

If you build it, will they come?

Considering patron driven acquisitions in academic libraries

By Alison Griffin and Sarah Forzetting.

Patron Driven Acquisition (PDA) is a process whereby materials are made available to patrons via MARC records loaded into the catalogue, but are not purchased until there is sufficient demand, and usage of a given title reaches an established threshold. Increasingly considered the next big thing for Collection Development in academic libraries, PDA comes at a time when the technology required to deliver books (in various formats) quickly enough to accommodate patron requests is possible, and when academic libraries are facing a shift in how and what they collect.

“Just in case” to “Just in time”

Historically, many Association of Research Libraries (ARL) libraries were in a position to be true libraries of record, and as such, librarians attempted to collect everything published in given areas “just in case” someone might want to read it anytime in the future. The budget cuts of recent decades coupled with an increase in academic publishing and the associated costs for such materials have put great strain on this model. The appeal of PDA is that it delivers materials to patrons “just in time” at their point of need, saving the librarian the time and effort of title-by-title selection. The result is a paradigm shift in how academic libraries potentially select materials.

While it is unlikely that PDA will replace approval plans or other types of firm ordering any time soon, there nevertheless seems to be a place for it in the Collection Development policy of the near future. Instead of purchasing the entire expensive ebook package or a blanket approval plan for all titles from a given publisher, it makes more sense to load the records and purchase only that which there is demand for. Here is how it works:

1. The library works with a vendor to identify a pool of materials for patrons to discover. This can be done through a profile that lists the library’s subject areas of interest and guiding non-subject parameters, such as price, readership level, publisher and book type (ie, collected works, reference, textbook, etc). The profile



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can be used to identify already published backlist titles or pull in newly published frontlist titles as they become available. Librarians are able to maintain control over what is added to the pool by vetting title lists before they are added to the catalogue or they can rely on the vendor to establish and update the pool of titles on a regular basis.

2. Basic records for these titles are loaded into the library’s catalogue. Ebook records contain an active link in the MARC 856 field that takes the patron directly into the ebook. A link in the 856 field is also used for print records where a message informs the patron that the library will purchase this title if desired, and it might take a couple weeks to obtain.

3. The library also usually deposits a set amount of money that they commit to spend over a determined period. Subsequent purchases are billed against this deposit, and reconciled with the library monthly. A license agreement is also signed to protect both parties in this partnership.

4. From there, patrons use the library catalogue as the discovery mechanism and seamlessly access the ebooks, never knowing the library may not yet own the title they are viewing. The library is invoiced for each title once a threshold is reached, which differs

by company and acquisition model. Print books aren't acquired quite as effortlessly as the patron must complete a form which goes to the library or the vendor to initiate purchase, but the goal is to eventually supply the title within the same window as an Interlibrary Loan (ILL).

5. When the money is almost spent, the library can choose to deposit additional funds, or hand select the last titles to not go over budget. Therefore, the librarians control what goes into the pool of resources, and ultimately how much it will cost.

Some of the vendors offering PDA also have a short term loan option where the initial usage is not free as it is with other models, but instead the library is charged a nominal fee for the patron's short term usage. Libraries using this model can usually set how many short term loans they pay for before the book is purchased for the library. This model is good at providing access to a wider range of content but it detracts from building a permanent collection as the short term loan costs rarely count towards the purchase of the book.

PDA considerations

Libraries considering adding this model to their collecting methods are wise to shop around and ask the various vendors about how their models compare. The threshold for triggering purchases varies with each company – it can be based upon minutes spent inside an ebook, number of pages viewed, or even complicated algorithms that take into account multiple factors.

Librarians should also ask about the implications of single versus multiple user license costs and how this affects access of PDA titles once purchased. Obviously, multi-user licenses allow for greater access than single user, but they are more expensive, too. Flexibility to adjust final purchases accordingly is helpful.

Other questions for vendors include how to handle course reserves where the usage spikes for just a short time, and if there are any means to handle Interlibrary Loan of ebooks, as these models are starting to be available with some vendors. Many publishers are now offering the option to checkout ebooks and download them to an e-reader. Librarians should check how the option to download an ebook applies to PDA titles.

In addition, libraries should also think about their reasons for wanting to try PDA. Establishing a

rationale for adding PDA as a collection method and identifying the desired outcome of PDA collecting will help to determine which vendor model the library should choose. Possible reasons for PDA may be:

- Save librarians time selecting title-by-title
- Provide patrons the ability to discover a wide range of material
- Evaluate similarities or differences between patron and library selections
- Demonstrate to library or campus administration patron involvement in collection building and/or meeting patron needs (even if patrons are not aware of the project!)
- Save money in the short-term
Evaluate patron preferences for ebooks versus print books

Once the rationale for PDA has been identified it may also be helpful for libraries to think about the following pitfalls of PDA and how the vendor can address them:

- Librarians will need to spend time analyzing PDA usage, weeding unpurchased PDA titles and tweaking profiles to balance patron demand and budget constraints
- Flooding the catalogue with PDA titles can result in a high number of purchases or can be overwhelming for patrons to wade through
- PDA can just defer an inevitable purchase rather than avoid a purchase altogether
- Librarians will need to assist the vendor in managing duplication between print and ebook collecting as well as overlap between PDA titles and other purchased ebook packages

Value to patrons and librarians

When PDA projects started, the biggest debate seemed to focus on whether or not patrons would select the same materials as the librarians would have. As more libraries have experimented with PDA, a new, and perhaps better, question has emerged: Does it matter either way? If librarians have already guided the pool of resources and books are being used, isn't that the point? Other considerations are fair, such as the potential impact to the smaller publishers – will they be protected without a librarian's guided hand? Time will tell, but given the popularity of social media which empowers end-users, and the pressures on academic libraries to build relevant collections with limited budgets, PDA seems to offer a solution that is timely and flexible enough to offer value to patrons and librarians alike.

More information on vendors doing PDA:

- Ingram MyiLibrary: <http://myilibrary.com/>
- EBL: <http://www.ebib.com/>
- EBSCO: <http://www.ebscohost.com/ebooks/about>
- Proquest: http://www.proquest.com/en-US/products/brands/pl_ebrary.shtml

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