Back to the Future: Re-Examining the Need for Shelf-Ready Processes in the E-Book Environment

Susan J. Martin
Texas Woman's University, smartin28@uchicago.edu

Pamela D. Ward
Texas Woman's University, pward1@twu.edu

Brittney L. Washington
Texas Woman's University, broberts4@twu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/charleston

Part of the Collection Development and Management Commons

An indexed, print copy of the Proceedings is also available for purchase at:
http://www.thepress.purdue.edu/series/charleston.

You may also be interested in the new series, Charleston Insights in Library, Archival, and Information Sciences. Find out more at: http://www.thepress.purdue.edu/series/charleston-insights-library-archival-and-information-sciences.

Susan J. Martin, Pamela D. Ward, and Brittney L. Washington, "Back to the Future: Re-Examining the Need for Shelf-Ready Processes in the E-Book Environment" (2015). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference.*
http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284316243

Back to the Future: Re-Examining the Need for Shelf-Ready Processes in the E-Book Environment

Susan J. Martin, Acquisitions Librarian, Texas Woman's University

Pamela D. Ward, Director of Technical and Access Services, Texas Woman's University

Brittney L. Washington, Library Assistant III, Texas Woman's University

Abstract

Shelf-ready processing of print materials is a commonly available service from library book vendors, and many libraries outsource these services in order to help save staff time and costs, and to expedite the process. However, in the age where print monographs are increasingly replaced with e-books, do these services still make fiscal sense? In the spring of 2015, the Texas Woman's University Libraries were looking to expand shelf-ready services to a second vendor, but before doing so opted to do a feasibility study to see if shelf-ready services were still needed and economical. This paper presents the findings of a two-month study done at the Texas Woman's University Libraries on their outsourced and in-house cataloging workflows. The study examined the amount of time it took to receive the materials after ordering, the various costs involved, including shelf-ready fees and internal staff costs, as well as the number of print materials being purchased over the past three fiscal years.

Introduction

Texas Woman's University (TWU) is classified as a Doctoral/Research university. One of four independent public institutions of higher education in the State of Texas, it is the nation's largest university primarily for women. With campuses in Denton, Dallas, and Houston and a total student enrollment of over 10,000 FTE, TWU offers both traditional and online degrees from the Bachelor's through the Doctorate in the liberal arts, nursing, health sciences, sciences, business, and education. TWU Libraries hold 686,588 volumes, subscribe to over 2,000 journals and databases, and have a collections budget of $1.6 million.

Texas Woman's University Libraries went shelf-ready in March 2012 in order to save staff time and money processing firm order print books. The Libraries had just experienced a significant reduction in their budget which resulted in the elimination of several staff positions. We assumed that routine copy cataloging took up a large portion of staff time and was not cost effective. With these two assumptions in mind, weinvestigated using shelf-ready services, which are a common and popular book vendor service.

We thought that by receiving the bulk of our firm order books "shelf-ready," cataloging staff would be free to do other tasks and projects.

Questions were raised as we prepared to expand to another vendor: Is the quality of cataloging and physical processing acceptable? How many and what sort of changes do staff need to do with these books? How many days from order placement until the items are available? What is the true per book cost? Do we purchase enough print books that outsourcing still makes sense? What other efficiencies or technologies can we capitalize on? In light of these questions, we wanted to compare the two workflows, in-house copy cataloging and shelf-ready, before making any additional outsourcing commitments. A two-month study tracked all print books received from order to shelf; and a complete cost analysis of the entire acquisitions and cataloging processes was done. For this paper we were asked by our administration to use pseudonyms for our vendor names, and we are honoring this request.

Structuring the Study

We were inspired by a study done by Rebecca Schroeder and Jared L. Howland of Brigham Young

University. Their study focused specifically on looking to see if shelf-ready should be used for print approval items, which was different than our focus, but the overall goal was similar and we found that their methodology was sound.

