quickly shift gears when necessary without too much disruption.

Today's Challenges

Today's technical services face different challenges than what was faced over ten years ago. The concern of acquiring an e-resource has decreased dramatically and in its place is an increasing awareness of the need for providing discovery and access. Libraries are subscribing to thousands of e-journals plus various other resources such as print, digital, and media. Sophisticated technologies have now reached libraries presenting opportunities for reenvisioning of responsibilities and workflows. Users are seeking some kind of result from technology whether for need or entertainment. Technical services can successfully acquire an e-resource, but how can they facilitate the discovery of that full-text article or digital media that is being sought? Libraries find themselves performing new functions and fashioning new services to help users discover and access the information they seek. Technical services divisions can reimagine and redefine themselves.

Background of VCU Technical Services

At VCU, technical services are centralized. Until recently, we had a mostly traditional division called Collections, Technical Services and Information Systems (CTSIS) which was organized into five departments: Acquisitions, Cataloging, Collection Management, Library Information Systems, and Preservation.

The Acquisitions Department ordered, paid for and received materials, negotiated licenses, and managed the e-resources. The Department consisted of three units: Order, Firm Order and Accounting and Serials.

Each of the three units had core responsibilities. Order Unit acquired all materials for the library. They navigated to OCLC where bib records were imported into our local ILS for order creation. The Firm Order and Accounting Unit was responsible for processing invoices and receiving monographs. The Serials Unit performed tasks of checking-in, binding, claiming, and managing electronic serials.

The Cataloging Department worked extensively with computer records. Staff created, edited, and maintained the computer information that assisted users when they search for books, periodicals, DVDs, compact discs, computer software, and a wide and growing array of electronic resources. They ensured that online catalog information described library material accurately, had appropriate subject headings and were given call numbers that located them with similar resources in the Libraries' collection.

Transformation

VCU Libraries' technical services have been evolving over the past ten years to address the changing climate brought about by new technologies, e-resources, and user needs. It has implemented new technology, reorganized, and developed functional positions to support discovery and access of content. Discovery and access are now the focal points since these functions facilitate research and scholarship, both of which are essential to the earnest library user. Users expect simplicity when seeking information and want information that can be seamlessly

delivered just in time. The Libraries want to fulfill that need and provide a one-stop service for discovery and access of the rich resources to which they have invested in.

Is content being used to its full potential? Where does a user start a search? Does he go to Google to perform a search and find thousands of hits and only looks at the first page possibly overlooking relevant information scattered among the results? Or does he go to the library environment where he can discover local, regional, and international resources without having to encounter thousands of results that are not relevant to his topic? VCU Libraries wants to ensure that all content in their collection is easily discoverable and accessible. This is crucial in managing a library particularly when budgets are tight.

Library Technology

From 2003 until 2012 Aleph was the integrated library system. All e-resources were managed in Aleph until SFX was brought up in 2004. The Aleph OPAC was the discovery interface for e-resources. Orders were manually created in Aleph and URLs were added one by one for e-resources. There were multiple records in the catalog when a title was in multiple collections. Holdings had to be updated in Aleph, OCLC, and DOCLINE. It was a very time-consuming process to perform these tasks. Titles and platforms were constantly changing. URLs required constant babysitting and holdings regularly needed updating. E-resources were not as easily discoverable and accessible to users as the library had hoped because of time consuming tasks such as downloading bib records, creating and placing orders, setting up publisher access, and adding URLs and holdings in Aleph, OCLC, and DOCLINE. Workflows were complicated and there were disconnects in processes as resources were handed off from one staff member to another for processing. The Libraries had all these rich resources, but no truly efficient method for providing easy access.

Once SFX was implemented in 2004, serials staff worked diligently to activate titles and update holdings, thereby connecting users to electronic full-text in a timely manner. Aleph and SFX were

not integrated and work in one system did not carry over to the other system. However, Serials staff did not have to wait for Order Unit staff to create orders in Aleph before activating titles or collections in SFX. As long as a title had been ordered with the publisher or vendor and access was turned on, activation could take place in SFX. For Serials staff, electronic workflows improved greatly and SFX helped to bring seamless access to users.

