Against the Grain

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Is Selection Dead? The Rise of Collection Management and the Twilight of Selection

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Our contributors do not think so. "Technology has been an integral part of academic learning for quite some time with both students and lecturers spending a significant portion of their time on laptops and mobile devices" says **Kent Freeman**. **Andrew Hutchings**, Managing Director of **Blackwells UK** agrees "It is the content that is key; the delivery of this content is secondary and will be determined by the market."

This is good news then for the eTextbook. As lecturers continue to seek more ways of engaging students by integrating multiple sources of information into course materials, the make-up of the eTextbook could lend itself perfectly to this development. As business models, budgets, and library set-ups extend to the purchase and distribution of eTextbooks for all students, there is still the opportunity to experiment with different ways of making this content available.

Add this to the fact that lecturers need to use authoritative content in their teaching, regardless of format, what we could be looking at is an ability to integrate "bite-size" chunks of textbooks with other learning materials. DRM and territorial rights concerns notwithstanding, such an option would not only meet lecturers' desires to include a variety of materials to enhance teaching, but it also addresses the affordability element that students want. Purchasing just the information they need at the time that they need it could well be the answer. **Amil Tolia**, CEO **Reference Tree**, readily agrees. "When I was a student I found it frustrating that I had to spend a lot of money on purchasing printed textbooks that I might only refer to a few times throughout my course. Whilst eBooks were beginning to emerge, it was still only possible to buy them as a whole entity. That's when the idea for **Reference Tree** was born. If I wanted the option to buy individual chapters of textbooks, then it stood to reason that other students would want this option too."

Do eTextbooks really enable and support the evolution of learning and teaching methods and increasing student engagement in their academic study?

So could eTextbook technology deliver core content in a cost effective way that enhances and expands the future of higher education? Do they really enable and support the evolution of learning and teaching methods? Well, potentially yes. Etextbook technology allows for greater experimentation with core content as well as the ability to add assessment tools that will provide both lecturers and publishers with insight. For example, these technologies allow for "hidden" information to be gathered on how a student reads a text, how they interact with it, how they highlight it, how they annotate it and so on. Not only does this provide lecturers with information about their students' needs and learning habits, but it also helps them to identify further learning materials that could better educate students. **Flat World Knowledge**, for example, now offers faculty a sophisticated customization platform that lets them edit textbooks down to the sentence level, add new material and interactive media, and then publish the book automatically in a variety of digital and print formats through a simple one-click process. Such sophisticated customization tools in addition to the availability of new productivity tools and performance reports means that eTextbook technology could help encourage better teaching practices too.

Similarly for publishers and their authors such technologies can enable more targeted publishing. **Rough Cuts** from **Safari Books**, for example, allows customers to view and comment on pre-published manuscripts, providing the editors and authors with valuable information as to how manuscripts could be improved. With greater detail available as to how students and faculty want to use textbooks, publishers can also learn more about potential frustrations or limitations that may exist and develop products accordingly.

To conclude this article, whilst the eTextbook is still very much in its infancy, technology has contributed greatly to its development and will continue to do so. But whilst technology excites and invigorates, it can also blinker the core purpose of keeping the focus on the goal of improving the education of the student. Whilst publishers, platform developers, content providers, and device manufacturers need to continue to introduce new technologies as the market demands, when it comes to higher education, we must be on our guard and not focus on technology simply for technology's sake.

In our next and final report we explore in more depth how the eTextbook could be developed in line with the needs of 21st-century education. 🐾

Endnotes

1. The Future of the Textbook Marketplace, *Outsell Market Report*, May 2010.

2. Instructors and Students: Technology Use, Engagement and Learning Outcomes, **Cengage**, December 2010.

Is Selection Dead? The Rise of Collection Management and the Twilight of Selection

by **Rick Anderson** (Associate Director for Scholarly Resources & Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah; Phone: 801-721-1687) <rick.anderson@utah.edu>

*Distilled from an **ALCTS Collection Management and Development Section Forum**, presented at **ALA Midwinter**, San Diego, January 2011.*

Introduction
(Harriet Lightman and Brian Quinn, conveners)

"Is Selection Dead? The Rise of Collection Management and the Twilight of Selection," was the name given to the provocative forum hosted by **ALCTS/Collection Management & Development Section (CMDS)** at **ALA's 2011 Midwinter Conference**. The forum was conceived and planned by the section's Collection Development & Electronic Resources Committee, under the leadership of committee chair **Brian Quinn**.

