Description

It’s about Wants Vs. Needs!

For centuries, retailers have struggled with this classic inventory problem. That if you carry enough items in your bag, prospective customers will get convinced that you really have what they want! It mostly works.

Academic libraries face a similar challenge — they compile collections based on input from faculty, publishers, and library staff, and stock the shelves accordingly.

They then track the utilization of those collections, paying particular attention to the interlibrary loans (ILL) that indicate an unmet need from their own collections.

On average, as much as fifty percent of a library’s collection is either never used, or used so infrequently as to invalidate the original cost of acquisition. This represents a very inefficient use of budget dollars.

From Just-In-Case to Just-In-Time

Faculty input allows libraries to forecast the need for course texts and journals, but stacking shelves with academic texts by subject ‘just-in-case’ has always been a complex science, since data on past utilization is never an accurate forecast of future demand. In the face of stagnant and now declining budgetary resources, shelves of ageing texts become something of an embarrassment in budget review meetings, especially when compared to interlibrary loan request information.

Early attempts to switch from ‘just-in-case’ to ‘just-in-time’ were made with interlibrary loan purchases rather than requests, based on the logic that if one student or faculty member were requesting the item, there was likelihood that someone else would request it too. Purdue University Libraries conducted such an experiment in 2002 and found the program to be both cost-effective and much appreciated by customers.

The Advent of E-Books

Digital technology provided the perfect solution to the need for ‘just-in-time’ purchase options. Rather than making projective orders of books based on forecasts that were often nothing more than educated guesses, librarians could now make entire catalogs available for purchase-on-demand, based on agreed prices rather than stacking shelves with books and hoping that someone would check them out.

In addition, university administrators were quick to capitalize on the real estate aspect of this new environment. Hundreds of square meters of shelving could now be replaced with additional computer terminals or subdivided into meeting rooms and study areas to better meet the needs of a changing student population.

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Will PDA Model be the Game Changer?

Patron-driven acquisition (PDA), also referred to as demand-driven acquisition or on-demand purchasing, has been embraced as a desperately needed solution to a growing financial problem. With escalating journal subscription fees, the funds available for text collections have come under increasing pressure, and PDA allows librarians to better control the delicate balance between purchase and utilization.

As the sophistication of digital technology has improved, PDA models can now be managed to the point where different levels of utilization can be delivered based on the number of minutes spent reviewing a text, or the number of pages printed from that text. In other words, acquisition now includes a rental option.

However, PDA is by no means a universal panacea. It can ensure that whatever funds are available are spent in the most customer-focused manner, but critics argue that catering solely to the needs of your patrons can result in the development of a fairly haphazard collection of material rather than the comprehensive type of collection much preferred by academic purists.

Category

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