The Invention of the Patron-Driven Acquisition (PDA) Model for e-Books: A Historical Note

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Introduction

Patron-Driven Acquisition or PDA models are now commonplace for the purchase of e-books. This approach promises a higher rate of use than the traditional selection strategies based on choices made by librarians. Allowing users to select books works especially well for e-books because, unlike paper books, e-books can be delivered in real time.

Looking back many have traced the origin of the PDA model to a general concern for the lack of use of traditionally purchased paper collections and experiments with purchase rather than borrow interlibrary loan experiments. In fact neither of these played a part in the first application of the PDA model to e-books.

The story of the first use of the PDA to e-books is recounted below. It was the solution to a particular set of problems faced by a particular library customer and as it happened in turned out to be a very good solution for libraries generally.

The short version is that David W. Lewis and Scott Doan invented the e-book PDA on the exhibit floor at the 1999 ACRL conference in Detroit.

The Customer

The Marion County Internet Library is a granted funded project of the Indianapolis Library Partners. The project purchases databases for the use of the school, academic and public libraries in Marion County, Indiana. The project began in 1997. Management of the project was by a committee of local librarians and the only staffing was a part-time consultant who provided training and outreach and handled trouble shooting with vendors. The project has had a budget of about $500,000 throughout most of its history. In the late 1990s this level of funding provided an opportunity to experiment with new products as they
entered the market place. David W. Lewis was the chair of the committee managing the project during this period.

The Vendor

Based in Boulder, Colorado, netLibrary was founded in 1998 and was the first vendor to provide a collection of general academic e-books to the market. The company first exhibited at the ACRL conference in Detroit in April of 1999. At the time Scott Doan was in charge of marketing for netLibrary. The purchase option netLibrary offered at the time were a one-time purchase at 155% of the list price of the book or an annual fee to access titles. netLibrary had gone to considerable pains to make e-books behave as if they were paper books in order to convince publisher to allow their titles to be included in netLibrary’s e-book collection. The collection was primarily academic books although included a collection of romance novels and a large number of “Dummies” books. netLibrary was never able to reach financial viability and was acquire by OCLC in January 2002.

The Problem

The Marion County Internet Library had an interest in purchasing e-books from netLibrary, but because it had no staff to select individual titles it was not clear how it could use the netLibrary offering.

The Solution

David W. Lewis was aware of the research on book use that clearly indicated that the best predictor of future books use was past use. In discussions on the exhibit floor Scott Doan and David W. Lewis considered the netLibrary offering and how it might be used by the Marion County Internet Library and worked out what later became know as the PDA model. In order to assure a minimum level of sales for netLibrary, a deposit account with a set level of expenditure was agreed to. In exchange for making this commitment the Marion County Internet Library would be allowed to purchase titles only when they were used. This in turn made it possible to select titles without a librarian being involved and provided, at least according to the research on book use, the best chance of purchasing titles that would be used in the future. Scott Doan took these ideas back to netLibrary and over the next several months arrangements were finalized.

The Marion County Internet Library PDA with netLibrary went live in September of 1999. Initially access to the content was through the netLibrary web site, but shortly after the start of the contract bibliographic records were add to the catalog of the Indianapolis Marion County Public Library as the primary access point and
as a result the exposure to the titles, and their use, increased. Initially a purchase was triggered by a single use. In later years a higher trigger was negotiated. In the last four months of 1999 and the first six months of 2000 836 e-books were purchased for just over $45,000. They were accessed a total of 1,307 times in 1999/00. In each of the next four years over $100,000 was spent by the Marion County Internet Library with netLibrary to purchase over 2,000 in each year. In the last of these years, 2003/04, there were over 30,000 accesses.

The project was considered a success and continued until netLibrary changed their policies on how e-books could be sold to consortiums.

More information on the Marion County Internet Library e-book project is available in a short paper by David W. Lewis.\(^5\)

### Notes


Available at: [http://idea.iupui.edu/dspace/handle/1805/660](http://idea.iupui.edu/dspace/handle/1805/660) (accessed June 18, 2013).
