Charleston Library Conference

Pay-Per-View Isn't All Wet: Providing Articles Can Save the Budget

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Barbara MacAlpine, "Pay-Per-View Isn't All Wet: Providing Articles Can Save the Budget" (2010). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference.*
http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284314852

PAY-PER-VIEW ISN'T ALL WET: PROVIDING ARTICLES CAN SAVE THE BUDGET

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ABSTRACT

Could your library use an extra hundred thousand dollars? If your budget is drowning in journal expenditures, this program may suggest a lifeline. Four years after a total conversion from serial subscriptions to article pay-per-view on ScienceDirect, Trinity University has the data to show that this kind of change in journal acquisition can be a very positive experience in terms of the budget, service to faculty, and public relations. You will find out about survey results that reinforce our conclusions. Additional pay-per-view avenues will also be explored.

Discussion topics will include:

- Who will be served? (faculty of course, but students too?)
- How do you budget for pay-per-view?
- Do you cancel selectively, or cancel everything from a publisher?
- How well are you tracking usage?

Session participants might be librarians who want to test the waters with article pay-per-view, those who have taken the plunge and would like to swim another lap, and publishers who are hoping the subscription dam won't break. My goals include gathering additional information from swimmers and dam watchers while throwing a life preserver to those who are sinking under budget woes.

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2010 this author undertook an academic leave project focused on an analysis of Trinity University's pay-per-view journal article program, with an emphasis on statistics related to usage and finances. The project extended to an investigation of practices by other academic libraries for comparable information. My goal was to develop recommendations for changes to our existing program, including its possible expansion to publishers beyond Elsevier.

Some of the recent literature on pay-per-view is tied into the Charleston Conference, including a series of articles published in the December 2009/January 2010 issue of *Against the Grain* and at least one presentation at the 29th Conference in 2009 (Murray and Weir). A very useful background and literature review are provided by Carr and Collins (2009) along with their report of a survey of current pay-per-view practices at six institutions around the United States (including Trinity University).

While these items informed my research, my presentation's focus is derived from two quotes that are intended to guide the discussion:

"Pay-per-view will make fiscal sense to many institutions." (Bachrach)

"Transactional access [pay-per-view] is by no means a magic bullet to solve all problems, …" (Murray and Weir)

BACKGROUND

In 2007 Trinity University's Coates Library embarked on a new program to provide greater access to all articles in the journals made available through Elsevier, a major publisher of periodicals in the sciences, psychology, and business/economics. Rather than increasing our subscription base, we cancelled all Elsevier print journals and instead offered "pay-per-view" from its ScienceDirect platform. With this kind of service the library set up a deposit account and then paid a set charge for any Elsevier article, which became available electronically as soon as it was ordered. The greatest impetus for the pay-per-view program was financial. We hoped to achieve major savings by cancelling our 80 Elsevier print subscriptions, which in 2006 cost us more than $150,000 annually with guaranteed increases for the future (see charts 1 and 2 below). In addition to the potential savings, there were significant benefits offered to the faculty; they could submit an order for any Elsevier journal article at their convenience and receive immediate delivery to their desktops of a PDF of the original article. The PDF also provided any original graphics that were in color or required high resolution, which are especially important factors in some disciplines.

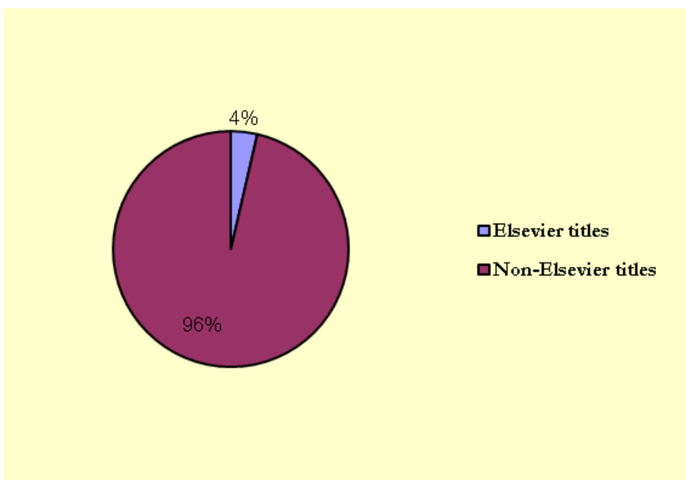

Chart 1: Percentage of 2006 Coates Library subscriptions published by Elsevier.
Courtesy of Clint Chamberlain, 8/21/06.