We derived our study sample from the print titles we received during April and May 2015. We normally receive a significant portion of our print firm order materials during this time, and thought it would provide a good representative sample. We ended with 355 titles from a variety of vendors. The items were tracked using two forms which followed each workflow process, shelf-ready items and in-house (see Figures 1; 2, on next page). Using the unique Alma-assigned Purchase Order Line number, each item was tracked by date and time as it progressed through the workflow. Any corrections made to the shelf-ready materials for either the MARC record or physical book were noted. The tracking stopped with the date the item was sent to circulation to be shelved.

Copy Cataloging
Shelf-Ready study

POL-

Acquisitions

Date received:

Time received:

Cataloging

Received in:

Date/time work began:

Date/Time finished:

Physical Processing

Received in:

Date/time work began:

Date/Time finished:

Date to circ:

Shelf Ready
Shelf-Ready Study

POL-

Acquisitions

Date received:

Time received:

Cataloging

Received in:

Date/time work began:

Date/Time finished:

Modifications made

MARC (overlay? Edit?)

Barcode:

Label:

Date to circ:

Figure 1. Tracking work forms.

Findings and Analysis

As shown in Figure 3 (p. 122), shelf-ready materials took consistently longer from order to shelf, and cost significantly more per item than materials ordered for in-house processing. The shelf-ready books averaged 28 days from order to shelf compared to 10 days for all other materials. Cataloging staff spent 1.5 minutes per shelf-ready book performing quality control checks to ensure accuracy; a final physical processing check took an additional minute. In-house materials took longer, 10 minutes per book with an additional 2 minutes for physical processing. We noticed that cataloging times varied depending on the vendor, and after looking at some of the specific titles (specialty DVDs, kits, dissertations), we concluded that the variation in time corresponded with difficulty of cataloging the item, and that the more sophisticated items were not able to be ordered shelf-ready.

The order-to-shelf result from our SRV was not a surprise, as we had initially thought it took a long time compared with materials received from others. However, the per item cost of purchasing and processing was a surprise, as we uncovered costs which were not readily apparent. Our shelf-ready fee is $5.99 per book, which covers cataloging and physical processing. This cost appears on our invoices and is the only cost we commonly associate with the process. However, we incur an annual charge ($2,800) in order to use the SRV's ordering system. We divided out that cost, and it added an additional $4.77 per book for our sample, making our total shelf-ready cost to be $10.76 per book. We also have our own internal costs for acquiring, cataloging, and processing. Each shelf-ready item incurred an extra $0.48 OCLC charge and $8.68 worth of TWU staff time, bringing the final per item cost to $19.92.

