

Collection Development in the Context of Library Networks

E. RAMA REDDY

Indira Gandhi Memorial Library, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad - 500 046

Abstract

In the recent years, the libraries need to focus their attention towards developing electronic documents selectively and access to electronic information sources using network facilities. Selection of electronic sources for collection development activities is to be done based on certain criteria i.e. reputation of authors, publishers and products, context, format features, access methods, storage and licensing agreements. The author provides strategies for libraries to get into networks and resource sharing trends. The present era is more conducive to the resource sharing and use of financial resources effectively. The concept of ownership need to be replaced with sharing the resources for mutual benefit.

Introduction

Collection development covers selection, acquisition, processing, arranging, maintenance including weeding out of reading materials. Libraries' collection development policy should enable the library to provide efficient and prompt services to its users. The print on paper is slowly shifting to electronic publishing. The new medium will become more efficient in terms of storage, maintenance and accessing even from remote places. The print-on-paper will stay and is not likely to be replaced all together with the electronic / digital documents but the trend is shifting rapidly towards electronic storage and access. In view of this trend, the libraries need to focus their attention towards developing electronic documents selectively and access to electronic information sources using network facilities. The collection development in libraries should concentrate on network-based resources and sharing of resources to enable wider use of information resources to serve the users. It is necessary to know the features of electronic publishing along with the conventional publishing in collection development.

Electronic Publishing

Electronic publishing can be defined as the publication process where the manuscripts are submitted in electronic format, edited, printed and

even distributed to users by employing computers, telecommunication and publishing including the features of motion, sound and interactive features.

It is a fact that many journals including abstracting and indexing periodicals and reference books are now available in electronic form.

The first electronic book was published in the year 1985 in Germany and ever since there has been steady growth in the number of electronic publishing covering all fields of human knowledge. At present the publications exist in 'dual' forms (on paper and electronic) and some are available in electronic media only. ACS was the first professional Association to bring out scholarly publications in electronic form.

According to online database directory, in 1996 there were more than 10,000 online and CD-ROM databases covering 25% of abstracting and indexing databases. Online and CD-ROM databases of secondary periodicals are frequently consulted by the users than the printed versions. Optical storage systems are synonymous with electronic publishing.

Selection of electronic resources

Most selection activities for electronic resources have developed from the criterion established for print materials. For non-print formats, selection criteria follow generally standard models, varying only slightly as additional criteria are needed to assure equipment compatibility and storage security. Selection of electronic resources such as CD-ROMs, dial access databases, electronic journals and WWW products require a more extensive set of criteria. I would like to outline how the traditional selection activities for collection development must continue to evolve to meet the needs of the new electronic / digital environment.

The traditional selection models consist of three basic criteria :

1. The reputation of the author and publisher
2. The scope, depth and breadth of content
3. The relevant details of special formats or features

The above can be broadly categorized into two (i) content and (ii) presentation and form. Most of the published literature on collection development continues this traditional content and format-based orientation with addition of pricing structure. With the advent of electronic formats, these selection practices are no longer sufficient. The actual criteria for selection and acquisition of electronic products are much more than the traditional models. Complexity of access to electronic formats

has increased the tasks related to selection activities. In making the appropriate decision, the selector must consider not only the content and formats of the product / item but the equipment needed, access methods, purchase or licence options and cost structure etc.

The two most important factors that influence collection development activities for electronic products are technology options and licensing issues. The libraries should select only those electronic products for which they have the applicable technology. Enough literature is available on technological issues such as establishing access to CD-ROMs, setting up local area networks (LANs), linking to networked services via the Internet and the WWW. The selector must work closely with technical staff to understand the local computing and networking environment to make the best selection decisions.

The second major factor that influence on selection activities are the license agreements. The copyright laws are not effective in protecting the rights of authors, database and software owners or producers and distributors of electronic products. To protect their investments, many of these parties have moved to use the license agreements, either passive licenses inbuilt into the product or extensive licenses requiring signing of agreements denying many rights defined by the copyright laws and the new issues are introduced like: user identity, product capabilities and restrictions on use into the selection decision. The selector must consult with appropriate acquisition specialists, purchasing agents and legal personnel to ensure that user needs and technological needs are met before the selection decision is made to acquire the electronic products.

Selection Criteria

It is necessary to examine the following issues / selection criteria for electronic collection development.

Traditional Criteria

The primary function of the collection development process is to define the library's criteria for selection of reading materials. The fundamental criteria includes the reputation of author and publisher, level and depth of the content, special format or feature that add value to the title. Many of the review sources evaluate these issues in detail. For electronic resources, these criteria lead to evaluation of the parties participating in the creation of the product, assurance of correct content and confirmation of the product performance. The electronic product reviews are available from wide variety of print and electronic sources.

