

## Against the Grain

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# A Demand-Driven Future

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## A Demand-Driven Future

by **Elizabeth R. Lorbeer** (Associate Director for Content Management & Associate Professor, University of Alabama at Birmingham) <lorbeer@uab.edu>

of titles to making them accessible to library patrons. Our collection development and technical services options offer predictable, uniform access to an ever-widening and complex universe of monographic content. Finally, we bring the strength of our customer service and internal operations staff to the challenges of delivering access, workflow, duplication control, and financial value.

**YBP** development work involves customer discussions, to sort out exactly what is needed and how we can supply a solution to fit those needs. We also depend on our strong partnerships within the content community to help shape and develop new services. We face changing relationships with library systems vendors and bibliographic utilities, as metadata begins to move to shared, cloud-based models. Academic book vendors have come a long way from the original wholesaling model of buying books from individual publishers and selling them to individual libraries.

In NASCAR, racers and fans discuss the concept of “coopetition”: cooperation and competition at the same time. For instance, race teams from the same race shop share tips to make all their cars run faster than competing race shops’ cars. But when the race comes down to those last few laps, each driver is in it for himself or herself, racing for the win. We see a similar network emerging in the world of academic books. Libraries certainly purchase books, but they also look to publish books these days from archival or OP holdings. Consortia may or may not seek to use book vendors when negotiating deals with publishers or aggregators. Aggregators are a newer partner in the academic supply chain, offering publishers multiple new, competing channels for their content and offering libraries competing ways to access that content. And book vendors are in the middle of it all, trying to ensure that publishers, aggregators, consortia, and libraries all hear and understand each other’s competing priorities and needs. As monograph content becomes increasingly digital in the coming years, our relationships will continue to shift and grow. We enthusiastically embrace these new opportunities to transform academic collection development and bookselling. 



**L**ibrarians have always craved content for their collections. If the Big Deal whetted our thirst, librarians now have the opportunity to offer access to even more content using demand-driven systems. What made the Big Deal attractive to librarians was that publishers could sell all of their unsubscribed journal content upfront at a discounted price. Coupled with the sale of eBook packages, large quantities of content were purchased in the likelihood students and faculty might find and use the content. However, over the years, these large bundles have increasingly tied up a significant portion of the library’s budget leaving many no options but to cancel. However, a newer model has emerged to increase access through mediated and unmediated solutions and restored the librarian’s ability to add content to the collection that was previously unattainable due to cost or lack of digitization. As many libraries have watched their monograph and serials budgets decline over the past two decades, demand-driven purchase and lease options through third-party vendors have offered the ability to provide access to unsubscribed content at the point of need.

Beginning in 2008 at the downturn in the economy, the **University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)** libraries could no longer maintain large serials bundles to most scientific, technical and medical publishers. This serious blow to the collection meant the libraries returned to subscribing to individual journal titles.<sup>1</sup> **UAB’s Lister Hill Library of the Health Sciences (LHL)** retreated from purchasing “Big Deals” and electronic book collections long ago, and is currently reorganizing the collection to provide and pay for access at the article and book chapter level rather than purchasing bundles of titles. There will always be a certain portion of the budget spent on content that users expect the library to provide, but these are often the materials found on opening day collection lists, and items users need, but rarely want to purchase. This means a greater portion of the materials budget is available to acquire content through demand-driven solutions.

In 2009, **LHL** set up various pay-per-view accounts with commercial publishers to supply articles on demand, but use of the mediated service was infrequent. Most users reported that the document delivery service was too costly even though **LHL** subsidized the cost so the most an individual paid was \$12 per article. The campus community also desired a way to gain immediate access to journal content, especially when the library was closed. When the **Copyright Clearance Center (CCC)** advertised a new unmediated service that could deliver full-text articles directly to the user within min-

utes, **LHL** configured a Get It Now with PayPal account. The **CCC** offers both a mediated and unmediated article fulfillment service, but **LHL** favored the unmediated service that includes a PayPal option — requiring the user to contribute to the cost of the article. With most articles priced at \$24 each, the user pays \$6 towards the cost of the article and **LHL** subsidizes the remaining cost. Access to the Get It Now with PayPal service is available through the library’s Serials Solutions Article Linker page. When the user finds a journal article the library does not own, Article Linker displays options to pay \$6 for immediate access to the article through Get It Now with PayPal or to request it through the library’s interlibrary loan service for free or \$3. Being promoted as an experimental pilot, the Get It Now with PayPal service has been active since late September 2012. So far, early users report satisfaction with the service. **LHL** is beginning to collect data using Google Analytics on how many times the Get It Now link is selected on the Article Linker page compared to the ILLiad request form. In spring 2013, data will be analyzed along with a user satisfaction survey in an attempt to determine if the service is effectively meeting need on campus and supplementing the library’s traditional interlibrary loan service. Some questions still remain, such as whether \$6 is the right price point to charge users for an article, and if the Get It Now service delivers articles fast enough to satisfy users’ expectations. Most of the articles users have purchased are from publishers with whom the library once maintained Big Deal agreements. Most of the larger commercial presses and society publishers offer their content through the Get It Now service, and the amount of money **LHL** set aside to subsidize this service is much less than the library spent on any of its former journal packages.