The forum reflected some of the chief concerns of librarians who work with collections. Patron-driven acquisitions, high serials costs, housing and preserving legacy print collections, and, most profoundly, the delicate balance we must all strike between our traditional mission as information professionals and the changing needs and expectations of the communities we serve are topics in the forefront of our minds. Yet while an exploration of these issues propelled the organizers to propose the forum, they were not the only reasons behind the choice of topic. This new emphasis on the management of collections, no matter whether those collections are owned, leased, or freely available, affects all librarians, and it was our hope that the forum would stimulate conversation about changes in the entire concept of "library collections." It was under these general auspices that the forum topic was born.

Reeta Sinha (YBP, Inc.)

Faced with reduced budgets and statistics showing low use of monographic collections, some contend that selection is an inefficient use of library resources. One solution being adopted rapidly in academic

libraries is patron- or demand-driven acquisitions (PDA or DDA): if selectors haven't purchased materials users want in the past, then offer access to everything and buy what users demand, what they have used at least once.

Selection isn't dead but is being killed off, perhaps because PDA produces expedient and tangible results. But, the premise on which PDA is based may be false. Reasons for low circulation of books have been decades in the making, including a philosophy equating large collections with prestige and better economic times. It is not necessarily because selectors have failed to respond to user needs. If selectors struggle with collection development, it may be because they have a multitude of responsibilities and lack adequate subject allocations.

PDA, which uses technology to garner direct and seamless input from users to the library is just another example of how collection development, at its core a patron-driven activity, has responded to challenging economic times. Building a library collection starts and ends with understanding the needs of library users, the institutional environment, trends in assigned disciplines, budgetary constraints, and evaluation quality of content.

PDA is an option, one that is to be embraced but doesn't require killing off a core activity in academic libraries. Rather, it can be implemented within the context of collection development, using an approach that is measured and inclusive — of selectors, users, vendors and aggregators.

Nancy Gibbs (Duke University)

Selection is not dead, nor is this the twilight of selection. What is occurring is a more collegial process for selection — in today's information age the selector, the provider, and the patron work more collaboratively than ever. While we may still select one-off titles for Special Collections or for International and Area Studies materials, this is no longer the norm for most other subjects. Approval plans supply core, academic materials, and patron-driven and demand-driven purchases are being implemented more widely in academic libraries for mainstream materials. Each of these activities involves a different form of selection — approval plans involve tailoring profiles to receive what is truly core; patron-driven acquisitions projects involve culling title lists by establishing ceilings on prices, floors on reading levels, selecting specific publishers, and broadening subject matter to highlight solid materials for possible patron selection.

So what are selectors doing instead of selecting individual titles one-by-one? They are busy:

Pushing the library expertise out to the scholar

Teaching critical thinking and information literacy skills

Selecting materials for the local repository

Writing grant proposals

Working with other staff on digital projects

Finding those elusive materials that meet deeper and broader research needs and distinguish your collection from others

Serving on the reference desk, IM'ing, CHAT

Being on the front line for e-resource access and discovery issues

Reviewing consortia packages for usage and renewal

Steve Bosch (University of Arizona)

There are significant environmental factors that are giving rise to the question, is selection dead? First, it is the economy. **National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)** data clearly shows that funding for libraries in higher education has dramatically shrunk as a percentage of total expenditures since 1996. Libraries have been seeing both the "serials crisis" and a "budget crisis," though the budget crisis hasn't gotten as much press. Secondly, there continue to be profound changes in users' behavior. Network-level discovery and access have become the norm. The focus is no longer the local collection, and Webscale

discovery must be supported by the delivery of information at the point of need. The third major factor is that although research libraries were built in a period of information scarcity, we now live in a world where information is abundant and readily available. Thirty years ago the largest aggregation of information would always be found in a local library — now library collections pale in comparison to what is available on the Web.

