

## Patron-Driven Acquisitions

# Current Topics in Library and Information Practice

De Gruyter Saur

# Patron-Driven Acquisitions

History and Best Practices

Edited by  
David A. Swords

De Gruyter Saur

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# Contents

Acknowledgments . . . . .	VII
Editor’s Note . . . . .	IX
Introduction <i>David Swords</i> . . . . .	1
Part 1 – Background and Reasons	
Chapter 1 Collecting for the Moment: Patron-Driven Acquisitions as a Disruptive Technology <i>Rick Lugg</i> . . . . .	7
Chapter 2 Approval Plans and Patron Selection: Two Infrastructures <i>Bob Nardini</i> . . . . .	23
Chapter 3 Building a Demand-Driven Collection: The University of Denver Experience <i>Michael Levine-Clark</i> . . . . .	45
Part 2 – PDA in the World	
Chapter 4 The Story of Patron-Driven Acquisition <i>Kari Paulson</i> . . . . .	63
Chapter 5 Building New Libraries on the International Stage: The Near and Middle East <i>Rex Steiner and Ron Berry</i> . . . . .	79

## VI Contents

### Chapter 6

#### Patron-Driven Acquisitions in School Libraries: The Promise and the Problems

*Tom Corbett* . . . . . 95

### Chapter 7

#### PDA and Publishers

*David Swords* . . . . . 107

## Part 3 – Modeling PDA

### Chapter 8

#### Patron-driven Business Models: History, Today's Landscape, and Opportunities

*Sue Polanka and Emilie Delquié* . . . . . 119

### Chapter 9

#### Financial Implications of Demand-Driven Acquisitions: A Case Study of the Value of Short-Term Loans

*Doug Way and Julie Garrison* . . . . . 137

### Chapter 10

#### Texas Demand-Driven Acquisitions: Controlling Costs in a Large-Scale PDA Program

*Dennis Dillon* . . . . . 157

### Chapter 11

#### Elements of a Demand-Driven Model

*David Swords* . . . . . 169

## Part 4 – Conclusion

### Chapter 12

#### PDA and Libraries Today and Tomorrow

*Dennis Dillon* . . . . . 191

About the Authors . . . . . 197

Index . . . . . 201

## Acknowledgments

Above all, I thank the authors of the chapters that comprise this volume. Each one of them has a profoundly busy professional life, yet they somehow found time to write these chapters. And in my opinion, none of them did perfunctory work; they all have given us clear, original, informed thinking on the subject of PDA. It is also important to say that the appearance of their names in this volume does not mean they share my opinions or one another's opinions about PDA. One of the strengths of this book is that it gives the reader many windows into the developing world of PDA. Also I thank Mike Shatzkin for his generous willingness to talk about PDA, a subject with which he had no experience and lots of wisdom. Finally, thank you Alice Keller, editorial director of the Walter de Gruyter series in which this volume appears. She took the idea to her executives and persuaded them that the time had come for a book on PDA. She has been patient, wise, funny, and always a good friend.





## Editor's Note

Patron-driven acquisitions or acquisition (PDA), demand-driven acquisitions, patron-selection programs, user-driven collection, research-driven acquisition model, patron-initiated purchase, and their derivatives are synonyms in this book. Some authors prefer one term or the other and for defensible reasons. At this time, PDA seems likely to prevail in library parlance. It would not be my choice, given that “personal digital assistant” and “public display of affection” spoke for the letters quite awhile back.\* And we cannot be sure that it will prevail. While the marketplace of ideas makes up its mind, for purposes of this book, whichever variation or variations an author has chosen stands.

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\* A young friend told me recently that he has been “banned from the Denver Zoo for too much PDA.” To squelch any rumors, the friend who said this was not Michael Levine-Clark.