In comparison, all other materials were ordered, received, and on the shelf within 10 days. Each of these items incurred $2.85 for physical processing (including OCLC) and $9.27 of TWU staff time with an average per book cost of $12.12. Vendor A's (V-A) order to shelf time was 11 days with a per
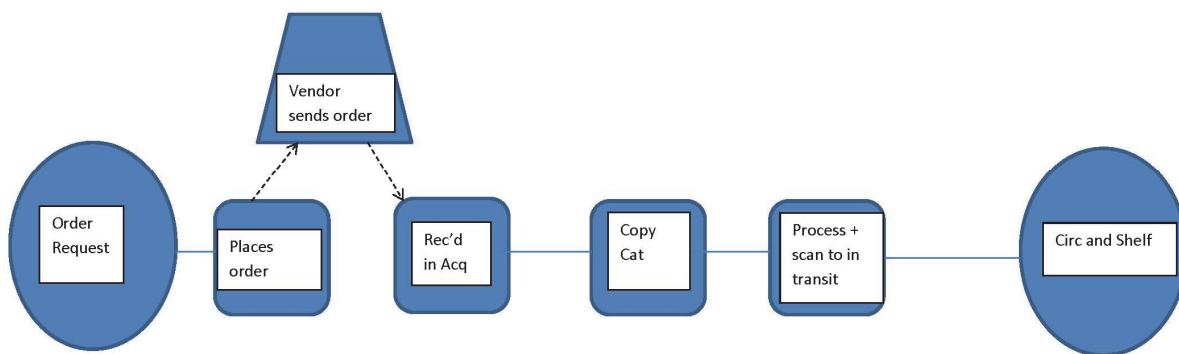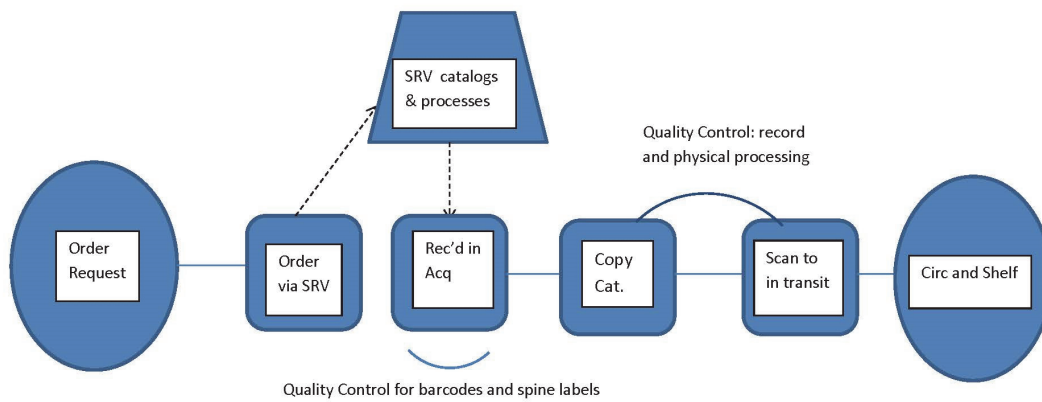
Figure 2. Workflows.

book cost of $13.05. Vendor B's (V-B) was the most expedient and cost effective, with just over 7 days from order to shelf, and a total per book cost of $11.05. At $19.92 the cost of a shelf-ready item was at least $6.87 more (and as high as $8.87) than any of the materials processed in-house.

The Libraries would benefit from having greater control over the cataloging quality and process, as well as see a significant savings by eliminating the costs incurred by a duplicate shelf-ready workflow. As shown in Figure 2, all shelf-ready items are quality control checked using a workflow that mirrors the in-house one. This workflow was implemented from the onset of the service, and was kept due to the amount of corrections—actual and perceived. Figure 4 (p. 123) outlines the cost per book for the 523 shelf-ready books received in FY15, along with the cost per book if the same 523 items were acquired

through a different vendor. The costs in red are the savings. V-B would realize the greatest savings, due in part to its automated ordering system, which saves significant ordering time and is free to use. We also see significant savings when we apply the per book costs to the entire 1200 items received in FY15. The library could potentially save $5,244.00 on per book processing costs.

The shelf-ready quality control workflow is faster, but the amount of time saved is negligible. Divided evenly, we would need 8.34 hours of time per week, leaving almost 32 hours for e-book cataloging and other projects. Receipts do not come in evenly—April and May tend to be our busiest months, whereas almost nothing is purchased during the summer. Large projects will have to be saved for the slower period. However, the library will save significant staff costs by

	Shelf-Ready Vendor	Vendor A	Vendor B	Misc Vendors	All non SRV
Average Order to Receipt (days)	27.04	10.08	7.07	18.7	9.73
Average Order to Shelf (days)	28.54	11.15	7.88	20.23	10.73
Average cataloging time (min)	1:27	14:57	4:16	4:16	10:12
Average processing time (min)*	1:00	2:09	1:26	1:26	1:51
Average cost for Shelf-ready services**	$10.76				
Average processing cost (TWU)***	$0.48	$2.85	$2.85	$2.85	$2.85
Average staff cost (ACQ)	$7.25	$8.75	$7.25	$8.75	$8.25
Average staff cost (CAT)	$0.42	$0.89	$0.72	$0.87	$0.82
Average staff cost (PROCESS)	$0.12	$0.22	$0.18	$0.27	$0.21
Average staff cost (TOTAL TWU)	$8.68	$10.20	$8.20	$9.88	$9.27
TOTAL COST from order to shelf (not including item cost)	$19.92	$13.05	$11.05	$12.73	$12.12
TOTAL COST w/KAPCO (student applied)	---	$14.25	$12.25	$13.93	$13.32
TOTAL COST w/KAPCO (staff applied)	---	$15.55	$13.55	$15.23	$14.62