Selection, as a process that selects individual items for inclusion in local collections as well as a process that is focused on the development of the purely local collection, does a poor job of supporting Webscale discovery and delivery of information resources. The centrality of selection began to erode with the broad adoption of approval plans and the "Big Deals.**"** Patron-driven acquisition and cooperative approaches to managing print collections will lead to further deterioration of selection as a core resource management tool. In an environment characterized by ubiquitous access to information and Webscale information discovery and delivery, building and maintaining local collections is not a sustainable strategy for meeting current and future users' needs. The end of selection becomes the beginning of resource management.

Rick Anderson (University of Utah)

For several centuries, the information world in which librarians did their work was a world of physical objects: books, printed journals, physical sound recordings. When information is tied to physical formats, it is inevitably expensive and hard to find, and moving it around is a slow and costly process. In such an environment, it makes sense to build "just in case" collections — not because such an approach is efficient or even very effective, but because one has no other choice.

Recently and quite suddenly, this fundamental reality of the information world has changed. Now, the documents that our patrons need are very frequently available in digital formats that make them easy to find and make near-instantaneous acquisition of them possible for the first time in human history. Even printed documents can be found and procured very quickly in the digital marketplace, whereas for centuries they could only be found with great difficulty and acquired after significant delays. At the same time, library acquisition budgets are under unprecedented pressure. These two facts should lead us to rethink our traditional collection-building practices at a pretty radical level. Thirty years ago it was easy to justify buying a book just in case someone might want it in the future — but what is our justification for doing so now? The purpose of a collection is not to be a wonderful collection; the purpose of a collection is to meet the information needs of library users. If it is now possible to meet those needs by means other than traditional collection-building (perhaps by means of patron-driven, just-in-time acquisition), and if budget cuts increase the opportunity cost of every dollar spent on a book, then don't we have a professional duty to explore those other means? This isn't to say that all libraries should immediately stop building traditional collections, only that we should be willing to rethink the universal appropriateness of such collecting, and willing to experiment (even aggressively) with new models.

Response #1 – Brian Quinn (Texas Tech University)

New economic realities and emerging technologies have made selection more critical than ever. In an effort to improve selection, libraries are experimenting with new strategies such as PDA. This potentially useful adjunct to existing selection practices raises many questions. What would a PDA-infused collection look like? Would it be esoteric and idiosyncratic rather than systematic and balanced? If so, would this place greater demand on interlibrary lending? If other libraries have also instituted PDA, would they have the materials to lend, and if so, could these eBooks be shared?

These questions suggest that PDA at this point may be most valuable when used as an additional means to build collections rather than as a substitute for selection. If PDA is to be used responsibly, it would seem to require some degree of mediated selection of titles in order to ensure the quality of selection. If so, selection would still be central but will have shifted to a kind of meta-selection, from choosing titles to choosing

chase and chug at the **2011 Charleston Conference**. Stay tuned.

Speaking of which I just heard that the fantabulous **Connie Foster** will become **Interim Dean of Western Kentucky** shortly. Like wow! Good luck, **Connie**!

Some baby news. **Thomas Mack Gremiliion** is **Becky Lenzini's** second grandchild. See his picture in this issue, p.1.

And **Dennis Brunning** sent me this picture of his granddaughter all dressed up in St. Patrick's Day garb. Isn't she cute?!

And **Roger Schonfeld** and his wife are expecting a second baby this summer.

Ran into the magnificent **Bob Schatz** at one of the meetings I have been going to and he told me his daughter is married and he has grandchildren of his own. He showed me pictures on his **iPhone** or was it a **BlackBerry?** See **Bob's Op Ed** (this issue, p.48). He says that libraries are losing valuable real estate on the their institutional homepages. I remember when that tried to happen to us at the **College of Charleston** but thanks to great leadership it didn't happen. Still, **Bob** is right at least from my experience. As I search the Web looking for library staff I find it harder and harder to find the library homepages.

