

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT & MANAGEMENT: TRENDS, OPPORTUNITIES, & CHALLENGES

Collection development and management skills are the lifeblood of librarianship. While the mechanics of collecting tend to move in step with technological changes, the foundation and principles of collection development remain constant. As librarians, we must address several trends, opportunities, and challenges related to collection development and management.

Trends

Trends in collections tend to be in the way we manage collections. Demand-driven acquisitions, shifting publishing and business models, and static funding are the primary trends we are currently facing.

Demand-driven Acquisitions

Digital Video Recorder (DVR) technology has allowed people to time-shift their television watching. People no longer have to adhere to the schedule dictated by the day and time a program airs. Individuals can still watch their favorite shows and can still choose what they watch. They just do it at their convenience.

Similarly, demand-driven acquisitions have allowed librarians to cost-shift our collection building. We no longer have to buy things on the prospect of a possible patron need. We can still select the content we make available to our patrons via the demand-driven profiles we establish. We just shift the time of our purchase to when there is a demonstrable patron need for the content. This trend will continue to grow and morph. Our challenge is to find the right balance between demand-driven and traditional acquisition models.

Publishing and Business Models

Publishers are scrambling to find sustainable business models after experiencing a sharp decline in the quantity of purchased print materials. Demand-driven acquisitions is just one response to the current economic climate and which is still undergoing constant revision. Other publisher responses include making content open access, providing access rather than ownership of content, bundling content into unbreakable packages, and changing licensing terms to be either more or less restrictive.

Publishers are still making money, but their bottom line is not growing as fast as it has historically. Until publishers develop a business model that both engenders acceptable profit

growth and is sustainable for libraries, current business and publishing models will continue undergoing significant revision.

Opportunities

There are myriad opportunities for collection development and management. The one I would like to highlight is assessment. We have more data available, about both our users and our collections, than we ever have before. We have only superficially examined what we can do to assess and evaluate our collections with the data that we now have. Our greatest opportunity is to meaningfully assess our collections so we can build the strongest collection possible and ensure the library's relevance going forward.

Challenges

Identifying and collecting the best material, along with static funding, are two of our most difficult challenges for collection development.

Collecting the Best Material

Identifying and collecting the best material possible is something we can do only if we appropriately assess our current collections and patron needs. Subject librarian-led assessment, both quantitative and qualitative, should drive what we collect, how we collect, and in what format we collect content.

Static Funding

Flat funding is both a continuing trend and a challenge. Funding must be addressed from every possible angle for us to even maintain the collections we already have. Negotiating the best possible terms for electronic content is one strategy. We will also be required to think creatively to bridge the funding gap. Finding and canceling resources that no longer meet the needs of our patrons and taking advantage of new business models are other ways we can address static funding. I discuss this in more detail in my vision statement.

Conclusion

This is an exciting time to be involved in collection development. Difficult and interesting problems need to be addressed. The way we address them will determine the way our library is perceived and used by our patrons in the future.