# Introduction

David Swords

*Ebook Library*

From the ancient library at Alexandria until the 1990s, libraries had been above all warehouses for books. They were orderly warehouses, but to be sure, they were warehouses. Perhaps it was the abrupt shift in journals from paper to electronic that began remaking libraries, but other important forces have been at work as well. One not to be overlooked was the transformation of bookshops, in the United States led mostly by Barnes & Noble, into spaces that looked like libraries, that had their *gravitas*, their dark wood, but that were deliberately commodious, that included coffee shops and comfortable chairs, that invited not just standing and browsing among the shelves but comfortable reading for hours. I remember being in Greenville, South Carolina, in the mid '90s where on any Saturday Barnes & Noble was the most popular nightspot in town, choked with people sprawled everywhere, drinking coffee, talking seriously, and reading. The Eighteenth-Century English coffee shop had come to the Twentieth-Century American bookstore.

Not long after, academic libraries began to follow the lead of their retail cousins. Where formidable librarians had forbidden food and especially drink, they included coffee shops of their own. Where they had been quiet as the cloistered monasteries of the Middle Ages, they became gathering places for students who used the library to meet and talk through, or even act out, assignments.

The evolution continues today as libraries wrestle, for example, less with the issue of which books to buy than with the more pressing issues of which books and how many to weed, so that they can open space formerly devoted unquestioningly to shelves, to other practices. Cushing Academy in Ashburnham, Massachusetts, whose Library Director Tom Corbett describes their evolution in Chapter 6 of this volume, scandalized Boston in fall 2009 when the school announced its intention to do away with its print collection. But far from the philistine practice for which Cushing was pilloried in the *Boston Globe*, the school had taken a bold step in recognizing that its library could serve the Cushing

community far better by becoming something more like a media center, a gathering place where people can talk, can study television or radio as well as books and journals, can get to assignments online and on Blackboard, and can bring the outside world to them and go out to the world from the space the library has become. People have said to me down the years that students no longer go to their campus libraries, have no need to go to them when Google is everywhere, and especially in every Starbucks. But those people have not visited the libraries where I go, such as the Scott Library at York University in Toronto, where students and their ubiquitous backpacks sprawl through every inch of the new information commons. They have not seen the beautifully functional library at the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, where students occupy media rooms on some floors and on others, spaces where cell phones are allowed or spaces where they are forbidden. They have not visited the renewed library at Ohio State University, which houses only a percentage of its old book collection in favor of spaces that invite learning in all its forms.

As we begin to examine the thinking of many of our best minds on what is being called patron-driven acquisitions (PDA), it is useful to understand the environment into which this practice comes. In some ways PDA is the child of research that shows library selectors, dedicated to building timeless and timely collections as they are, cannot predict which books people will use and which will languish unused on shelves for decades. PDA is equally a response to recession and diminished budgets, which have led both to the need to buy fewer books and to the need to repurpose staff to public service as positions are discontinued, even as the library becomes busier. And PDA is the child of academic administrators who have instinctively questioned the need for the immense, never-ending blackhole of materials budgets in the face of the need to terminate staff and to apply money to rebuilding and building essential infrastructure. PDA is the result of all of these forces.

But more than these PDA is the product of technology and very specifically of the coming of age of ebooks. Publishers, who have been the objects of ire for their adherence to old ways in the face of new technology, deserve credit for their willingness to go along with PDA as a method for libraries to acquire books. As Chapter 7 discusses, they have been and are wary of PDA, but enough have swallowed their fears and forged ahead that the practice can now be a main method of acquisition even in the largest ARLs (see Dennis Dillon's Chapter 10 on PDA at the University of Texas, Austin). What publishers have specifically

allowed is libraries to put bibliographic records into their catalogues for books, and especially for ebooks, that they do not own. When searches discover these records, a url links patrons out to the books themselves, where the entire work can be browsed. Under some systems the browse period allows all patrons a window in which they can decide whether a book suits their needs before a transaction that costs the library money occurs. In the most economical approach to PDA, whose value Doug Way and Julie Garrison quantify in Chapter 9, when patrons need a book the library pays for a short-term loan, usually 5 percent to 15 percent of the list price, rather than paying full price for a volume that far too often under traditional acquisition methods, might never be used again. In short, PDA establishes a specific measured connection between the cost of material and its usefulness to the community of library patrons. Libraries pay full price for books that are used extensively, pay by the use for books that are used lightly, and pay nothing for books that simply dwell in their catalogues as unwatched bibliographic records.

