**Evidence Based Library and Information Practice**

**Demand-Driven Acquisition E-books Have Equal Cost Per Use as Print, but DDA Has Much More Active Use Overall**

**A Review of:**
Downey, K., Zhang, Y., Urbano, C., & Klinger, T. (2014). A comparative study of print book and DDA e-book acquisition and use. *Technical Services Quarterly*, *31* (2), 139-160. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07317131.2014.875379

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**Abstract**

**Objective** – To compare usage of demand-driven acquisition (DDA) e-books with print books to help determine if one acquisition model better serves the needs of library users and return on investment.

**Design** – Case study.

**Setting** – Library system of a large American public university.

**Subjects** – 22,018 DDA e-book discovery records, 456 purchased e-book records, and 20,030 print item records were examined.

**Method** – The researchers examined usage statistics, circulation statistics, and cost measures of DDA e-books and print books. E-books were purchased in 2012 and print books were purchased by the start of the DDA project (January 2012).

**Main Results** – All but one of the 456 DDA-triggered e-books had repeated use within the first year, totalling 2,484 user sessions. 90% of the triggered e-books had 2-9 user sessions, and over half had at least 4 user sessions. E-books were most used in classes N (fine arts), P (Language and Literature), and R (Medicine). E-books in T (Technology) had a lower percentage of user sessions compared to other subject areas. 712 (3.2%) of the e-books in the discovery pool were used without triggering a purchase. Usage of e-books in the discovery pool (those used but not triggering a purchase) showed a consistent use of e-books by subject.

E-books in Class B (Philosophy, Psychology, Religion) were used more in the discovery pool without actually being purchased, suggesting a light use of a wide range of books in this subject area. In contrast, Class R (Medicine) saw less use in the discovery pool than what was actually purchased, suggesting heavier and more focused use of triggered e-books in this area. Only 62.5% of the 20,030 purchased print books included in the study were used in the first 1 to 2.5 years they were added to the collection (i.e., 37.5% were not used in that time period). Half of the print books were used no more than once (once or no use), and more than 90% were used fewer than 10 times. Print books in Class Q (Science) contributed to only 7.5% of the total circulations, suggesting print books are underused in this subject area. 10.2% of total circulation of print books in Class R (Medicine) suggests print books are better used in this area. Print acquisition and use occur more often in classes N (Fine Arts) and P (Language and Literature). The average cost for DDA e-books was of $98.52 per book. The average price per print book was $59.53. The unit cost per print book was $17.73 per use. Depending on various measures, cost per use for e-books ranged from $17.73 to $29.15 per use. (If the measurement included the free use of non-triggered DDA books, the cost per use was $18.07, essentially the same as the print cost).

**Conclusion** – Both print books and DDA e-books are proportionately distributed across most subject areas. Although DDA and print cost per use are equal, DDA leads to much more active use overall.

**Commentary**

Although there is a growing number of papers about DDA programs, very few include the addition of print books for comparison. This article makes a very good effort in contributing to this subject.

The EBLIP Critical Appraisal Checklist (Glynn, 2006) was used to determine that a case study was an appropriate tool for this research. The methodology (for the most part) was clearly explained and those interested in replicating

the study should be able to do so with relative ease.

This was a very thought-provoking read, however there were some items that should be noted. What led to some confusion for this reader (but was explained later in the article) was the definition of a "discovery pool" and what actually constituted a "trigger." These definitions would have been very helpful closer to the beginning of the discussion, as some libraries have other criteria for initiating a trigger.

One shortcoming of the methodology is the comparison of DDA in 2012 and print books purchased up to 2012. Although it is very intriguing and an interesting way of examining "like" books, one might question the publication date of the print for comparison purposes. We know that DDA books were purchased during 2012 (and one can perhaps assume they were published close to that time), but it is unclear what the publication dates were for the print. How long does it take to purchase 20,000 print books? A year? More? It may or may not be a minor detail, depending on how big the difference actually is. Stating what years of print were included in the study would have strengthened the article.

University libraries are struggling to find acquisition models that best serve the needs of their users while also trying to stay within budget. It was interesting to see that books were used more in N (Fine Arts) and P (Language and Literature) and R (Medicine) regardless of format. Cost per use was essentially the same or very similar, whether print or e-book. E-books purchased were more expensive than print books, but e-books were more likely to be used than the print books. The famous Kent (1979) study concludes that 40% of print books do not circulate within the first six years on the shelf. With decreasing budgets and relatively slow uptake and varying buy-in for e-books over print books, libraries struggle with the fact that many of the print books they purchase do not get used. With DDA, at least a purchase gets used once. Some e-books were used without triggering an

actual purchase. Those libraries who already use DDA but have a trigger option after only one use may want to investigate other options that could allow usage, but not necessarily the financial commitment. The authors mention some hidden time costs to the DDA model (such as technical services workload issues and weeding discovery records). Future research on these hidden costs would be extremely helpful for libraries to determine the true costs of DDA. Although every library will have its unique subject collections and unique users, this article is an important read for those in libraries who are struggling to determine what

they should be doing (or attempting to do) with their acquisition monograph budgets.

## References

Kent, A. (1979). *Use of library materials: The University of Pittsburgh study*. New York, NY: M. Dekker.

Glynn, L. (2006). A critical appraisal tool for library and information research. *Library Hi Tech, 24*(3), 387-399. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/073788306106 92154