Some people have all the fame**! Becky Lenzini's** great movie Website *http://serious-movielover.com/* has been discovered. She is now movie reviewer for a Website in Chicago *http://www.snspost.com/*. Plus she was interviewed for their radio spot *http://www.snspost.com/sns-04022011-rango-reviewed/*.

The creative **Scott Smith** tells me he has finished library school at **Kent State**. His column this time is about **Curious George**

against the grain people profile

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BORN AND LIVED: Landstuhl, Germany; Air Force family: California, Mississippi, District of Columbia, Okinawa, Ohio, IL.

EARLY LIFE: East St. Louis Senior High School, **Kent State Univ.** (BA), **Atlanta University** (MSLS), **U of South FL** (MA).

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Youth Specialist and Fine Arts Librarian, **Tampa-Hillsborough Public Library System**, Acquisitions and Collection Development Librarian positions at the **St. Petersburg Jr. College**, **University of Central Arkansas**, The **College of New Jersey** and **Tennessee State University**.

FAMILY: Mother (**Mildred**), Sister (**Bettie**), Brother (**John**), Nephews (**Jay** and **Andrew**).

IN MY SPARE TIME: I make bed quilts and wall hangings from African, Asian, and novelty theme fabrics. I also manage my church's bookstore, and I coordinate the book club.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *The Woman's Study Bible* (**Nelson**), *Jubilee* (**Margaret Walker**), *Third Life of Grange Copeland* (**Alice Walker**), *The Hand I Fan With* (**Tina McElroy Ansa**), *Warmth of Other Suns* (**Isabel Wilkerson**), *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (**Rebecca Skloot**), the *Yada Yada Prayer Group Series* (**Neta Jackson**) , and *The Daniel Fast* (**Susan Gregory**). I collect books and magazines on African American quilting and quilters, which I have put in LibraryThing.

PET PEEVES: Selfishness, telemarketers.

PHILOSOPHY: Treat people the way I want to be treated.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Editing the RFP for our ILS system.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: To have a home with a large of enough space for a separate quilting studio and dining room.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I see less print books and periodicals in libraries and public life. I see a the coming of a more online-access environment with fewer library staff.

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the titles that patrons get to choose from, or approving titles that they have chosen. Selection thus appears to be alive and well rather than dead and is simply assuming new and different forms.

Response #2 – David Magier (Princeton University)

Some provocative propositions deployed to promote PDA and hasten the death of selection are based on false distinctions, library caricatures, and rhetorical strawmen. Outmoded libraries with "traditional," "local" collections — consisting of printed books selected "one at a time," "just in case" someone might ever need them and without regard to the information needs of users, and created, furthermore, with wanton abandon in an unmanaged era of plenty, for the purpose of organizing a "wonderful collection" of content that no one needs and is anyway hard to discover or use — are contrasted with proposed patron-driven, cost-effective, "just in time" libraries responding digitally to users' needs, providing Webscale discovery and instant delivery, where libraries themselves "pale in comparison to what is available on the Web."

Both sides of that contrast are far from reality, and betray a fearsome lack of understanding of what collection development (and selection) really are. No library (since Alexandria) tried to collect "everything." Libraries scalably deploy limited resources. Selection — print and electronic — has always been "patron-driven": understanding and balancing priorities among current and potential future trajectories of need of constituencies and fields is the keystone of collection development, driving acquisition decisions.

Ignoring the long tail of need, abdicating subject knowledge, liaison, and the means of collectively shaping shared collections, turning over all selection to users (and expecting "the Web" to supply whatever else is needed) will surely save space, reduce payrolls, and win the hearts of administrators. The resulting libraries, though, will be incapable of supporting research, and are likely to be cut off from access to collections of research libraries that collaborate to deploy their limited resources for that serious purpose.