Collaborative Collection Building: Health Sciences Librarians and a Consortial Ebook DDA Program

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Introduction

The University System of Maryland and Affiliated Institutions Library Consortium (USMAI) consist of the 16 libraries from the state's diverse public universities and colleges (http://usmai.org/). As decreasing or flat budgets become the new normal, academic libraries need to find creative solutions to stretch funds while still providing what students and faculty need. Many have turned to demand-driven acquisition (DDA). Given its history of shared collections, USMAI decided to implement a pilot project in 2013 to explore the feasibility of a joint DDA ebook program.

Planning

A committee of 10 -- including the collection manager from the University of Maryland Health Sciences and Human Services Library and a health sciences librarian from The Universities at Shady Grove, one of the system centers -- convened to design and manage the pilot. The consortium leadership provided a budget of $100,000, and the committee selected a broad profile, focusing on the subject areas supported at the system centers, which offer several interdisciplinary courses. One goal was to provide greater equity in access to resources across institutions. The committee decided to pilot a novel consortial DDA model that limited the lending of each purchased book rather than agreeing to a price multiplier. A simple questionnaire was devised to measure participation based on user status.

Description

The pilot went live in August 2013 with an initial load of 6,560 titles into the consortium's shared catalog. The original model was to pay for six short-term loans and purchase the book at the print list price on the occasion of the seventh loan. A purchase entitled the consortium to 14 short-term loans per year with an additional copy being purchased at the print list price on the 15th loan. Over the course of the year, the committee removed certain titles from publishers who demanded exorbitant increases in the cost of short-term loans and added others. At the end of the first year, the shared DDA collection contained 15,532 titles. An analysis of usage showed that the users of all libraries in the system had benefited from the program, and funding for the pilot was approved for a second year.

During the second year of the pilot, the auto-purchase threshold was lowered from six to three short-term loans to increase the number of titles the consortium purchased. In an effort to expand the number of publishers involved in providing DDA books to the consortium, a second pilot was started. This lease-to-own model has a multiplier of 3.25 percent and only includes back-file titles. At the end of the second year, the initial pilot had grown to 23,632 titles, 705 of which had been purchased. This DDA plan has been so successful that it was moved from pilot status to become a normal part of the consortium's operations. The lease-to-own pilot is still under evaluation.

Total usage across campuses started out slowly in the first year, likely influenced by limited marketing of the program (Figure 1). Usage increased in the second year, and then has dipped somewhat in the third year, which might be due to the implementation of the lease-to-own model.

Health-related books are one of the top-ten most accessed subject areas for both the original pilot program and the lease-to-own model. Figures 2 and 3 show the numbers of loans and browses of health-related books by subject, with Public Aspects of Medicine and Pediatrics having the most. There was concern about adding certain medical books to the profile given their high cost and the belief that they would serve the needs of only a few campuses. Usage data show, however, that these books have been used across all campuses, likely the result of an increase in interdisciplinary courses that include health-related aspects.

The program enables campuses that might not be able to justify purchasing certain health-related resources to provide access to subsets of users that need them.

Conclusion

A consortial ebook DDA program can be a cost-effective way of equitably increasing access to a greater number of resources for library users. As ebook models for libraries continue to evolve, it is vital that libraries work with publishers to design systems that are mutually beneficial. It is our hope that other consortia will adopt this type of model so that it will continue to be viable in the marketplace.