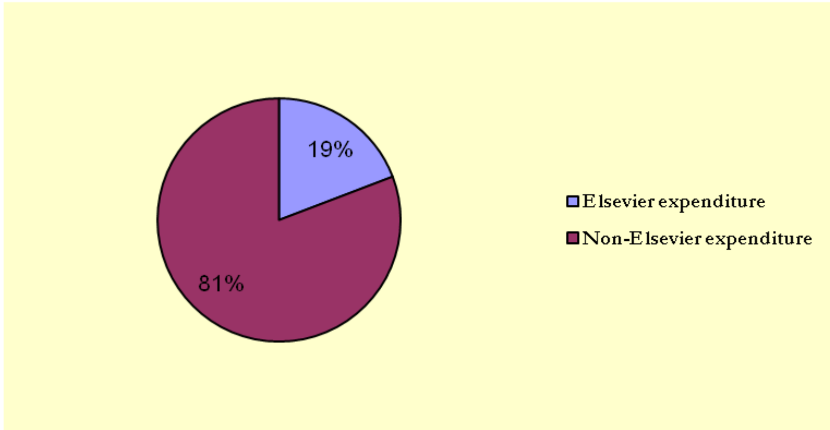

Chart 2: Elsevier expenditures out of total 2006 Coates Library serials budget.
Courtesy of Clint Chamberlain, 8/21/06.

PAY-PER-VIEW 2007 TO DATE AT TRINITY UNIVERSITY

While traveling into unchartered waters, we estimated that we might spend as much as $50,000 a year, so this amount was deposited into our Elsevier account in the 2006/2007 fiscal year. Somewhat to our surprise, we have only spent $37,560, starting with a focus group trial in the fall of 2006 through October of 2010. There has not been a steady increase in usage per year (see Charts 3 and 4), but the total for 2010 has already exceeded the number of purchases in each previous year and may indicate growth for the future as well.

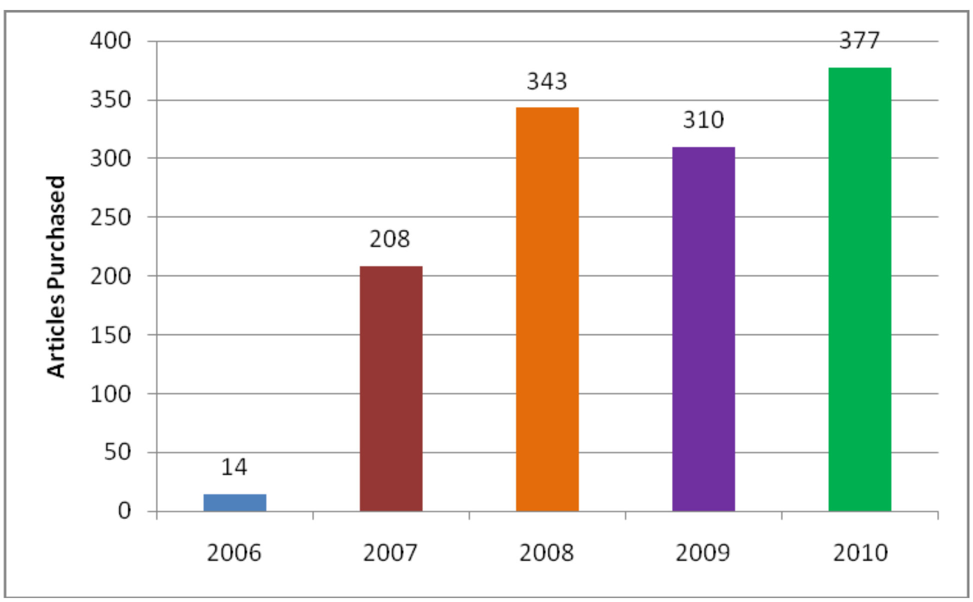

Chart 3: Elsevier journal articles purchased per year, October 2006—October 2010.

