Foreword

Without doubt, the management of electronic resources has become one of the key issues academic libraries face in their strategic development. Most academic libraries have seen an almost complete transition of their journal collections from print to electronic formats transpire in the last two decades. Yet, despite this longstanding trend, academic libraries continue to struggle to identify the best ways to manage these collections. Key considerations include how to acquire, process, and describe these collections in the most efficient ways and how to provide optimal access to the students and faculty of the university. Within these core areas, a myriad of details arise that must be addressed as libraries devise their strategies for electronic resource management.

Those outside the library field might assume that the move to electronic resources has simplified the work of libraries. Quite the opposite has proven the case as libraries have begun to shift more of their attention away from handling only print materials. Libraries face much more complexity to manage and provide access to electronic content than were ever required by print collections. It should also be noted that even though the proportions are higher, few libraries deal exclusively with electronic materials. Most academic libraries manage collections composed of digital materials, electronic resources, and physical items. It is an ongoing challenge to allocate efforts between the demands of the print and electronic components of a library collection.

This new volume, *Progressive Trends in Electronic Resource Management in Libraries*, co-edited by Nihar K. Patra, Bharat Kumar, and Ashis K. Pani brings together a dozen chapters by separate authors, each addressing some aspect of the theme of managing electronic resources from a different perspective. I am impressed with the broad international representation, with authors from India, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, India, Serbia, South Africa, Portugal, Nigeria, and the United States. Each chapter in the volume approaches a specific area of interest given from the perspective of practical experience.

All aspects of library organizations have been reshaped through involvement in electronic resources. Technical services units must acquire and describe these collections, reference librarians provide direct end-user support, Web services teams develop or implement tools that facilitate access to remote users, bibliographers, and subject specialists, and collection development personnel make decisions on which new resources will be acquired and which will be cancelled in any given year. Collection development naturally plays a role as selectors shape the collection in each area, working to create the proper balance between print and electronic materials. In the division of labor throughout the library, does it make sense to distribute responsibilities for electronic resources among all personnel, or should libraries have dedicated personnel for managing electronic resources?
The initial phase of the transition to electronic resources revolutionized the realm of serials and periodicals. The publication of scholarly articles has largely moved out of the print world to electronic publication, bringing fundamental change to libraries and researchers. The activity currently focuses on e-books. How do e-books fit within workflows and automation systems that were designed for print? New models of acquisition have emerged that turn the traditional strategies upside down, making materials available “just in time” rather than anticipating interest through the traditional “just in case” selection and acquisition process. Demand driven acquisitions currently stands as a model for selection and purchase of electronic materials that has gathered significant interest, but that comes with workflow issues that significantly impact both collection development and technical services operations.

For most libraries, the move to access to scholarly content through subscriptions to electronic resources has largely moved to completion. Yet, it is important to consider that in some international regions and in specific disciplines, print continues to endure as the primary avenue of publication. As libraries begin to invest in electronic resources, an economic analysis of costs versus benefits can help reinforce the value of its subscriptions. For those thoroughly involved in electronic collections, ongoing analysis is needed to make decisions among competing content packages. Increasingly, analytic tools support data-driven decision making to optimize how library budgets are spent on collection materials. Libraries may want to engage in different types of cost benefit analyses related to electronic journal subscriptions to gain objective data on the impact of their investments in electronic resources relative to their use by students and faculty.

Electronic resources require attention to a variety of legal issues. Librarians often find themselves needing to gain expertise copyright law as they deal with the acquisition and dissemination of electronic documents. The licenses involved in subscriptions to electronic content packages often have complex terms that must be negotiated with their providers and executed as contracts. Key points might include permanent ownership of materials that persists even if the library discontinues its active subscription, whether items can be shared with non-subscribers through interlibrary loan or document delivery programs, whether there are any restrictions on documents when placed on reserve for use by students enrolled in a class. Any advice and knowledge that librarians can gain in addressing such legal details will return practical benefits.

A variety of software applications have been developed over the years to assist libraries in the management of electronic resources. The options range from freely available open source applications to full featured commercial electronic resource management systems. Quite a variety of standalone and integrated products have been created over the years that automate electronic resource management, each with their relative advantages and disadvantages. Many standalone electronic resource management systems find use in many libraries today, but many track electronic resources less systematically using spreadsheets or databases set up by individual administrators. An alternative approach that has arisen in recent years involves library services platforms that incorporate the capabilities for both print and electronic resources. Libraries now find themselves in a new phase of automation where electronic resource management is beginning to be incorporated into comprehensive platforms rather than managed through separate tools.
Libraries have growing interest in the freely available electronic resources available through open access publishers and other channels. Open access publishing, though a part of the academic enterprise for many years, has made substantial gains in recent years, largely due to mandates from the agencies that fund research. It is essential for libraries to find ways to take advantage of these resources, especially those that complement areas of interest for their library in support of teaching and research. In addition to the material acquired through paid subscriptions, identifying additional open access materials and systematically including those resources within the scope of the local discovery service is a challenge but can significantly expand the body of content the library offers to its users.

Readers interested in exploring the realm of electronic resource management will find a wealth of experience and expertise reflected in the contributed chapters of this volume. The authors of the individual chapters have focused on topics and problems representative of the challenges that libraries face in these times where electronic resources increasingly dominate their collections. As with any printed work, some of the specific details will apply to the snapshot in time in which they were written. However, the concepts and issues will endure for as long as libraries continue their journey away from one defined by content delivered primarily in print into a new reality where electronic resources and digital content dominates.

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Marshall Breeding works as an independent consultant, author, and speaker focused on library technologies. He has authored the annual “Automation Marketplace” feature for Library Journal since 2002, has authored or edited seven books and hundreds of articles and book chapters. He frequently gives keynote presentations and workshops at conferences throughout the world and is the founder and publisher of Library Technology Guides.