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Patron-Driven E-book Solutions: Moving Beyond the Banana Books Incident

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Abstract:
The University of Colorado Boulder Libraries participated in one of the first patron-driven acquisition initiatives offered by netLibrary in the late 1990s. One outcome of this patron-driven pilot was the banana books incident which has now become part of popular collection development lore. This incident will be described more fully and will highlight the difficulties of establishing demand-driven models that are divorced from an institution's approval plans. More recently, the University of Colorado has taken the lessons learned from the banana books snafu and has developed institution specific solutions for patron selection and use of e-books. This paper will discuss strategies for integrating e-books into subject and publisher based approval profiles with Ingram-Coutts and the My iLibrary platform. The paper will also address the complexities of customizing 70 profiles that are a combination of print, e-preferred, e-patron-driven with Coutts and 30 selectors.

Introduction

Patron-driven is a popular model for e-book acquisition, but its success varies by institution and implementation. Different vendors, profile criteria, and purchasing models create infinite options for setting up patron-driven pilot projects and libraries need to develop strategies for effectively managing the risks and benefits of working with a patron-driven model. The University of Colorado Boulder Libraries have participated in three patron-driven acquisition pilots that have helped us developed institution specific solutions for patron selection and use of e-books. The three pilots are:

1) a netLibrary consortium PDA managed by the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries (Alliance) that CU participated in from 1999-2005; 2) a small My iLibrary PDA Pilot for five subject areas that was implemented in 2009; 3) an integrated PDA program developed with Ingram-Coutts & My iLibrary, established in 2010.

The authors will highlight problems encountered and lessons learned from these three programs and address local solutions developed to manage potential risks associated with patron-driven acquisition.

netLibrary Patron-Driven Acquisition Pilot, 1998-2005

In the late 1990s, the University of Colorado worked closely with the founder of netLibrary, Tim Schiewe, to develop an e-book distribution model for the academic library marketplace. Following conversations between Schiewe and the Dean of Libraries,

James Williams about the concept, Schiewe went on to create netLibrary as an early aggregator for scholarly and trade e-books. The University Libraries tested netLibrary's product prior to the company's launch, and subsequently participated in one of the first consortium patron-driven acquisitions model for e-books.

The Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries developed a plan with netLibrary in 1998 and implemented the first consortial patron-driven acquisition plan in the United States. During the pilot, MARC records were loaded into member libraries' catalogs and Prospector, the Alliance's union catalog. They were available for one year. The consortium automatically purchased one license to e-books the second time they accessed by a patron. Additional copies were purchased based on simultaneous use. If a purchased e-book was in use when another patron was trying to access it netLibrary would make a second copy available to that patron. If that second copy was accessed twice, the Alliance automatically purchased a second license. No more than three licenses would be automatically purchased. If three copies of an e-book were accessed simultaneously and a fourth user attempted to access the e-book, the fourth user was turned away. Authorized users had access to all of the e-books on the netLibrary platform but the Alliance only paid for e-books that were accessed two or more times by our users. Cost was determined by a pro-rated formula based on library size and materials budget and divided among Alliance members.

Banana Books Incident

While the netLibrary patron-driven acquisition pilot was extremely innovative, it is also infamous for the banana books incident at the University of Colorado Boulder Libraries. During the pilot, an undergraduate geography class was assigned to research the production of a crop in a developing country. While the instructor intended to teach students about the economics of crop production and the impact of globalization, all 150 students were given the same instructions to research the production of bananas in Central America. While the University Libraries held some books on this topic, the demand from 150 students far exceeded our supply.

At the same time, we had records for netLibrary books loaded into our online catalog. In addition to discovering e-books in our catalog, netLibrary offered full-text searching within their e-books. netLibrary was flooded with undergraduate users looking for resources about the banana trade and we ended up purchasing several titles about bananas. In some cases e-books with bananas in the title or abstract were purchased because they were easily retrieved by a simple keyword search but they had little or nothing to do with the students' broader research topic. As a result costs spiked from $13,000 in March to over $37,000 the following month.