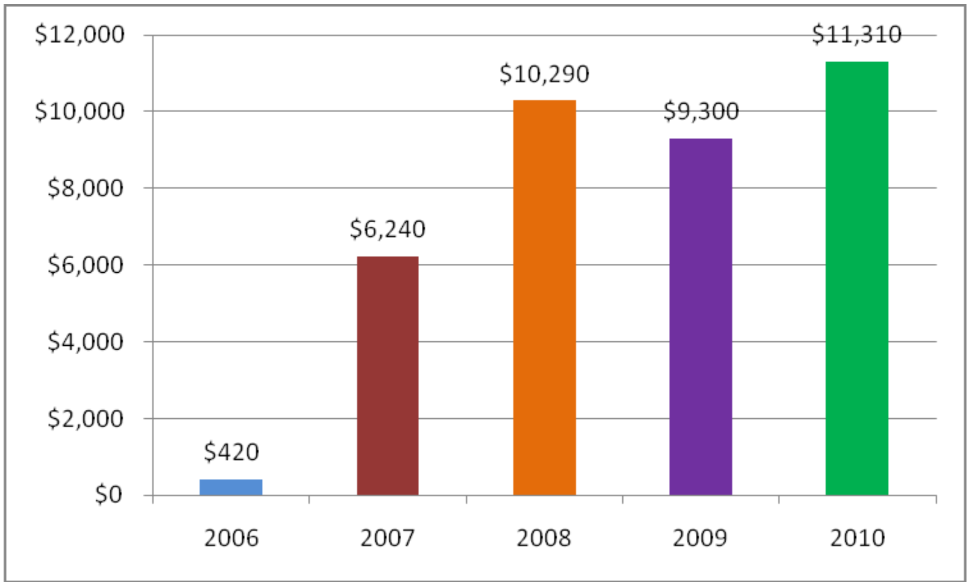

Chart 4: Expenditures for pay-per-view Elsevier journal articles, October 2006—October 2010.

Nevertheless, our pay-per-view expenses are certainly not decimating the budget at the same rate as the paid Elsevier subscriptions did. A conservative (5% increase per year) estimate of what our renewal bills from 2007 through 2010 might have been totals $678,845 for Elsevier journals, compared with our actual pay-per-view article cost of $37,560 for the duration of the program.

Why has usage been relatively low? There are a number of possible explanations: Elsevier journals are not as important to our faculty as we thought. Some economically-minded faculty members have been just as satisfied to use the quick turnaround of interlibrary loan, judging it to be a free service. (Of course that's not completely true in view of staff time.) It is still a bit of an inconvenience to order the article on ScienceDirect, where one must jump through a few hoops and remember a username and password imposed by the library. Some faculty members also have access to ScienceDirect through other avenues (local connections, their last institution, a spouse, etc.).

Those who have used pay-per-view are generally quite satisfied, and a few departments have found it to be a good source for cancelled or previously inaccessible journals (especially Chemistry and Psychology). For many of our faculty, it is still an untapped resource. As other institutions have experienced, we have seen greater use of journals to which the library did not have subscriptions than to those we cancelled. By mid-2010, articles had been ordered from 278 of these non-subscription journals in ScienceDirect. Moreover, 39 of the 80 Elsevier journals we cancelled have seen no purchasing activity.

A larger factor in the low usage, which was one of our earlier concerns about switching to pay-per-view, is that student access has been a mediated process offered by the reference staff, library liaisons, or faculty members. Most students are accustomed to (and spoiled by) one-click access, and mediation is not an option they will choose. If they have to contact a person to request the article, they will usually select another source instead. Libraries that offer students immediate click-through access for pay-per-view have much higher use of ScienceDirect journals. DePauw University, for example, has an FTE comparable to Trinity. The library tried unmediated pay-per-view with Elsevier for both faculty and students in 2007, spent $50,000 in six months, and switched to a different plan (College Editions) that was more financially feasible for their purposes (Gilson). Trinity recently changed its student access procedure and will be monitoring the effects on usage (see The Future … below).

PAY-PER-VIEW AT OTHER LIBRARIES

As part of my examination of Trinity's program, I gathered data from a number of other institutions around the country that offer pay-per-view access to journal articles from Elsevier as well as other publishers. More than half of these are small liberal arts colleges and universities similar to Trinity in size and focus; 36 are from the Oberlin Group. Much of the information came from my contacts with science librarians as well as surveys by other institutions. Queries from librarians following an ALA presentation on Trinity's pay-per-view program (Chamberlain and MacAlpine, "Replacing") and reactions to a paper published in *Serials* (Chamberlain and MacAlpine, "Pay-per-view") provided additional data.

