Chapter II

Collection Development for Virtual Libraries

Patricia Pettijohn
The Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute at the University of South Florida-Tampa, USA

Tina Neville
University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, USA

The evolution from paper to electronic resources transforms the way that information is owned, shared, and accessed. For libraries, the commodification of digital information has long-term implications for the acquisition and development of library collections. As licensing replaces purchasing, and the business practices of software companies replace those of publishers, access to information on demand supersedes collection building, and cooperative acquisitions supplement local collection development. Growing demand for full-text online content that can be easily searched and remotely accessed has led libraries to depend on a host of intermediary agents and cooperatives. Within this landscape of proliferating information and diminishing buying power, it is not surprising that when the Digital Library Federation launched an informal survey of the major challenges confronting research libraries, respondents identified digital collection development as their greatest challenge (Greenstein, 2001).

In this chapter, we will look first at how libraries have responded to this paradigmatic shift by pioneering new collection development strategies, and then examine the changing responsibilities of collection development librarians in an electronic environment.

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ELECTRONIC ACQUISITIONS AND COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

Collection development represents not just the acquisition of information, but a strategic investment in knowledge. Ideally, the guiding principles, goals, and strategies of this process are formally stated in collection development policies. These policies are based upon an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the collection, the availability of shared resources, and the information needs of the community. To define subject coverage, depth, level, and scope, librarians emphasize or exclude specific subject areas, languages, formats, and genres (Evans, 2000). Existing collection development policies may be adapted for use in selecting electronic resources or revised to consider additional formats, features, and evaluative criteria. Policies must consider the virtual library from a dual perspective; it is both a dynamic collection in its own right and a hybrid collection created by merging the virtual and physical libraries (Manoff, 2000).

Ultimately, the goals of collection development in academic libraries are unchanged: to meet the immediate and anticipated information needs of users and to serve the research and teaching missions of the university. This is accomplished through strategically selecting, sharing, retaining, duplicating, divesting, archiving, and facilitating access to intellectual content.

Content

The foundation of the virtual library is intellectual content. This includes indexing, abstracting, and full-text databases; electronic journals and books; resources in multimedia formats; numerical and geospatial data; digitized special collections; and free Internet sites. Resources that contain full-text articles, generally selected by the vendor from a variety of sources (including newspapers, journals, standard reference works, and case law), are often referred to as aggregator databases. Some databases are multi-disciplinary, while others offer integrated access to multiple resources by discipline.

Allocations

In academic libraries, the values outlined in the collection development policy, often stated as collection intensity levels, are reflected in budget allocations committed to specific academic programs, disciplines, and departments. Academic library allocations balance the cost of materials and demand for content (which vary widely among disciplines), often using formulas based upon the number and academic rank of faculty and students within departments (Martin, 1995). The increased cost associated with multiple formats, the shift from owning to licensing