Lessons Learned from the netLibrary Pilot:

Scope and Collection Profile

One of the main criticisms of this pilot was that the libraries purchased content that was outside of our collection development policies. When the pilot began, e-books were a new format and netLibrary had a small number of e-books and the collection was growing slowly. As a result, the Alliance initially decided to include all content with no filters for subjects, imprint dates, or audience level. As netLibrary content grew, the purchase plan shifted towards including content from select publishers. However, there were still few publishers who were willing to provide e-books and participate in patron-driven acquisitions. The banana book incident is one example of purchasing out of scope material, but the Libraries also purchased many e-books that were textbooks or intended for a general-popular audience and would not have been purchased through our existing print approval plan. Although many of the titles were appropriate for our collection, the overall impression was that this was not an effective selection tool because we did not have control over collection development.

On the other hand, even some of titles that were deemed out of scope are still being used. Over the lifetime of the collection, the netLibrary e-books have been accessed 8 times on average. This has shown us that initial patron use after publication can be a reasonable predictor of future use and that there is a demand for materials outside of our traditional collection. The continued use of the netLibrary e-book collection also demonstrates the efficacy of patron-driven acquisition compared to the large percentage of materials selected by librarians that remain unused.

Overlap with Existing Collections

We were not able to select on a title-by-title basis and we could not prevent duplication with our existing print collection. Since a large percentage of the titles available on the netLibrary platform were backlist titles, the University Libraries had already purchased print copies. While the Libraries were interested in making e-books available, there was approximately 40% overlap with our existing collection and was not cost effective to purchase a second copy in another format.

Licensing, Turnaways, and Trigger Events

netLibrary's one book, one simultaneous user model was frustrating to library users and staff alike. It yielded high turnaway rates when popular e-books were in use and the Alliance ended up purchasing multiple copies because simultaneous use triggered a purchase.

Monthly Invoices

The expenditures were difficult to predict because we did not have control over what titles were purchased or when. While the Alliance negotiated minimum and maximum expenditures in the contract, they also elected to receive monthly invoices instead of setting up a deposit account. Initially there was some concern that they would not reach the minimum expenditure level however, expenditures spiked during the banana books incident and grew steadily over the duration of the pilot.

The Alliance limited financial exposure by removing older, unused titles from the libraries' catalogs. e-books with zero use were removed from the library catalogs after one year. This helped the libraries manage the number of potential purchases and allowed them to continue to add new content to the pool.

Workflows
The netLibrary pilot also required each library to develop a separate acquisitions and cataloging workflow to manage the MARC records. Provisional MARC records were loaded into the library catalog and were overlayed with new records when e-books were purchased. The Alliance received monthly invoices for e-books, but there was a significant delay (up to one year) before the purchased MARC records were received and overlayed. We were also loading MARC records for new content on a quarterly basis and removing MARC records for content that did not trigger a purchase after one year. This rolling window created a challenging timetable for managing the collection.

My iLibrary Pilot, Fall 2009-Spring 2010
In fall 2009, the University Libraries were given an opportunity to participate in another patron-driven acquisition pilot for e-books through the Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA). However, instead of participating as a consortium, GWLA negotiating the terms of the general contract but each member library set up their own individual pilot. Many of our selectors were leery of PDA models because of the banana book incident. Nevertheless, the University Libraries set up a deposit account with $20,000 from five subject areas that were interested in testing this purchase model: religious studies, business, chemistry, women's studies, and ethnic studies.

Subject specialists from each participating subject reviewed lists of e-books from academic and scholarly publishers and selected acceptable titles to include in the pilot. The title list was a combination of recently published (within the past three years) and backlist titles in each subject. The pilot also included some duplication with our existing print and e-book holdings but this was intentional so that the Libraries could compare usage between e-books with print equivalents.

The University Libraries loaded 984 MARC records for PDA e-books into our catalog in spring 2010. The pilot was not promoted to end users and neither the library catalog nor the My iLibrary interface indicated that these titles were not yet purchased by the library. Users could access the e-books through our catalog or by searching the My iLibrary interface. GWLA negotiated that three or more uses triggered a purchase. Users were given information including citation, complete metadata, table of contents, and the ability to do a full-text search inside the book before opening it and these activities did not count as a uses that would trigger a purchase. This reduced the likelihood of purchasing e-books that patrons were only browsing or quickly realized did not pertain to their research. There was no time limit for the third use and no charge to allow users to browse the e-books or use 1-2 times.