At least 18 of the institutions are offering pay-per-view from Elsevier's ScienceDirect platform. A few have followed our lead and cancelled all of their Elsevier journals, while more have only cancelled high cost/low use titles. The amount being spent or budgeted varies considerably, from a low of $5,000 to a typical $30,000/year. Almost all the libraries provide either mediated or no pay-per-view service for students. Most interesting is the system set up at Lafayette College, which makes access for faculty easier and provides students with electronic mediation. The college FTE is similar to Trinity, but in the first seven months of pay-per-view with Elsevier the library had 1400 article requests (Heidenwolf). Its service began in late 2008, by which time Elsevier had made available a program called Article Choice. This enables small and medium-sized libraries (corporate, academic, and government) to purchase bundles of articles on a more cost-effective basis than single article pay-per-view.

Eleven or more of the institutions surveyed are participating in Wiley's ArticleSelect program, in which pay-per-view is offered through the pre-purchase of tokens (one token per article). The librarians at Wellesley College have been especially impressed with the cost-saving opportunities for Wiley journals and have routinely cancelled subscriptions to high cost/low use titles in favor of using tokens (Lenares). The price for tokens decreases as the quantity purchased increases. Hamilton College librarians reported the use of 400 tokens in busy months, while a Colgate University librarian noted that current use (in April 2010) was 10-11 tokens per day (Poulin). A number of librarians have expressed interest in cancelling part of their Wiley subscriptions in favor of access via tokens. This is the most popular of the pay-per-view programs that are reported; it is a model that other publishers could emulate to advantage.

THE FUTURE OF PAY-PER-VIEW AT TRINITY UNIVERSITY

While it is always dangerous to look down the road very far in the world of journals, the following areas are being explored for the Trinity academic community.

Elsevier/ScienceDirect

Currently faculty members have a departmental username and password that they must remember when ordering pay-per-view articles. We would like to provide access in a manner similar to Lafayette College, which has set up an account with ScienceDirect that is connected directly to the IP address of the library's proxy server. Then requests for ScienceDirect journals that came through our link resolver would send faculty to an authentication page where they could log in with their institutional username and password and receive the requested article. Orders would be filled without anyone having to remember another set of login information. We are still working on this possibility, though our systems are not the same as those at Lafayette and thus far we have not been able to resolve some technical issues.

While some degree of mediation is still in order for students who want Elsevier articles, we made one change in September 2010 that allows requests to be submitted through an electronic system that is more convenient and may encourage greater use. Our link resolver now redirects students to a request form for ScienceDirect journal articles. The form is received by interlibrary loan staff, who can first check for print availability at the library (which students rarely do themselves). We generally deliver the article within 24 hours, except over the weekend. The form includes a "needed by" date, which also allows the staff to substitute our regular (but fast) interlibrary loan process for filling some of the requests. We think this change will result in greater use of ScienceDirect articles by the students; in fact, that is my hope. It is still likely to be more cost-effective than the subscriptions we used to have for Elsevier journals.

Wiley InterScience

Since 2002 we have had increased access to Wiley journals, initially through the TICUL (Texas Independent College and University Libraries) consortium and more recently via its new name, TCAL (Texas Council of Academic Libraries). By agreeing to continue subscriptions to those journals which were in our Wiley collection in 2001, we have additional electronic access to many titles that are part of an Enhanced Access License (EAL) maintained by such institutions as Rice, Baylor, Texas A & M, UT—Austin, etc. By and large, this has been a great arrangement with major benefits for our faculty and students; with a subscription to 28 titles, we have access to articles from c275 journals. On the other hand, it has also become increasingly expensive (see Chart 5 below). From a draft list of our most expensive journal subscriptions (those which cost more than $1,000 in 2010), 19 of the 28 Wiley titles were on that list of 148 journals.

YEAR	# OF ARTICLES	SUB. PRICE	COST/USE
2002		$31,983.15	$35.07
2003		$36,820.61	$24.98
2004		$39,214.04	$40.81
2005		$43,423.53	$41.04
2006	1611	$46,944.04	$29.14
2007	2341	$49,995.28	$21.36
2008	2387	$53,431.84	$22.38
2009	2744	$56,927.64	$20.74
2010	1662 (Jan-May)	$60,626.23	

Chart 5: Wiley journal usage and costs.
Subscription prices for 2002—2007 and cost/use for 2002-2006
courtesy of Clint Chamberlain, 8/28/07.
# of articles not available 2002-2005.

