Comprehensive Resource Management in Libraries

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ADAPTING TO THE SHIFT TOWARDS A HYBRID LIBRARY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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1. Introduction:

There has been a sharp shift towards the adoption of e-resources in the libraries globally. Even though the change is slow and gradual, libraries in India and other developing countries have started facing the complexities associated with it. The use of electronic resources in libraries began with the development of the machine-readable cataloging (MARC) format in the mid-1960's. Later many databases were developed even before the invention of World Wide Web. Gradually books got digitized and they were made available in CD-Rom format. The advent of digital technology helped further to bring publications in different formats. They include e-books, e-journals, online encyclopedias and other reference sources. Along with these aggregations of e-journals and e-books, which otherwise called as full-text databases, emergence of bibliographic databases providing indices and abstracts has made the scenario more complex.

In the management of print documents, libraries had the traditional work flow of ordering, making payments, cataloguing and processing them for shelving and use by the patrons. But the workflow related to e-resources is not that simple, consistent and are multipronged. When dealing with books, we had only publishers and book sellers. Now another set of intermediaries have emerged called the aggregators. They are just beneficiaries of the trade for being an intermediary.

Another important prerequisite in the case of e-resources is the skill-set required by professionals for managing the same. In many libraries the management of e-resources including their procurement, cataloguing, and making available to the users are managed by one or two librarians, whereas most of the library staff are unsure what to do, basically because the situations are new to them and they vary from title to title and publisher to publisher.

This article lists various e-resources available at present and the features and complexities attached for the procurement and management of them.

2. Collection development policy:

As we all know, it becomes effortless for the administrators of the library to make decisions about procurements of resources if there is a clear cut Collection Development Policy. This leads to consistent and informed decisions. In the case of e-resources procurement also there is need for a well-defined collection development policy and following are to be taken into consideration while one designs the same.

- The policy statement should be on par with the mission of the library. It should clearly state the need for such a policy.

- It should mention the clientele whom the library is serving and the purpose of the library services.

- The policy should clearly specify the criteria for selection of resources.

- It should state clearly whether the library needs print, online or both in the collection and point out various factors taken into consideration for selecting a format.

- The policy should describe in detail the collection management processes like retention. weeding, preservation and cancellation.

- The policy should state whether a consortia approach is required and justify the need.

- It also should also describe how e-resources can be made available to the users, whether limited to a campus network or extended to remote users also.

A well drafted statement accommodating all above points will put the library professionals on the right track. Librarians involved in the procurement and management of e-resources will have a clear vision of their drive involving rapidly changing resources scenario.

Once the identification of a resource is done you need to evaluate the same prior to procurement or subscription. First and foremost consideration should be the content part of it. Electronic resources have the advantage of carrying additional multimedia elements and value added services along with them. These also should be verified during this process. Naturally the second factor in the consideration is the cost involved. As the resources can be used simultaneously by many people, libraries won't buy multiple copies of the same. Taking the same into consideration, publishers charge huge costs.

Currency of the content is another factor to be evaluated. Many publishes have digitized their older editions of books and brought it to the market. Hence the year of publication of the print counter part of the item should be taken into consideration. Licensing agreements and ease of access to the resource are also worth considering at the time of evaluation of a resource.

3. E-Resources market:

Project Gutenberg was the first electronic book project. It focused on documents and books that were in the public domain.

The philosophy behind this project was to create texts that were easy to use and inexpensive to create. Every book was freely available to the public on the Internet, and then on the Web.

Books published by the publishers were initially digitized and provided in the form of CD-ROMs and later as DVDs. The earlier formats were basically pdf and html.

But the growth of Internet and the FTP technology to search and download files from the remote servers brought in the concept of online e-books. Publishers used this situation to increase their bargaining capacity. Since the files remained in their servers, the concept of ownership changed to right to access. This further added to the bargaining power of the publishers. Time limited access through subscriptions, perpetual access through a huge ransom payment, access only to chapters or limited pages and access only to limited number of users at the same time are variant types of options available in the e-document trade. This necessitates libraries to know or perceive the potential use of an item. Otherwise publishers will exploit the ignorance of library administrators to their advantage. In a developing country like India where libraries even today are still in a process of getting transformed to a hybrid library situation, they are very vulnerable to the unhealthy business practices in the publishing trade.

Publishers offer life time access (Perpetual access) to an e-book published by them with no restrictions. Any number of users can use, download and copy the book any number of times. At the same time we all know that the value and use of the content of a normal book is for only a few years. After that its use slowly diminishes, basically because new editions of the same come up. Hence perpetual access is not as advantageous as it appears to be, especially when we consider the cost involved for the same.