*In house processing did not put on Kapco covers during this time, but in the future, they will be.

That will add an additional 10 minutes of time or $1.20 of student time or $2.50 of staff time.

** SRV includes $5.99 shelf ready fees and a $4.77 Ordering System cost

*** TWU processing costs are estimated at $2.57 (barcodes,labels,covers, etc. plus $0.48 for OCLC. Shelf-ready items also incurr this OCLC charge

Figure 3. Times and costs.

eliminating the duplicate workflow. Additional savings could be accomplished by retooling the physical processing workflow to use student workers and to move some of the processing into acquisitions.

We also wanted to see if our assumption on errors was correct. For our shelf-ready sample, we tracked 98 items, and due to our cataloging standards, 46 of those MARC records needed some sort of editing (removal of extra 856 fields, addition of a subject heading) or a complete overlay of the MARC record. This yielded us a 47% correction rate. We did not have any physical processing errors for the sample; however, this may be a false result due to a discovery of how the items are quality controlled. We assumed physical processing quality control took place only in cataloging and processing, and expected any errors to be discovered there. However, when we mapped out the workflow and spoke with the staff involved, we discovered that the majority of physicsal processing mistakes are switched barcodes and spine labels, which are spotted and corrected upon receipt in acquisitions.

Twenty-eight days and a 47% error rate still seemed high. So, we opted to verify our study data to see if it was an anomaly. We checked receipt times by downloading all print receipts from the past three fiscal years from Alma. We discovered that shelf-ready titles averaged 42 days from order to receipt, and in-house materials came in around 34 days. V-A was the quickest with 9 days, but some specialty vendors took as long as 36 days for the item to arrive. We did not order with V-B prior to FY15, and could not do a comparison. We learned that our shelf-ready receipt rate for our study was better than the past three years.

To verify the error rate, we selected 98 random titles received between September 2013 and March 2015. Each MARC record was checked by using Alma's View Versions in the metadata editor which shows the MARC record history for that particular title (order record, original vendor supplied record, and any edited version) along with who edited it and the date. The new sample yielded a 38% correction rate with 37 MARC

	Shelf-Ready Vendor	Vendor A	Vendor B	Misc Vendors	All non SRV
FY15 estimated costs 1200 firm order items	$23,904.00	$15,660.00	$13,260.00	$15,276.00	$14,544.00
Cost savings		$8,244.00	$10,644.00	$8,628.00	$9,360.00
Cost for 1200 items with Kapco (student)	---	$17,100.00	$14,700.00	$16,716.00	$15,984.00
Cost savings		$6,804.00	$9,204.00	$7,188.00	$7,920.00
Cost for 1200 items with Kapco (Staff)	--	$18,660.00	$16,260.00	$18,276.00	$17,544.00
Cost savings		$5,244.00	$7,644.00	$5,628.00	$6,360.00

Figure 4. Cost estimates and savings

records having been edited or overlaid immediately after receipt of the vendor supplied record. Our new sample had a better rate of success, but we find that 38% is still too high to be acceptable.