Note that cost/use began to drop significantly in 2007. While that year may have been an aberration, by 2008 our usage statistics included Blackwell journals (acquired by the Wiley purchase and subsequent merge into what is now considered the Wiley collection). What this means for us is that at a minimum, our cost/use is in the low $20 range. If the former Blackwell journals were removed from the # of articles figures for 2008—2010, because their cost is not included in the subscription price for any of the years on Chart 7, then cost/use could be higher.

Based on this analysis, Trinity librarians made the decision to cancel all but one (high use) journal title from the original Wiley subscriptions, starting in 2011. Instead we will purchase a pack of 1,500 tokens and participate in Wiley's ArticleSelect program. These tokens can also be used to purchase articles from former Blackwell titles, another possible area for a cost/use examination. A comparison of statistics between Scholarly Stats and Wiley often produced frustratingly different results for journal article usage, but even erring on the high side of usage suggested that we could save substantially by cancelling subscriptions and providing pay-per-view access via tokens. In 2011 Trinity will undertake a similar study of the former Blackwell titles and their cost/use for other possible cancellations, taking into account the political climate of affected departments and their preferences for journals in print vs. electronic access.

Departmental credit card

At least one library in the Oberlin Group (Dickinson College) has set up an arrangement whereby faculty in a specific department use a credit card to order articles from any publisher for immediate electronic delivery. The library reimburses the cost for the articles, using savings from cancellations of some of the department's more obscure, infrequently used subscriptions in order to support this fund. The faculty wanted to have the flexibility and freedom to purchase articles from journals that were outside the subscription base, and apparently they have been very appreciative of this arrangement (Brunskill).

Trinity librarians are considering trying this arrangement on a one-year trial basis with a department that has likely candidates for cancellation and would find this helpful without abusing the privilege. This would undoubtedly involve significant amounts of faculty education, monitoring and trust.

Mediated ordering

In November 2009 the library set up document delivery ordering and invoicing procedures to enable library liaisons to use their university credit cards for the purchase of "I need it now" electronic access to articles for their faculty. This does not apply to ScienceDirect or other document delivery services for which we already have arrangements in place. While this kind of ordering has not been used heavily, it is a service that creates considerable goodwill toward the library. Our Technical Service librarians anticipate significantly more document delivery activity of all kinds in the future, and this is one way they are making it easier for us to support the immediate research and teaching needs of our faculty while spending relatively little money.

USAGE STATISTICS

We have access to many journal usage statistics through publishers' webpages and the ScholarlyStats service. Due to limited staff time and perhaps a lack of understanding about what we could access and how it could be effectively used, we have not fully benefited from the wealth of information that is available. However, one of the responsibilities of a newly hired electronic resources and serials librarian will be to develop a system for harvesting these usage data and making them available to the liaison librarians. They would be a valuable tool as we work with faculty to identify journal subscriptions that may no longer be very relevant for our collection and our campus.

CONCLUSION

I approached this study as a strong proponent of pay-per-view journal article access, and my research reinforces this position. Trinity has saved a significant amount on Elsevier articles since 2007, far more than anticipated when we deposited what we thought would be our first annual payment of $50,000 in a pay-per-view account. Moreover, pay-per-view has been a popular service for those faculty members who have utilized it. We are now ready to increase our usage and cost by making the process easier for our faculty and students.

Additional savings may result from establishing other pay-per-view arrangements, especially for the Wiley-Blackwell journals. As a colleague at Colgate noted, "As with anything, there is risk involved that they will change the model if enough users switch to token access, but compared to canceling titles and having no access, it seems a reasonable risk" (Poulin). Our cancellation of all Elsevier journals was certainly a risk, but the results have far outweighed the initial concerns and the effort it took to start the program.

Will pay-per-view benefit other institutions? To quote a chemistry colleague at Trinity more extensively,

> "Pay-per-view will make fiscal sense to many institutions. Journals that have limited use - a few faculty members and students - are better accessed on a pay-per-view basis. Subscription prices simply are too high. With journals available on-line and with near 24/7 access, archiving at a library for some (minor) use down the road is just not fiscally responsible. However, for journals with broad appeal, especially at larger institutions, the pay-per-view model will likely not make sense." (Bachrach)

Decisions about pay-per-view will depend on a number of factors: usage, title availability through consortia, differences in disciplines, and to some extent the willingness of a campus to try untested waters. In many cases there will be a benefit to the budget, often to a much greater extent than anticipated. While pay-per-view may not be the "magic bullet" to which Murray and Weir allude, in challenging economic times it comes closer to that concept that many other options.

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