During the pilot, e-books were purchased within 95 days on average. By the end of the pilot in fall 2010, 25 titles were purchased for a total of $4,600 and an average of $184 per title. However, 130 (13%) of the e-books were used 1-2 times. We have been able to provide access to those e-books valued at approximately $30,000 at no cost. The pilot included e-books from subjects representing each major discipline and the purchased e-books were fairly evenly distributed across the subject areas: 8 religious studies, 5 women's studies, 1 ethnic studies, 4 chemistry, and 7 business e-books. To avoid turnaways, the e-books were purchased with multiuser licenses which cost approximately 150% of the print list price.

Lessons Learned from the My iLibrary Pilot:

Selector Approved Content
The pilot only included a small number of e-books and subject coverage but it highlighted subject areas that worked well as patron-driven e-books. It also provided proof of concept that encouraged other subject librarians to participate in our next patron-driven pilot. Having selectors review title lists was a very manual, time consuming process but it prevented us from experiencing buyer's remorse because we only purchased e-books that complemented our collection.

Deposit Account

A deposit account is a useful mechanism to prevent overspending, but few libraries face the outcome of dealing with a deposit account that is underspent. Since we only spent 23% of our deposit account and the Libraries continued to work with My iLibrary, we decided to retain the MARC records for the remaining 967 e-books in the catalog and continue to charge the account accordingly. Thirty-nine more e-books have been purchased since the pilot ended. This demonstrates that it is necessary to provide ample time for e-books to be discovered and it may be difficult to establish a maximum amount of time to wait for an e-book to be used. Until we can collection more data about how long it takes an e-book to be purchased, we need to be careful about removing titles with 0-2 uses from our catalog.

Duplication with Print and Other e-book Collections

Overlap with our existing collection was still an issue because we were purchasing backlist titles and we did not have an automated way to prevent duplication. Selectors reviewed title lists in Excel spreadsheets and our acquisitions staff manually checked our library catalog for print or online holdings.

Establishing Scalable Workflows

Patron-driven acquisition models require detailed tracking of record loads, usage statistics, expenditures, and other feedback from selectors and users and it is useful to test these workflows with a small number of e-books in a pilot. However, pilots require libraries to develop separate workflows for managing these resources which is not efficient long term. We also realized that this type of pilot only enabled us to purchase backlist titles and would not help us grow an e-book collection. The pilot prompted us to think about ways to get patron-driven e-books on an ongoing basis and helped us to establish workflows for selectors, acquisitions, and cataloging that were scalable to our next patron-driven model.

Integrating Patron-Driven e-books into an Approval Plan, Fall 2010-present

During fall 2010, the University Libraries transitioned to a new monographic vendor, Ingram-Coutts, who works exclusively with the My iLibrary e-book platform. Ingram-Coutts offers integrated approval plans for print and e-books and several options for purchasing e-books. Due to the success of the My iLibrary pilot, many of our selectors were interested in experimenting with patron-driven options for e-books.

Each selector made decisions about preferred format based on discipline-specific needs. Our science librarians opted to make all available e-books patron-drive, while some of our social science libraries limited patron-driven e-books to select publishers or specific book types like edited works. Other selectors were interested in loading as many e-books as possible to see what patrons would select. Instructions in the approval plan increased the number of subjects receiving patron-driven e-books from five to eighteen including all of the sciences, and several subjects in the social sciences and humanities.

We receive monthly invoices for the e-books that have triggered a purchase with 3+ uses and we can also run reports to see how many e-books have 0-2 uses. As of October 2011, 2,844 e-books are available for purchase and the University Libraries have purchased 69 patron-driven e-books through our approval plan. In addition, 345 e-books have between 1-2 uses so they could be purchased any day now.