Why are ebooks critical to this practice? First, they can be delivered instantly. Even if printed in the library through a print-on-demand machine, but more typically delivered from a warehouse hundreds of miles away, print cannot easily satisfy the spreading human demand for instantaneity. Second, ebooks take up no space. When Cushing Academy pitched its collection of some 25,000 books, it opened the library for uses besides warehousing. But it also replaced the print with an ebook collection of some 160,000 titles, which it obviously could never have physically housed. Third, space has specific costs. Rick Lugg (Chapter 1) estimates that on average libraries spend \$4.26 per year keeping each book available on a shelf. With ebooks, all of that money can go to other purposes, including to making available to patrons a larger slice of the canon of books. Which leads, fourth, to what I believe to be the most important contribution of PDA to our research libraries. In Chapter 5, Rex Steiner describes how he has been able to use PDA to create a nearly instant collection with almost no money in his library in Azerbaijan, a task that for he and his co-author Ron Berry in the past has taken years and hundreds of thousands, even millions, of dollars. As I write this introduction, the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy has “turned on” an ebook collection of 170,000 volumes for its students and faculty, with more titles added each month. If those books had to be purchased before they could be used, if they had to be shipped to the city of Baku on the Caspian Sea in the Caucasus, if they had to be

processed and shelved, the library could afford only a tiny fraction of them. Instead, as libraries in developed and undeveloped countries are finding, PDA has an exponential democratizing effect. Academies can afford to allow access to what they could never afford to buy. The libraries become much better resources, and if they wish can radically rethink their role and their identity. Most important, because the people who use them have more of the best that has been and is being thought and said at their command, those people can become better citizens of the world.

In conclusion, I should say that if this introduction has been mostly philosophical, it belies the purpose of this book, which is, in fact, mostly practical. As Kari Paulson points out in Chapter 4, PDA as we see it today had its origins in Australia among Australian librarians not long after the turn of the Century, and in that country is now an established acquisitions practice, not an experiment. While a relatively few libraries have full-blown programs elsewhere, the collective experience represented by authors of chapters in this book demonstrates that PDA can be predictably implemented and managed in libraries that serve large and small communities. Sue Polanka and Emilie Deliquié offer an assessment of the different approaches ebook aggregators take to PDA (Chapter 8), and Michael Levine-Clark describes how he has managed the issues that bringing up a PDA program in his library has required (Chapter 3). All of us who have worked on this book believe that PDA has valuable widespread application for secondary-school, college, and research libraries worldwide. That said, Bob Nardini sounds a cautious note in Chapter 2 that deserves to be heard.

My fellow authors would say that if called upon they will thoughtfully offer to any of you who take up this volume the benefit of their experience with PDA.

*David Swords, Warner, New Hampshire, 1 July 2011*

# Part 1

## Background and Reasons





# Chapter 1

## Collecting for the Moment: Patron-Driven Acquisitions as a Disruptive Technology

Rick Lugg  
*R2 Consulting LLC*

In early 2011, as this is written, patron-driven acquisition (PDA) has become one of the most discussed ideas in the world of library collections. PDA has the potential to fundamentally transform decades of library practice, along with long-established relationships among publishers, book vendors, libraries, and library users. Like all game changers, the basic idea is simple. Instead of acquiring books that users *might* want, the library provides a broad range of new title information, enabling patrons to choose which books the library should buy. PDA also enables acquisition at the point a title is needed, rather than buying speculatively and holding in anticipation of use; “just-in-time” access replaces “just-in-case” collecting. In other words, PDA emphasizes collecting for and at the moment of need, to supplement or replace the more traditional philosophy of collecting for the ages. Several trends have converged to make this idea especially compelling right now.