In 2011 Primo was implemented as the discovery layer. It is a single interface which allows users to easily find the information they need, including print books, e-books, print and electronic articles, digital media, and other resources. The system was found to be intuitive and integrates licensed, local, and open access resources. Users are presented with a single search box that provides more exposure to not only e-resources, but also, information that is local and widespread. It brings attention to the Libraries' unique collections that may not ordinarily be discovered. Primo improved the way the Libraries arrange, retrieve, and present holdings.

Implementation of the cloud-based unified management system, Alma, began in 2011. Aleph had been the ILS for many years and it was no longer providing quality performance that could be offered by some of the new systems. After being on the verge of buying two new servers to support library operations, Alma was found to be a good return on investment. The Libraries had already implemented the Ex Libris discovery system, Primo, and felt that Alma, another Ex Libris product, would be a good match. Upon showing interest in the product, VCU was invited to become an early adopter in 2011 where a commitment was made to help with final development of Alma before its general release in 2012. After intense training, testing, configuring, meetings, webinars, trial, and success, VCU Libraries went live on October 24, 2012.

Alma has proven to be a good investment for the Libraries. It has streamlined workflows for ordering and managing e-resources. Order Unit staff can perform an OCLC search in the Metadata Editor of Alma, locate a record and import the record into Alma without ever leaving the system.

MARC records can be loaded into Alma which automatically create order records. Staff can easily go to the Community Zone, which incorporates the knowledge base, a community bibliographic catalog, and global authority files to activate titles and collections which puts them in the local catalog where materials can be managed. Titles can be activated at the collection level without having to activate title by title and upon activation materials are discoverable in Primo.

Primo Central Indexing is an Ex Libris cloud product that the library subscribes to as part of the Primo discovery and delivery solution. This index provides aggregation of the library's articles, e-books, and open access resources that are harvested from publishers and aggregators. It facilitates easy searching, discoverability, and access. The single search box allows users to search across open access, local, international, and regional collections. VCU Libraries is able to define the scope of its resources that are relevant to its users and determine how results display. Users are connected to unique local collections. Primo will then show results through relevancy ranking and users can access resources that are of interest to them.

Reimagining of Technical Services

Reimagining of technical services at VCU Libraries occurred when functional responsibilities were added to two of the technical services departments to apply expertise in the area of metadata and digitization. These are functional areas that support discovery and access. Responsibilities focus on identifying unique local collections and making them discoverable.

In 2006 the Digital Collections Systems Librarian was hired in the former Library Information Systems Department (Digital Technologies) within the area with functional responsibilities for raising awareness of the Libraries' unique collections and open access resources and making them discoverable and accessible. This position, along with several other staff, digitizes special collections and archives materials. They work closely with the Metadata Catalog Librarian, ensuring that data is accurately described and

digitized for easy discoverability. They also work closely with VCU faculty to identify articles that are published in open access journals and can be added to the institutional depository called Scholars Compass.

In 2007 the Metadata Catalog Librarian was hired in the former Cataloging Department (currently Metadata and Discovery), providing metadata for digitized collections and harvesting of electronic ETDs. Most of the digital collections come from special collections that have been digitized and include images, monographs, newspapers, oral histories, comics, cartoons, medical artifacts, yearbooks, university publications, and alumni publications. A data dictionary is developed before each collection is cataloged, which is a framework for the fields that will be included in the metadata for the item or collection. A metadata specialist assists this librarian to ensure that items and collections are added to the appropriate place for discovery, such as Firstsearch, WorldCat, CONTENTdm, Flickr, and Wikipedia.

Reorganization of Technical Services

VCU Libraries has gone live with two new powerful systems (Primo and Alma) that are supporting discovery and access. The Libraries recognized another opportunity that arose for reimagining technical services and promoting discovery and access.

The Head of Acquisitions decided to retire in April 2013. After study, collaborative work, and planning, the VCU Libraries decided to reorganize technical services. The division was renamed Information Management & Processing (IMP). The Acquisitions Department was split. The Serials Unit joined the newly named Metadata and Discovery Department (formerly Cataloging). The Order Unit and the Firm Order and Accounting Unit joined the newly named Collection Analysis and Investment Department (formerly Collection Management).

