Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Using Evidence in Practice

Streamlining Workflows in the Now: Using Evidence to Select a DVD Vendor for the University of Alberta Libraries

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Setting

Located in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, the University of Alberta Libraries (UAL) serve a robust community of users made up of over 10,000 staff and over 39,000 students across 200 undergraduate and 170 graduate programs from 18 faculties at the University of Alberta (University of Alberta, 2013a; University of Alberta, 2013b). Programs of study are wide ranging, and serve all levels of study. The UAL have 13 locations, with librarians and support staff at all locations involved with collections work. The acquisitions and bibliographic services units serve a central role within the libraries to oversee and streamline processes for

functions related to the acquisition and discovery of library materials. Each year, the UAL normally hire paid academic library interns who are recent graduates (within the last two years) from an accredited library school program, and in the 2013-2014 academic year one of the interns was assigned to work with acquisitions and bibliographic services on a project related to the acquisition of video materials on DVD.

Problem

With an influx of online video resources, many institutions are increasing their partnerships with video streaming providers such as Films on Demand, Filmakers Library Online, the National Film Board of Canada, and more, providing ubiquitous access to these resources. Although the UAL are implementing many video streaming services, there is still a sizable demand for individual physical DVDs in cases where there are requests for specific, often difficult to locate video resources that are not available via streaming. The acquisition of video materials (generally in DVD format) at UAL had never been fully examined in the past and there was no preferred vendor in place. Unit libraries within UAL normally purchased DVDs online from various suppliers using a credit card. Such a process was cumbersome and not cost effective, nor effective from a workflow perspective. The availability of a librarian intern initiated the process of further investigation into possible vendors and methods for obtaining this particular format of information across nine UAL units, covering the complete range of disciplines served by the UAL.

The acquisitions and bibliographic services department strives to streamline workflows within an environment of constant change (both in terms of staffing and new technologies), and also to meet the university's procurement standards in dealings with vendors. As part of the evaluation of business relationships with materials vendors, the current landscape of materials supply must be examined, and a

determination made regarding the best options for provision of service. The current increased reliance on digital media suggests that libraries' video needs will be met with more streaming services, but digital streaming does not yet provide full coverage, necessitating the use of DVD vendors in the meantime. Hence, this project set out to uncover a suitable DVD vendor for the UAL in an effort to decrease credit card spending and to streamline acquisitions and cataloguing workflows.

Evidence

Several sources of evidence were used to make a decision on which vendor would be best for the acquisition of video materials at the UAL. First, a literature review was conducted in order to examine the landscape of possible vendors and understand the acquisition and cataloguing activities at other academic libraries. Current literature on academic libraries' DVD acquisitions is limited, focusing instead on the shift to video streaming services (Alonso-Regalado, 2010; Handman, 2010; McKenzie, 2006; Widzinski, 2010) or on the development of a video collection (Bergman, Peters, & Schomberg, 2007; Walters, 2003). Walters (2003), however, identified some possible vendors who distribute materials internationally, such as Baker & Taylor and Ambassador Media (now called Ambassador Education Solutions) (p. 166). To supplement the lack of literature, information regarding possible video vendors was obtained through some academic library websites (North Seattle Community College Library & Media Services, http://facweb.northseattle.edu/mpaz/Media/Vendors.html, and University of Calgary Selected Interdisciplinary Video Vendors, http://libguides.ucalgary.ca/content.php?pid=100718&sid=817240) and the periodical *Video Librarian Online: The Video Review Magazine For Libraries*, http://www.videolibrarian.com. Based on content coverage and services, a short-list of possible vendors was established: The Book House Inc., Action! Library Media, and Coutts Information Services.

In order to have a better understanding of the types of DVDs purchased by the nine unit libraries at UAL via credit card, an examination and analysis of three months of credit card purchases was undertaken, looking at orders from June to August 2013. Data recorded from each purchase included: date, merchant or source (such as Amazon.ca, AbeBooks, and Alibris), format (monograph, DVD, or CD), cost (including shipping and handling), publisher, title, and, for DVDs, the film's director. Such data were collected to allow further analysis of credit card purchase trends both within and across library units in addition to providing information on DVD purchases. Overall, 562 items were recorded and 30% of these were DVDs. Of those, 78% were purchased from Amazon. The next biggest vendors of the purchased DVDs were New Day Films, accounting for 5%, and the National Film Board with 4%. Seeing so many DVD purchases confirmed the need for a formal, vetted, DVD vendor.

Interviews were also undertaken with each library collection manager to ascertain video ordering preferences and procedures. Librarians elaborated on their extensive use of and reliance on credit cards to purchase DVDs. As no current video vendor was formally established, they cited a great reliance on Amazon.

Data from the examination of video titles recently purchased via credit card was used to test whether the short-list of vendors would be able to meet the UAL's DVD needs. A sample of 50 titles, covering a selection of diverse titles previously ordered from each library, including foreign language, popular, and independent films, was created and sent to three vendors that in our initial estimation would be best suited to meet the UAL's need for procurement of materials and shelf-ready cataloguing services. Each vendor was asked to indicate whether or not they could supply these items (on an item by item basis), how much it would cost, an approximation of how long it would take to obtain the items, if they could provide

cataloguing/shelf-ready processing services, and if so, how much those services would cost.

The evidence showed that no one vendor was able to supply all titles on the sample list; however, all three were able to supply much more than we initially supposed. One of the three short-listed vendors (Book House Inc.) did not wish to solely supply video materials, so they were dropped from consideration. Of the remaining two, one was also our preferred supplier for English language monographs, Coutts Information Services, and it was therefore decided that UAL would use them as the primary supplier, with the second vendor, Action! Library Media, being used as the secondary DVD supplier.

Implementation

The process of investigation and selection of video suppliers was communicated to library staff in a presentation and via the UAL Collection Development Committee. Acquisitions staff were informed of the change and procedures were drafted to detail the order of operations, detailing which vendor to use first and the processes for ordering with each vendor. Since Action! Library Media was a new vendor for the UAL, a new account was opened and test orders were placed in order to further verify that the company could fulfil the orders.

Outcome

The selection of two vendors to fulfil UAL's DVD acquisition needs has led to a streamlining of processes around the acquisition of this format. In practical terms this has meant a reduction in the use of credit card based purchasing in favour of ordering within established library vendor systems and receiving regular invoices. The changes are still new and will need to be monitored and adjusted over time. We plan to monitor fulfilment and turnaround rates, as well as refine processes as issues arise, such as how to handle rush acquisition of these types of materials. The

changes have meant increasing UAL's use of an existing vendor, Coutts Information Services, to a format not previously purchased, and the creation of a relationship with a vendor new to UAL, Action! Library Media. As UAL monitor how both of these companies work with DVDs, we will gain a better sense of which is best in handling specific types of material or publishers, and can tailor our ordering accordingly.

Reflection

Implementing this evidence based change was straightforward, encountering little resistance. Initially there were doubts as to whether, in this digital climate and with such a plethora of DVD needs, a primary vendor could be established. The availability of an academic library intern ensured time would be spent finding and assessing DVD vendors, establishing confidence in the outcome of this project. Having the evidence — comparing the cost of credit card purchases to vendors' pricing, and seeing how much the UAL were actually relying on credit cards — provided the rationale for giving preference to the identified vendors.

Further, this project is a reminder that although digital technology has changed the way libraries serve their users, it is important to note that there is still a transitional phase — a time of learning and adjusting to trends. Libraries are participating in video streaming services, providing access to films online, but demand still exists for physical video collections and should be met efficiently, especially in a restricted budgetary climate.

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