Reputation of authors, publishers and products

Traditional selection criteria for print materials have relied on the reputation of authors, illustrators, editors, printers and publishers. In the electronic publishing, apart from the above it include graphic artists, photographers, software authors, screen designers and homepage developers. When a work is created into electronic medium, the creators such as the author of the search software and database designer play a very important role.

Now that many print products are moving towards CD-ROM and WWW based formats, the advent of search engines and web browsers play a critical role in the evaluation process. A single database may be available in several versions from various vendors running under various access methods or search engines. The selectors largely depend on products from large producers / distributors such as Silver Platter, UMI, EBESCO not only for quality but also for the reliability of search software, ease of access and customer support. Hence, new partnerships of author / publisher and producer / distributor have become important and worth examining in the process of selection of electronic products.

Content

Content is the second criterion in traditional collection development. The content consists of coverage, audience, special features and relationship to the actual needs. Selectors are generally familiar with the following : (a) In-depth coverage (b) Broad overview (c) Exhaustive analysis (d) Selective review (e) Historical perspective (f) Contemporary observation (g) Avoidance of errors and bias. These issues are equally important in the selection process of electronic documents. An electronic document expands access to content by adding special features like interactive indexing, keyword search, boolean search etc. For CD-ROM or WWW based products several print volumes or multiple titles can be combined into a single electronic work.

Format features

For books and print items, organization of text and presentation influences the selection decision apart from the features such as bibliographies, indexes, tables and appendices etc. For electronic products, the examination goes one step further. A hands-on search provides the selector to understand the production functions. A title may have valuable content, good development of ideas and quality of writing but difficult to search or slow response time etc., plays an important role. The selector

has to examine command structures, screen displays, system responses, help screens etc. As mentioned earlier, the reputation of the publisher / producer plays a crucial role in guaranteeing a user-friendly product.

Technological aspects

Selection of electronic resources must be based on principle that the library has adequate equipment to view, play or provide access to the product. The archives of electronic products concern about the security of data files, search software, operating systems, remote access links and storage costs etc. The selectors need to coordinate with technical experts in evaluating these aspects.

Access methods

Access issues are limited to location and storage in the traditional collection development. The emerging electronic technologies with the large scale access to remote resources, the library profession must change some of the basic assumptions. Access to CD-ROM products, online access to full text databases, electronic journals and WWW sites may be as simple as an option on the Library's online public access catalogue (OPAC) or via e-mail through a listserv on the Internet. For other products, the selectors need to understand the concepts such as client-server technology, Z39.50 protocol and graphical user Interface (GUI). Until these access methods are mastered, the selector of electronic products cannot begin to evaluate the products' user-friendliness in use. More experienced selectors may believe that they have mastered the common electronic formats. But even basic products become difficult to the user when they are acquired for network applications. A simple user-friendly CD-ROM that is a popular stand alone title may perform erratically on the local area network (LAN). The selector must rely on advice and reliable testing by the technical staff regarding the desired number of network users without a drop in response time. In the networked environment, problems with search commands and printing options can quickly arise due to software updates. For CD-ROM or Internet-based products updating may require addition of more disc space for the retrieval of new files and print options etc.

Evaluation of electronic products should focus on issues like a user-friendly interface etc. It is also essential to evaluate the basic features such as menu-driven vs. command-driven functions, consistency in screen displays, online help, boolean search capabilities and response time. Preview or test disc are an excellent method of determining the reactions of users towards the products.

Storage

Traditionally, the libraries are considered to give priority to storage. The selectors also view the archival value of a title as prime criterion for selection. For electronic products, assuring access to files and storage of files is a crucial issue. Print products are reliable compared to electronic products in terms of archival storage.

Licensing agreements

Selectors cannot ignore the importance of license agreements before selecting electronic products. Examining license agreements will be an integral part of the selection process, if the electronic products are available for lease rights only in multi-user environment. The selector must look at user definition, use rights and restrictions and contractual obligations and penalties.

User identity

The concept of who uses a title or a product was never an issue in selection until recently. In extremely rare circumstances the publisher targets the publications to the Institutions and the users. In general, a selector may expect a signed license agreement as a requirement for the lease or purchase of a networked computer software, CD-ROM databases or access to a remote electronic product. The license agreement will define the category of user and number of users simultaneously online with a price schedule. Many times the user definition in the license agreement restricts access by the location of the network. Some license defines users not only by category, status but also the branch, office site or academic building.

Use capabilities and restrictions

The concept of defining use is relatively new to the collection development. In electronic age almost every license agreement includes statements which detail the most fundamental user capabilities. A typical user license agreement will cover three major use rights : (1) To make searches of the text or database (2) To make hard or electronic copies of the search results and (3) To make an archival copy of the software.

