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Patron-Driven Acquisition

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Patron-Driven Acquisition

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atron-Driven Acquisition (PDA) is an e-book business model introduced by NetLibrary almost 10 years ago. The model was slow to develop over the years but has experienced a resurgence with programs from NetLibrary, Ingram Digital, and EBL. PDA stems from two traditional collection development principles—purchasing titles based on patron suggestions and establishing approval plans. The primary differences are that PDA is a business model strictly for e-books, and final selections are made by the patrons.

How does PDA work? Librarians are still the key. Working with a selected vendor, librarians establish a profile based on LC classification, subject, educational level, publication date, cost, and other criteria. E-book titles that match the profile are then shared with the user community via MARC records in the catalog. Once a patron discovers and views an e-book, it is purchased for the collection. There are several iterations of this purchasing model, depending on the selected vendor.

NetLibrary’s Patron-Driven Acquisition program offers 160,000 titles, plus 10,000 audiobooks. Titles (both e-books and audiobooks) are purchased at the first click/use. Libraries can pay in advance or use ‘pay as you go’ purchasing and may select an ongoing or annual purchase model. Ongoing access is a one-time purchase; once the purchase is made, the library owns the item. With the annual purchase model, the library pays an annual fee for continuing access. After five years, the library owns the title, and the fee is dropped. Libraries have the ability to set up an approval profile that determines what is available for patrons to purchase, thereby ensuring that purchases are within the scope of the collection.

Ingram Digital’s MyiLibrary Patron Select program offers 160,000 titles. First access to any e-book is a preview provided at no cost to the library and including all e-book functionality, such as printing and copying and pasting. The second full access triggers licensing (in perpetuity) of the e-book to the library, where the cost is incurred either for single- or multuser access. Library deposit accounts are for either 6 or 12 months and can be renewed. Rich Rosy, vice president and general manager, Institution Solutions at Ingram Digital, stated, “Our ability to offer custom collections as well as flexible pricing models truly sets us apart as strategic partners to libraries looking to enhance their digital offerings.”

EBL’s Demand-Driven Acquisition program offers fewer titles (90,000) but the most flexibility. All non-owned titles may be freely browsed for five minutes. After that, there are three options for purchasing. The first, short-term loan, is a onetime 24-hour loan (pay-per-view). Prices for short-term loans are substantially lower than the list price. The second option is mediated access, which allows patrons to request additional access to a title beyond the five-minute browse. Using e-mail, librarians can reject the request or approve it either by purchasing the title or offering a short-term loan. Third is the auto-purchase model. Here, a title is automatically purchased based on a designated number of short-term loans. Unfortunately, there is not a rent-to-own option, so money spent to rent the titles is not credited to the purchase price.

NetLibrary, Ingram Digital, and EBL all have reference titles in their collections (mostly single volume), so it is possible to purchase reference materials using PDA. I am unaware of any reference e-book aggregators or publishers who offer PDA, but I would be interested in a model for reference where purchases were based on usage. Because reference is becoming so granular, it would be great to purchase individual articles or chapters of multivolume sets rather than entire works.

After attending several sessions at the 2008 Charleston Conference on PDA, I discovered the primary argument against it was “it will eat up my budget.” Luckily, each of the vendors has a budget-control plan in place. The plans vary but typically include price-limit settings, real-time invoicing and usage reports, deposit accounts, predefined expenditure levels, and a disabling feature to cut off access to new content once the budget is depleted. Content previously purchased can still be accessed, however. Additional funds can always be added to PDA accounts, and “tweaks” to the profile can always be made.

Librarians using the PDA model note that significant time and effort should be given at the start of the program to establish the profile, evaluate usage patterns, and tweak the profile as needed. Among the benefits of PDA are guaranteed usage of new titles and proven usage of purchased titles, automatic acquisition, and seamless access for patrons.

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