Our findings were mirrored by several local peer libraries, four of which use shelf-ready services and four of which do not. The four libraries that used a shelf-ready service reported order to receipt times ranging from 10 to 26 days. For error rates, 3 of the libraries reported that they were low, but could not provide quantifiable numbers. One library had tracked their shelf-ready error rates and reported that they were close to 50%. Two of the libraries that do not use shelf-ready services fully catalog and process all their materials in-house. Both libraries receive significantly more print materials than we do (14,000–18,000 print items). They handle this load, along with e-books and other materials with 5 FTE (3 professionals and 2 library assistants) and 6 FTE, respectively, which is comparable to our 4 FTE in cataloging (1 professional and 3 library assistants).

Two additional institutions, St. Edward's University (SEU) and Columbia Gorge Community College (CGCC), have completely forgone the traditional book vendor in favor of using Amazon with a Prime membership that includes two-day shipping to supply their firm order print and media material. Copy cataloging and processing for all print and media materials is done in-house. CGCC has only 2 FTE for all library operations, and they treated 664 items with a 2-day turn-around time this past fiscal year, and SEU processed 1,100 items with 2 FTE (1 professional and 1 library assistant). Librarians at SEU and CGCC have written extensively about their experiences with

library vendors and their decision to use a nontraditional acquisition method in light of receipt times, questionable cataloging records, and declining print numbers in favor of e-books.

We examined the possibility of using Amazon as our primary vendor. We searched Amazon to see how many of our SRV and V-B sample titles were available. Out of 203 titles, 201 were available with Prime shipping, and only 2 were not Prime eligible, but were still available for purchase. The discounts offered by Amazon are comparable to our traditional book vendors, and the large inventory and fast shipping make Amazon an attractive option. The drawback is the amount of staff time needed to manually key in orders and invoices. If Amazon develops API ordering and invoicing with Alma, we will seriously consider Amazon as a primary vendor.

Shelf-ready processing made sense in the print environment. However, as information access has moved from print to electronic, we have seen a decrease in print monograph purchases. Over the past three years, our print receipts have averaged out to be 1239 per year. At the same time, e-book selection has increased (see Figure 5 on next page). This change is more than just a swap of form, print to digital, but it is reflective of how libraries are selecting and managing the content of their collections.

Static library budgets do not afford as much collection building as they did in the past. Collection development now focuses on what is actually needed at a particular time rather than what might be needed. Focusing more on their own unique archival materials, libraries are leasing access to a focused set of resources within the larger body of knowledge to support their
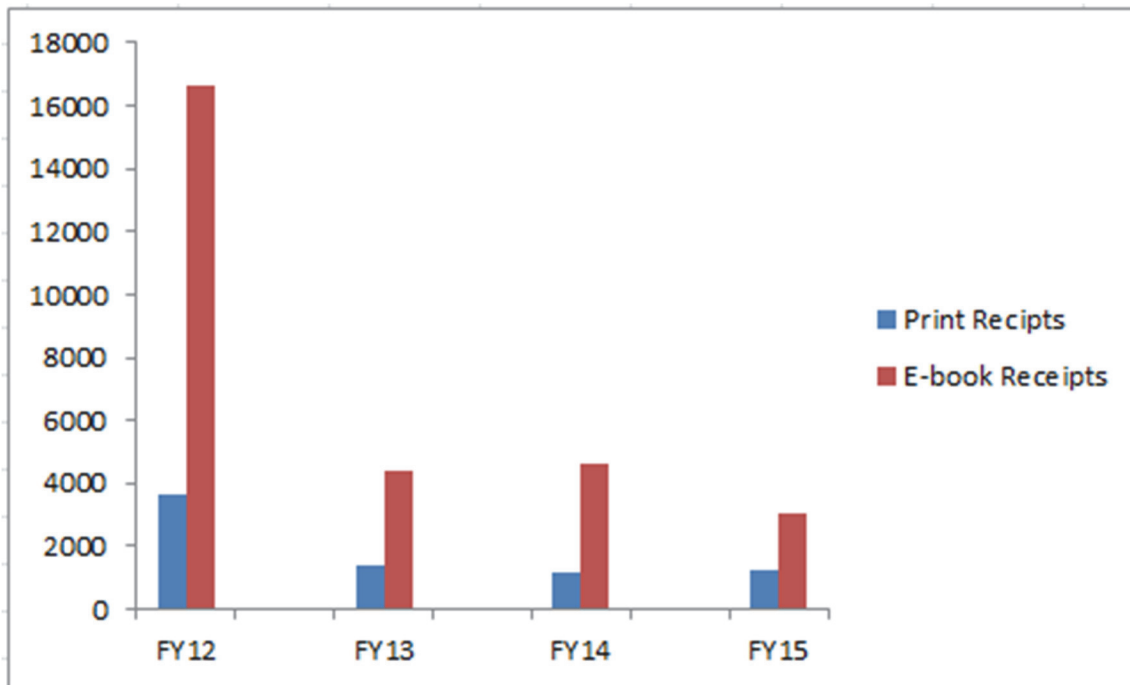
Figure 5. Cost estimates and savings