All the license agreements will define these capabilities in different sections in varying legal terms. By contract law, any rights not expressly stated in the agreement reserved in the product supplier. Many times use rights are stated in vague terms and are open to misinterpretation by the selectors. Large portions of license agreement text covers prohibiting user

rights and capabilities. The selector should examine it carefully. Definitions provided in the agreement are very important. For example a database producer advertises their product as "fully networkable". On careful examination the selector may find that the product is restricted to LAN within a single building and any dial-in access is strictly prohibited within the designated building etc.

Contractual Obligations

Many license agreements include specific actions for which the library is held responsible. It may be easy to agree to return outdated CD-ROM discs, restrictions on the assignment of passwords and the commitment to present access to unauthorized users. The selector should identify the obligations and bring them to the knowledge of the user of the product. If the terms are not acceptable or negotiable, the product should not be acquired.

The effort of the INFLIBNET and UGC is directed towards interconnecting the libraries using electronic information networks where the users would have direct and immediate access to information stored in various formats. In this kind of environment the collection development should cover what data to be included, what media format would be selected and what should and should not be preserved etc., including the license agreements of electronic products.

Network access

Network access to information is becoming a work habit. Academic and Research Libraries are main participants in this conference. While networking is not a new concept to most of us but IT based networking as tool for connectivity and information exchange is still a new experience. IT support is critical to make the dream of Nationwide resource sharing a reality. The growths of library networks depend largely on the developments outside the library professional. The networks need and depend on :

- Reliable data networks for connectivity and delivery
- Computing technology for storage and processing
- Electronic publishing for information resources

The IT is throwing an opportunity for libraries to change from reactive nature of yesterday to pro-active nature.

Strategies

1. Libraries should shift from their focus from acquisition to access.
2. Publishers and Information providers should be involved as partners in building resources sharing networks.
3. Users should be gradually made aware of the cost of information access and delivery by a pay for use.
4. Library and Information professionals should have a say in the emerging data networks.
5. The University Libraries should aim and develop, plan and become part of the campus networks, metropolitan and National and International Networks.

Resource Sharing trends

The libraries need to shift from the concept of owing resources to sharing resources to satisfy the user needs because no one library can satisfy the users for the following reasons :

Technological change

The rates of change continue to escalate and today's technology is old by tomorrow. There has been constant and quick obsolescence in the computer industry. Majority of the libraries use older systems and cannot afford to replace frequently with latest technological advances. This results in a mixed environment because the technology is uneven across the country. Systems and services should be able to take advantage of the new while continuing to accommodate the old with suitable up gradation wherever possible.

Information Highway

Growth and the creation of freenets are on the increase with no end in sight. Academic libraries should exploit the resources. Easy accesses to these tools make variety of information resources available to the users and may even encourage the end-user to bypass libraries altogether. Libraries should position themselves in this new environment. Libraries should utilize their traditional skills of describing and organizing information to bring some order to the chaos of network resources.

Cooperation and partnership

Libraries have always relied on cooperation and partnerships to accomplish some of their goals. This reliance is increasing and the nature

of the agreements is changing. Cooperation should be developed strongly based on subject specialization of libraries.

Electronic documents

There are increasing number of documents available only as electronic texts and some documents are available in both paper and electronic format. Licensing agreements which libraries sign when acquiring access to these documents may restrict the use they make of the materials. Libraries may purchase the licensing to a publisher's line for redistribution.

Reduced funding

Funding for libraries at all levels continue to be reduced. This may result reduction of services that they can offer. Sufficient resources are not available to allow libraries to fully exploit new opportunities the technology is making available. Without funds for equipment, libraries will be unable to participate in the information highway or meet their user needs.

User expectations

Library users are becoming computer literates and will become more aware of what is available via the Internet. Libraries must meet the increased needs and awareness of more computer knowledgeable users while continue to provide service to those who are not.

Conclusion

Traditional selection policies and procedures cannot keep pace with the change in the technology. The concept of owning a product is more predominant than accessing from other sources. The concepts of ownership need to be replaced with sharing the resources for mutual benefit. The wide diversities of materials like print, audio-visual, CD-ROM, electronic journals, network based databases and multimedia products continue to grow rapidly. The libraries at present are introducing the electronic information resources in piecemeal fashion based on user demand. The collection development in the electronic age must focus on the existing automated systems, electronic communications, expertise in accessing and testing the electronic products and skills in understanding and negotiating license agreements etc. The electronic era is more conducive to the resource sharing and also use of financial resources effectively. Indian academic libraries should strive to catch up with new developments in the information technology.