### The Academic Library Environment

Let’s begin with some background. First, over the past decade, academic libraries have undergone a rapid transition from print to electronic resources as the dominant information format. In most libraries, 65 to 70 percent of the materials budget is claimed by electronic journals, full-text databases, e-reference works, and increasingly electronic monographs. Licensed or purchased e-resources are augmented by many free online resources, and digital access to most current government documents. Streaming audio and video are increasingly common. In most libraries, full-text downloads outstrip print circulation rates by orders of magnitude. In short, digital resources are the default choice for users, and their

share of the library budget is large and will continue to grow. The prevalence of e-resources has radically changed user expectations regarding availability and delivery of content. The array of full-text resources commonly available to users in 2011 dwarfs what was available even five years ago. Even in the smallest institutions, immediate remote access to tens of thousands of e-journal titles, full-text databases, and ebooks is expected – and routinely delivered by the library.

Second, recent economic events, triggered by the 2008 recession, have resulted in massive budget pressure for most libraries. Cuts to higher education and library operating budgets will extend to materials budgets, which are likely to be smaller in the foreseeable future. Given the existing commitment to e-resources, most of which involve recurring expenditures, there will be still less money available for discretionary book purchasing, especially for print books. It is more important than ever that the right books – books that patrons will actually use – are bought with these limited funds. Nonetheless, although fewer print books may be purchased overall, new business models for chapter-level access, short-term rental, and print-on-demand could result in more parts of more books being used more often.

Third, many libraries face competing priorities for space. Decades of just-in-case collecting have resulted in library stacks filled to capacity but seldom visited. Simultaneously, library gate counts are rising, as students congregate in the library to study, work together, visit the writing center, and drink coffee. On most campuses, the library remains an important hub, irrespective of collection use. Information commons, teaching and learning centers, group study space, information fluency, and other programs are in high demand, and compete with the low-use stacks for space within the library. In the words of space planning expert Scott Bennett, “Library after library has sacrificed reader accommodations to the imperatives of shelving. The crowding out of readers by reading matter is one of the most common and disturbing ironies in library space planning” (Bennett 2003). The obvious solution is to manage print collections more intelligently, and to limit space for stacks to those print titles most likely to be used.

The idea of establishing a fixed “carrying capacity” for print collections flies in the face of years of library practice. It also requires action at both ends of the print lifecycle. To keep onsite collections within a desired footprint, the library will need to both reduce the flow of incoming tangible material and remove low-use titles from prime central campus space. These titles may go to remote storage or be discarded,

preferably in coordination with consortial partners in a shared print archive. But some action must be taken. Otherwise, the library runs the risk of becoming (and becoming viewed as) a warehouse for unused books, rather than a vital part of teaching, learning, and research outcomes.

Fourth, the lifecycle costs associated with retention and management of print collections are high. In Paul Courant and Buzzy Nielsen's chapter "On the Cost of Keeping a Book," the authors estimated that each volume retained in open library stacks cost \$4.26 per year (Courant 2010). Retention in high-density storage facilities reduces the cost per volume, but it remains significant. As the authors state in their conclusion, "it is important to recognize that the costs associated with a print-based world, often assumed to be small, are actually large" (Courant 2010). Many libraries are grappling with how to control these costs by participating in shared print storage programs or by adopting a more sustainable approach to print collections. While ebooks also have lifecycle management costs, they clearly do not have the same need for space; they do not "crowd out readers" as print books do. In fact, ebooks make more room for users.

Fifth, the rise of the Web has changed user expectations related to information seeking. In the self-service ethic of the Web, libraries have begun to emphasize getting their resources into *user* workflows – on meeting users where they work – rather than expecting users to come to the library building or website. Users are changing. Undergraduates regard the library building more as study space than as a source for information. Most library resources are used remotely and electronically. In a recent project at an ARL library, R2 Consulting (my company) encountered graphic evidence of this. In one year, this library circulated 426,937 items, including renewals. Even at this seemingly robust level, circulation had declined 45.9% between 2003 and 2009. In the same year, however, the library experienced 2,422,024 full-text downloads.

