



Evidence Summary

Analysis of Print and Electronic Serials' Use Statistics Facilitates Print Cancellation Decisions

A review of:

Gallagher, John, Kathleen Bauer, Daniel M. Dollar. "Evidence-Based Librarianship: Utilizing Data From All Available Sources to Make Judicious Print Cancellation Decisions." Library Collections, Acquisitions & Technical Services 29.2 (2005): 169-79.

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Abstract

Objective – To apply the principles of evidence-based librarianship to the decision-making process regarding the cancellation of print serials.

Design – Quantitative analysis of local and national data from various sources.

Subjects – Data sources included 1249 current unbound print journals, 3465 Medline-indexed electronic journals, statistics from the Association of Research Libraries and American Association of

Health Sciences Libraries, as well as traditional library statistics.

Setting – The study was conducted in the Yale University's Cushing/Whitney Medical Library located in New Haven, Connecticut U.S.A.

Methods – Several sources were targeted for data. A three-month periodical usage study of the current issues of the library's 1249 actively received print titles was undertaken. Excel-generated alphabetical listings of titles were used by shelvees to indicate, with a check mark, which issues were shelved

during a specified week. The workflow was adjusted to ensure only items under study were counted. Signs asking patrons not to re-shelve journal issues were posted. Usage data were collected weekly and entered into an Excel spreadsheet where the total use of the journals was tracked. In-house circulation, photocopy, and gate count statistics were also used. In addition to the survey, SFX statistics for the library's electronic journals indexed in MEDLINE (3465) were gathered during the same 3 month period covered by the print usage survey. MEDLINE was chosen as the delineating factor to ensure consistent subject coverage with the print journal collection. For perspective and trends, statistics from the Association of Research Libraries and the American Association of Health Sciences Libraries were considered.

Main Results – Based on the study's findings, 53% of the print collection (657 titles) received no use during the study period; 7.1 % (89 titles) were used more than once per month; and 1.28% were used one or more times per week. Further, only 10% (125 titles) of the collection represented 60.7% of the total print collection use. There was also a direct correlation between the drop in patrons coming to the library and the decrease in print periodical use. SFX statistics revealed that of the 3465 MEDLINE indexed titles 14.8% (513 titles) were not accessed at all and 10% of the journals represented 56.8% of all SFX usage. These results were consistent with statistics from the Association of Research Libraries and the American Association of Health Sciences Libraries.

Conclusion – Titles that were used the most in print were also used the most electronically. Further, the study revealed that print journals are used only a fraction as often as their electronic counterparts. Indeed, in both the case of print and electronic journals the largest use came from

a small number of subscribed titles. Print collection maintenance is more labour intensive and costly than electronic. Consequently, resources spent supporting 53% of the print collection that is not used seriously impacts efficiency. With constraints on acquisitions budgets, funding unused collections does not make sense. Examination of the print serial collection is only part of ensuring effective collections. As this study has indicated, unused electronic titles are also a drain on resources and further analysis of electronic packages is warranted.

Commentary

This study looks at print and electronic journal usage statistics to provide indicators as to what print collection titles should be cancelled. The study will be of interest to all librarians wrestling with the challenges of maintaining a relevant and cost-effective journal collection, and is straightforward enough to be readily duplicated. The *raison d'être* behind the analysis was reasonably well articulated, although greater elucidation as to why the selected data sources were chosen would have added to the reader's understanding of the process.

The methodology used compared 3 months worth of use statistics for print titles in the collection and electronic journal titles that covered the same subject areas in SFX. The use of SFX slightly skews the results as SFX accounts for only a small portion of the library's electronic usage. Still, trends are identifiable and useful. No margin of error was calculated to allow for shelving errors. A brief description of the alternative study methods that were considered would have been helpful.

Overall this approach is reasonable, given the financial constraints facing many libraries, and the analysis adds insight to the decision-making process behind print

journal cancellations. Conducted in a medical library, the question remains as to whether the findings are valid in the field of social sciences and humanities. Further study is warranted to answer this question. The indication that some electronic journals received little or no use should also be

investigated in terms of how to keep the electronic collection relevant in light of the difficulties of unbundling. Further investigation into whether the fact that SFX data represented only 8.5% of access in this study is consistent with the experience of other libraries could be quite revealing.