Another purchase model for e-books is to buy books in bundles. In ordinary book trade we have the freedom to pick and choose the title. But in this model the whole lot of books has to be purchased. Out of the whole lot only a few titles may be of use to us. Here we have no choice, but to take everything.

Third purchase model in e-books trade is limiting simultaneous access to the content to a specific number of users. This will be at a disadvantage if the content is in much demand and if a large number of clientele want to access the same simultaneously. While considering such packages for purchase, the library administrators should have a clear picture of the prospective users of the titles.

The most popular e-content is in the form of periodicals published by learned societies and publishers. They carry primary research reports and hence they are of utmost importance to academic institutions. The e-journals are offered in the form of subscription models. Since e-journals can be accessed by many people at the same time, the subscription costs escalate beyond imagination as compared to the subscription cost of their print counter parts. In the case of print journal it can be accessed by only a limited number of users, where as its online version can be accessed by many simultaneously. Moreover, most of the online journals are accompanied with value added services such as abstracts, multimedia content, citations and references formatted according to international styles as well as hyperlinks to related articles. All these features encourage the publishers to market their products at huge prices.

The publishers also retro-converted the previous print only journal issues into digital surrogates and huge digital archives were built in their servers. In most cases the publishers allow access only to the latest or minimum back issues of the journals. If libraries need to get

access to the archives we will have to subscribe or buy the archives separately. E-journals are also marketed in the form of bundles rather than individual titles which again makes the subscription a costly affair.

4. Bibliographic databases:

Bibliographic databases are huge collection of bibliographic descriptions related to e-journal articles. Libraries used to prepare bibliographic description for articles of the journals subscribed by them. When they are associated with abstracts, we named it as abstracting services. Bibliographic Databases are very useful in finding relevant literature and in maintaining Universal Bibliographic Control. The famous Chemical Abstracts available in the form of huge printed volumes is now available as "Scifinder", which is an online facility with lots of value added facilities. Similarly in the field of Library and Information Science we are familiar with the LISA and LISTA databases which are now available as online facility, though at a huge subscription rates. As the cost involved for subscribing to these databases is huge, the libraries have to take utmost care while subscribing for them.

5. Online reference sources:

Reference Sources are those documents or information sources which are accessed for getting pieces of specific information and not for continuous and detailed reading. Encyclopedias and dictionaries form part of such sources. Encyclopedia Britannica, Oxford Dictionary etc were integral part of a reference collection of any library. These occupied a large space in the reference section of our libraries, where as they could be accessed only by a limited number of users.

Availability of these resources in online form with value added services like hyperlinks to related sources and integration of multimedia elements have made them more attractive and also integral part of modern hybrid libraries. These online Encyclopedias and Dictionaries are provided with excellent search facilities with keywords.

Online reference sources do not come with perpetual licenses and libraries will have recurring expenditure to access them. The moment you cease to subscribe you are left with nothing. This is not the case with a printed source. Once purchased it remains with the library for a long time.

6. Other information sources and services:

There are several other information sources and services that libraries can subscribe to. Some of them provide statistical data, (eg. Indiastat.com) some others provide reports of court judgments (eg. SCC database) Myendnoteweb.com is an online facility with which you can search remote bibliographic databases like the library catalogues and deduce bibliographic information relevant to your research topic. The data so collected can be formatted into a bibliography according to an international style and can be shared with peer researchers. These

information sources and services are very essential in modern libraries.

A user looking for a specific piece of information will have to search for the same in each of these online-resources that the library has access to. This is a complex task as well as it consumes lot of time too. A solution to this problem has been provided by Federated Search Engines (KNimbus) and Web Scale Discovery Services (EBSCO, Summon). But as they maintain the index the library has to pay huge subscription cost. However to an extent these services avoid the problem of searching many places for specific information by providing a single search facility.

When you campaign for the addition of e-resources for the library, it becomes necessary to support the same with proper argument in favor of them. Here usage statistics becomes an essential factor. The library should continuously monitor the use of e-resources by collecting the statistics from publishers. They can give us download counts and usage statistics for the e-resources as their servers continuously monitor the usage.

7. Conclusion:

Adding e-resources in your collection is not always going to be a simple and faultless job. We will have stiff resistance from various corners as huge amount of funds are utilized for this. Many still will have the perception that a book is a book only if it is printed on paper and bound.

As a librarian you have to remain tolerant and continue to work in introducing e-resources to your library. It may help to assure staff and patrons that print books are not going away, that e-books will be just one more option. E-books will only become more widespread in libraries and society as a whole. Offering an e-book collection is one more way to provide quality service and remain significant to your patrons.

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