Lessons Learned from Integrating Patron-Driven e-books into our Approval Plan:

Profiling

Profiling is a time and labor intensive process but customizing a profile is an effective way to control the amount and types of e-books are added to the patron-driven pool. While the pilot was a static collection of e-books, patron-driven e-books in our approval plan match our profiles in real-time so that our e-book collection grows with our print collection. The library can review online lists of titles that match our profiles and we download MARC records for newly published e-books on a weekly basis. The University Libraries have purchased several large subject-based e-books packages however; title-by-title selection for e-books has been a challenge. Integrating e-books into our approval plan has given us more control over the e-books we load into our catalog to be purchased and we also have the ability to purchase individual e-book titles. Moreover, we are able to purchase frontlist e-books instead of having to

purchase backlist titles or wait several months or years after original publication to get an e-book.

Preventing Duplication
Another advantage of integrating e-books into our approval plan is that our monographic vendor helps us prevent duplication. We send our monographic holdings to Ingram-Coutts on a weekly basis in order to avoid purchasing multiple copies of the same title from different e-book vendors. Our approval plan includes instructions for purchasing titles in preferred format (paper, e-book, cloth) and prevents the library from unintentionally purchasing a title in multiple formats.

Streamlining Workflows
Integrating e-books into our approval plan helped us streamline selection and acquisition of print and e-books instead of maintaining separate workflows for different formats or parallel workflows for a pilot program.

e-book Availability
In order for patron-driven acquisition to work libraries need to select publishers who are likely to produce e-books and who publish print and e-books simultaneously. The University Libraries would like to expand our approval profiles to receive more patron-driven e-books not all content is available as e-books and not all publishers allow their e-books to be distributed as patron-driven. We have found that patron-driven acquisition can supplement our collection building but it is still necessary for our library to maintain an approval profile for print books and we will continue to firm order and purchase large e-books in order to meet the needs of our users.

Next Steps
The University Libraries still need to determine how long to leave the MARC records in the catalog and how many e-books to make available for purchase. We continue to review our usage statistics but have not removed any titles with zero use. However, we should consider these e-books as potential purchases and budget accordingly. In order to manage our monographic budget we may also consider purchasing e-books with 1-2 uses before the end of the fiscal year so that we do not create compression

issues by delaying the purchase of e-books in subsequent fiscal years.

Ingram-Coutts is working on several features that would maximize the number of patron-driven e-books we purchase and make eligible for purchase. First, Ingram-Coutts is considering giving selectors the ability to cancel or reject a title that matches a patron-driven profile in our online ordering system. Currently, we have to load all of the titles that match our patron-driven profiles but this option would give selectors more control over which titles are available for purchase and could potentially increase the number of selectors willing to include patron-driven instructions in their profiles. Second, Ingram-Coutts is also working on a mechanism that would allow selectors to designate e-books title as patron-driven instead of approval or firm orders. This would route more e-books into our patron-driven pool and would allow selectors to experiment with patron-driven acquisitions without having to change their approval profiles.

Another goal is to expand patron-driven acquisition model to include other libraries in the CU System. The University of Colorado has negotiated shared access to e-books purchased with a multiuser license and the Boulder campus has been sharing e-books with the other campuses for several months. We are in the process of working with Ingram-Coutts and the other CU System libraries to develop a profile for a shared collection of PDA e-books.

Finally, to bring the discussion full circle, the Colorado Alliance is developing another patron-driven e-book project. This proposal is with YBP and two major e-book vendors available through YBP. CU is watching this development but not yet participating since this would require setting up a separate workflow. Nonetheless, there may be future opportunities to participate in a consortial model that provides access to e-books among the member libraries.

If libraries can develop institutional-specific strategies for effectively managing the risks and benefits of working with a patron-driven model it can be an effective way to build diverse collections based on user needs and interests. The University of Colorado Boulder Libraries found the most success with two patron-driven acquisition programs that bal-

anced the needs of 30 selectors and the users that they represent. Integrating e-books into approval profile allows our librarians and our end users to be involved in the collection development process. We have the ability to leverage our approval plan, purchase frontlist titles, and streamline workflows for selectors, acquisitions and cataloging. We hope that that integrating PDA e-books into our approval profile is a sustainable model for patron-driven acquisition and will provide our libraries with a long-term solution to help us grow our e-book collection.