In addition to losing the Big Deals, **LHL** was also unable to maintain most of its monograph standing orders. While most health sciences libraries do not spend a significant portion of their budget on monographs, after five years of this practice, the collection was becoming inadequate, despite both electronic and print books being purchased upon individual request. **LHL** users are generally comfortable in accessing and using online textbooks so titles are purchased in digital format whenever possible. The library’s last LibQual survey showed widespread dissatisfaction with the monograph collection. The biggest complaint was the age of the works. However, users acknowledged gratification in the comments section that when they requested a book that request was fulfilled. It seemed natural to move to a demand-driven solution to acquire monographs since many of the titles users requested for purchase were available for sale through the eBook aggregators. **LHL** allocated \$7,000 towards its first demand-driven pilot with **ebrary**. Using the library’s book vendor, **YBP**, a tightly focused profile was created to select the titles health professional students often requested for purchase. This typically included test preparation and board

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review handbooks as well as concise manuals to popular health sciences works. The pilot ran from November 2011 to January 2012 with 431 demand-driven records imported into the online catalog and 65 titles being purchased. Since conclusion of the pilot, almost all of the purchased titles have continued to have high use, with many titles reporting an annual average of over 100 successful session requests. LHL opted not to lease access to content since the titles selected for the pilot are popular with students. Even though this was a small pilot, it showed that without any library marketing or promotion, users could find titles in the online catalog and that the titles purchased continue to be heavily accessed.

In the future, purchasing large bundles of electronic book content could become nonexistent, replaced by demand-driven acquisitions. Years of usage reports show which titles users constantly access heavily, moderately, or not at all. Rarely can librarians select and create their own bundles, begrudgingly purchasing content not necessarily needed for the library's collection. Though bundles continue to be promoted by publishers and aggregators as a cost-effective approach to buying content, demand-driven solutions allow librarians to add

content without the financial liability. "Just-in-case" consumption is now being replaced by "just-in-time" purchasing models, making library budgets "work even harder."<sup>2</sup> The annual effect of inflation, coupled with meager budget increases in content expenditures, has eroded purchasing power. Thus, in an academic era of public accountability and thriftiness, more than ever librarians need to prove to their stakeholders that content expenditures can be tied back to direct use by library users. Demand-driven solutions do not require a large commitment of money as librarians can control and craft what titles are made available to their community.

With demand-driven systems, perhaps the profession is embarking upon a golden age of acquisitions. Price and McDonald's retrospective study demonstrated that user-selected electronic books were used about 2.5 times more than pre-selected works made by librarians.<sup>3</sup> It is not that librarians are terrible selectors, but there is so much published content it is almost impossible to predict what users might need at any given moment. Librarians can easily add large sets of demand-driven records to their online catalogs and wait for users to trigger online access. Coupled with article fulfillment services like Get It Now, librarians can offer more content than what was previously offered by the Big Deals without tying up a huge portion of the library's budget.

Demand-driven solutions are reviving academic library collections stunted by years of meager growth due to declining materials budgets. These same solutions can also be used to quickly develop new collections as schools expand degree programs and offer distance education classes and support blended learning environments. With the possibility of offering users a larger selection of titles than ever before, without upfront costs or multiyear agreements, librarians are becoming more nimble in effectively meeting users' immediate needs to access content. 🌱

#### Endnotes

1. **Nicole Mitchell and Elizabeth R. Lorbeer**, "Building Relevant and Sustainable Collections." *Serials Librarian* 57 (2009):327-333.
2. **Steve Sharp and Sarah Thompson**, "'Just in case' vs. 'Just in time': e-book purchasing models." *Serials* 23, no. 3 (November 2010) : 201-206.
3. **Jason Price and John McDonald**, "Be-guiled by bananas: A retrospective study of the usage and breadth of patron vs. librarian acquired ebook collections. (<http://ccdl.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/lea/id/177>) Accessed November 28, 2012.

## What's Next for eBook Acquisitions? Challenges for Libraries, Vendors, and Publishers

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There's no question that digital technology has had an enormous transformative impact on monographic library acquisitions, both influencing acquisitions methods and changing the nature of the resources which we collect, or — more to the point — to which we provide access for library patrons. At first, digital technologies streamlined the acquisition of print resources and allowed libraries to scale back on staffing as acquisitions and cataloging became less like an assembly line and more like project management. However, as eBooks have emerged from technological advances, libraries are having to spend more time and money on negotiating licenses while managing a wider range of workflows than in a strictly print acquisitions environment.

The arrival of eBooks on the library scene created some chaos for acquisitions. Whereas in print acquisitions a book from any publisher can be cataloged, shelved, and circulated the same as any other, eBooks do not conform to the processes that work so well for print acquisitions. Due to publishers' fears of broad and easy distribution of digital content without remuneration to the publishers, eBooks were developed with so-called digital rights manage-

ment (DRM) restrictions that use digital technology — ironically — to restrict the dissemination of digital content in the form of eBooks. (In addition to reining in the ease of distribution of eBooks, also ironic is that eBooks still typically maintain the same form and format inefficiencies of print books instead of embracing the dynamic content and indexing potential made possible by Internet technologies.)

Early efforts by library vendors to be involved in eBook sales included the assertion that eBooks should be delivered through channels analogous to print books. Don't worry, vendors told libraries, eBooks behave like another binding, along with hardcover and paperback books. Vendors partnered with eBook aggregators, which developed eBook platforms that incorporated DRM, display and functionality for eBooks.

eBook aggregators also serve to address what may have been an insurmountable problem without them: eBook licensing. As use and dissemination of digital media have come to be governed by contract rather than copyright law, libraries found themselves in the position of negotiating with information providers just for the right to buy and share digital content. The process of license negotiation is time-consuming and results in many different agreements with different information providers. eBook aggregators allow libraries and publishers to reach a common set of agreements through an aggregator without requiring each publisher and each library to hammer out an arrangement individually. When a library reaches a license agreement with an aggregator, which is partnered with the library's primary vendor, then many publishers' eBooks can be worked into established acquisitions processes.



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