university's curriculum, new teaching methodologies such as the "flipped classroom," and online degree programs.

Changes in the industry inspire a fresh response. Today libraries have moved toward a just-in-time (JIT) purchasing model; waiting weeks to obtain materials is not an option—firm order e-books are available within a day or two and pay-per-view article services provide instant access. Moreover, libraries have embraced demand-driven acquisitions (DDA) services as a means of providing access to a large body of information in an instant and economical way.

We can also apply this JIT model to print materials. With smaller amounts of print items, the Libraries should be able to quickly obtain and make them available by seeking out vendors with the fastest shipping times. Additionally, ILS and content vendors are closely collaborating and creating sophisticated acquisitions APIs which interface seamlessly. These acquisition APIs reduce the time (and therefore cost) acquisitions staff spend keying in orders and invoices.

This evolution of vendor cooperation and integration has a positive effect on cataloging as well. Staff is able to locate and process vast numbers of records in-house due to the advanced searching capabilities in OCLC and import/export improvements in our ILS and third party products, such as MARCedit. The techniques used by book vendors to locate and process MARC records are easily duplicated by our own staff.

Recommendations

We recommend the following:

- Discontinue our shelf-ready service.

- Return all firm order cataloging and processing to utilize our in-house expertise.

- Focus on quickly obtaining print materials which will build in a cushion of time for cataloging and processing.

- Use Vendor B as our primary vendor for our print materials.

- Purchase an Amazon Prime membership to utilize their 2-day free shipping for rush orders.

- Reassess in fiscal year 2017.

This return to the traditional workflow will benefit both library and patron. The library will realize substantial savings over time in staff and processing costs, as well as a cleaner catalog. Patrons will have new materials on the shelves in an expedient timeframe. We will be poised to fulfill any requests for the material even after it has been ordered. Once the item is in-house, it's simply a matter of pulling off of the cart and processing immediately. However, if the item requested is waiting to be processed off-site, there's little we can do to expedite the process. In terms of our catalog quality, we will have better control and quality of our MARC records from thebeginning. Finally, all print items would be funneled through one workflow eliminating the need to having a separate cataloging workflow for a small portion of print materials.

Outcomes

We presented our study findings to our Libraries' administration team, and they agreed with our recommendations with the caveat to carefully examine workflows and rote activities that could be handled by other staff and students.

References

Ferris, K., & Buck, T. H. (2014). An ethos of access: How a small academic library transformed its collection-building processes. *Collection Management, 39*(2), 127–144.

Greene, B. (2014). Responsive acquisitions: A case study in improved workflow at a small academic library. Retrieved from http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2014/responsive-acquisitions-a-case-study-on-improved-workflow-at-a-small-academic-library/

Martin, S. J., Ward P. D., & Washington, B. L. (2015). [TWU_raw data Back to the Future.] Unpublished raw data set. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/11274/7305

Schroeder, R., & Howland, J. L. (2011). Shelf-ready: A cost-benefit analysis. *Library Collections, Acquisitions & Technical Services, 35*(4), 129–134.