CRL PRE-CONFERENCE AT CHARLESTON—“WEIGHING THE EVIDENCE: EVALUATING MAJOR RESEARCH DATABASES”

Many questions, and perhaps a few answers.

Discussion Leader
James Mouw, The University of Chicago
MAJOR DECISION FACTORS

• What kind of information is considered necessary to support major decisions on major electronic resources? Are there any common denominators?

• Comment on the importance of recommendations from faculty and subject bibliographers. Does a strong faculty recommendation reduce the need to do an independent assessment of the extent of content or functionality of the interface? Do they actually hold a trump card?

• How do you consult? Can any shared listserv or social media chat format effectively support the exchange of frank comments about publishers, pricing, quality of databases? It may be that selectors are only comfortable exchanging information in less formal networks – closed email lists, phone calls, direct conversation.

• Are you aware of open access primary source databases
  – Should there be more evaluative information disseminated about this option?
  – Comparative evaluation with licensed resources?
  – Who should create evaluations for OA options?

• Can one use the print version as a starting point for evaluation, or are the two formats often too different? There’s also the question of overlap and other means of availability.

• What does one do when the evidence is contradictory?
  – Either among reviewers, or in conflict with your own internal analysis.
ENABLING TOOLS and INFORMATION

• Tony: Evidence = Trial and error; No uniform approach; Context is everything.
  – Is this truly the case, are there more empirical approaches one can take?
  – Where do we cut corners, and is this appropriate?
• What kinds of information and tools are available to support investment decision-making?
  – How consistently is published analysis used? Should it be used more consistently?
  – Is timeliness a deterrent to its usefulness?
  – Is discoverability of the evaluations a deterrent?
• Is trial access overrated? How might this tool become more useful in assessment?
• Timing is a big challenge to the inter-institutional sharing of observations from trial access periods. It is challenging enough for selectors to gather comments from faculty and colleagues during these periods, let alone finding the time to offer this information outside the institution.
• Do we have the evidence available at time of purchase decision, or do published evaluations come after a decision has already been made? Can this be improved?
• Importance of networking with trusted colleagues vs. more public efforts, and questions of whether you get a more honest opinion “off the record.”
RECORD KEEPING, DISSEMINATION and ROI

• Should documentation of local assessment recommendations be maintained locally?
  – What tools are available for this?
  – What would be the benefit?
  – Should results of local assessment be shared with other institutions, or are local values and priorities too specific to be universally applied?

• Return on investment (ROI). How do we defend our decisions if challenged?
  – Are we challenged?
  – By whom, and how do we respond?

• How do libraries think about opportunity cost?
  – Can one predict ROI prior to purchase, or is this mostly a guessing game.
  – How do libraries express ROI for databases?
    • For journals, impact and uses are measured, but these are less relevant to assessing the value of say a news or financial database.
ENSURING ONGOING COMMITMENT FROM THE PUBLISHER

• How can libraries apply most effective leverage on publishers to maintain quality content, researcher-friendly functions, and sustainable resources? Through sitting on pre-publication advisory boards? Through spreading payments over multi-years?

• How effective are pre-publication advisory boards? Is participation a good ROI?
  – What about ongoing post-publication advisory boards?

• How might libraries, working together, do a better job of sharing concerns and information on large databases in the pre-release period?

• To what extent might information about products while in the development phase be obtained by libraries, or shared more fully by the publishers?
ROLE OF PRICING MODELS

• How can libraries obtain more flexibility in the pricing offered by publishers
  – more effective tiered pricing models?
  – move away from strict FTE brackets, since the depth of local research practices don’t always correlate to FTE?
  – Other ideas?
  – Is “flexible” a euphemism for “cheaper”?

• How does one measure a particular database’s price against potential benefits, such as functionality, interoperability with other available resources, local researchers’ needs?
SHARED PURCHASES

• Is there any hope in the future for shared use of “niche” databases? How can we deal with increased use restrictions, such as no ILL?
• How large a role does participation in consortial and other cooperative agreements play in your suite of database offerings?
  – How does one maintain uniqueness in their offerings?
• Consortia face longer processes with interesting dynamics. Is there an opportunity cost?
ROLE OF CRL

• If CRL helped libraries submit critical questions and gain information on large databases in a pre-release period when they are still under development, would that represent a more effective leveraging of influence than providing reviews after products are developed?
  – Can they do so without being perceived as collaborating too much with the publishers?
  – Would it be best for these discussions to take place without publishers present?
    • If so, how do they obtain specific information about the product development plans?

• What is the best role for CRL in supporting informed investment decisions?

• What distinguishes CRL’s offerings from the efforts of other consortia?
  – Is there are unique role or roles they can play?

• What special problems or challenges exist in the areas of CRL focus (i.e., news, public opinion, economics, demographics, government information) that are not adequately addressed by existing cooperative acquisition programs?