The Libraries identified six reasons for reorganization. They are:

- New technologies being introduced that provide opportunities for creating efficient workflows (Alma, Primo, WorldCat Knowledge Base, WorldCat Discovery Services).
- Change in leadership will create a knowledge gap that needs to be filled. Knowledge gap with the retirement of the Head of Acquisitions and other senior management considering retirement in the near future.
- Collections are changing. Materials the library collects is changing, which affects how material is acquired, processed and stored. There are e-books, e-serials, streaming media, large sets of materials. There is a decreased need for traditional processing and an increased need for off-site storage and physical preservation.
- Older organizational model. Analyzing workflows has proven that older model does not work as well as others that can be designed. Check-in is becoming a thing of the past with resources being frequently licensed rather than purchased.
- Aspiration to elevate position among research libraries. This opens new opportunities for changing what we are currently doing.
- Historical workflows less compelling. As we have worked with our current organizational model, there are some things that made sense when we first started doing them and are now stagnant as we enhance skills and gain knowledge. For example, it makes sense to have metadata production with the unit that is creating the digital object rather than having to handoff to another department.

A MAD Journey Begins

The newly organized Metadata and Discovery Department is positioning itself to provide strong support for discovery and access. Staff are aware that they must keep pace with new technologies as implementation occurs and users' needs

change. They are learning Alma, Primo, and other discovery systems. Continuing Resources staff (former Acquisitions) are collaborating with Cataloging staff to bring about quick resolution to e-resource issues. Continuing Resources staff are learning how to perform some cataloging tasks and Cataloging staff are learning some continuing resources tasks, eliminating time-consuming handoffs. For example, Continuing Resources staff have learned how to process continuations and added volumes, a task formerly performed by Cataloging. Cataloging staff have learned how to activate titles in Alma, which saves time from having to hand off this responsibility to continuing resources. A buddy system within the department allows staff to pair off to resolve issues and complete tasks. Successful task coordination is occurring with the aid of Alma, which provides logical task lists and guides the efficient workflow of materials. Staff have been introduced to a diverse range of discovery tools, such as WorldCat Knowledge Base and WorldCat Discovery Services, that support discovery and access. They are becoming well-versed in a wide range of activities that empower them to enhance skills and increase knowledge. They are learning to successfully manage knowledge bases, activate resources, create Google documents, maintain a link resolver, and troubleshoot access issues. They are learning key concepts such as web-scale discovery, central index, discovery layer, harvesting, and relevancy ranking.

Future

We have asked ourselves what does the future hold for technical services as traditional acquisitions models dissipate and we move forward in the areas of discovery and access. As we glance back at the past, organizational models can be found that have been in place for decades. Acquisitions, cataloging, collection management,

serials. Sound familiar? At one time you could walk into a library and find common names and similar patterns. Things are changing. You can now walk into a library and see different patterns arising. Metadata, digitization, discovery, access. Technology, e-resources, and users are driving change. Libraries are trying to find the perfect model for their particular library as they explore ways of organizing.

Libraries need to keep abreast of change and be able to flow with it. One method is to understand change. Analysis needs to be brought in to understand the environment. Rapid data export out of systems like Alma and Primo needs to occur to help determine performance so libraries can position themselves to evolve with the environment. How can libraries track analysis? New applications are developing for this purpose. For example, Altmetrics, which uses social media and newspapers, can be used to discern scholarly impact. Plum Analytics can measure research for individuals or groups and track different kinds of information like articles, books, videos, and data sets. Libraries need to pick the best method for them in order to align their workflows and services to address change.

Conclusion

The focus in technical services is changing from acquisitions to discovery and access. When a print book, e-book, electronic journal, letter, university publication, or any other type of content is acquired, it has no value if it can't be discovered and accessed. The technology we are implementing and the services we are providing can improve discovery and access and make our collections work for us. We just have to ensure that we are successfully moving with change. Change is always a challenge, but it can also be an opportunity.