While one statistic favors books and the other articles, the 6:1 preference for remote electronic access over physical check-out is compelling. The library's busiest front door is clearly its virtual one. But contemporary students also expect that library resources and services will be pushed out to other environments in which they work. These include course management systems such as Blackboard and Moodle; subject or course-specific resource guides, such as LibGuides; and mobile applications, etc. The availability of content in digital form is essential to meeting users in this way. Convenience for the user predominates, and

immediate access to user-prioritized content is a key element of attracting people who have other information-seeking options.

Sixth, use of print monographs has been low historically and continues to decline. In 1979, when Allen Kent and his colleagues at Pittsburgh published the results of their study of circulation at the University of Pittsburgh's Hillman Library, competition with e-resources was not a factor. Even then, "if a minimum of two uses were established as the minimum criterion, 71% of the titles [purchased in 1969], would never have been bought" (Bulick 1979). In November 2010, Cornell University Libraries reported that 55% of monographs the libraries owned published in 1990 or later had never circulated (Cornell University Task Force on Print Collection Usage 2010). This coincides very closely with anecdotal evidence from other libraries of all sizes. Perhaps of more concern is that a greater portion (64.5%) of books published in 2001 had not circulated by the end of 2009. And of still greater concern: on April 19, 2010, only 10.5% of books checked out from Cornell's libraries were in the hands of undergraduates (Cornell University Task Force on Print Collection Usage 2010). While we must be careful not to overreact to these findings, it is no longer justifiable to do nothing, considering lifecycle costs and the many higher-value uses to which central campus space could be put. The low circulation rate among undergraduates bears close watching and confirmation in other studies. If circulation proves to be markedly lower among these younger users, we will have a sobering picture of future print use.

The ability to measure use of electronic resources conveniently, through COUNTER-compliant statistics, link-resolver link-outs, and so forth, has heightened interest in measuring the use of print. Again from the Cornell report, "Usage data is regularly consulted for the electronic resources in which the Library invests but, up to now, such data has not been systematically examined in the case of print materials." Dating back to the Kent study, published in 1979 but focused on books purchased in 1969, librarians have been aware that use of print books is disturbingly low, despite concerted efforts to select the best titles. In the evolving culture of assessment in higher education, as libraries are being asked to demonstrate their value to research and learning outcomes, print collections represent a drastically under-utilized resource, with a correspondingly low return on investment (ROI). University administrators now expect libraries to act on this information.

Finally, better archiving arrangements make it more acceptable to rely on ebooks for delivery of content to users, without the need to

retain a corresponding print copy. As of February 13, 2011, Hathi Trust ([www.hathitrust.org](http://www.hathitrust.org)) lists 4,484,513 book titles that have been digitized in full text and archived to preservation-level standards in a trusted digital repository. Approximately 25% of these have been published since 1990. Large publishers such as Elsevier and Springer have escrowed their content with national libraries for safekeeping in the event of business disruptions. Shared print archiving for monographs is developing rapidly, assuring that print copies are available for error correction and re-digitization if necessary. This reduces the need for individual libraries to acquire and retain print, and increases comfort with a “collecting-for-the-moment” model.

The convergence of these factors creates an unprecedented opportunity to rethink library collections and acquisitions practice. Patron-Driven Acquisition, especially when applied to ebooks, has the potential to address all of these problems to some degree. It delivers monographs in electronic, remotely accessible form, the preferred alternative for many users. In some transaction models, PDA alleviates budget pressure by enabling short-term rental of content, or purchase only after x number of uses. It eliminates the temptation and the need to buy speculatively. Ebooks do not occupy shelf space and are not subject to the costs of print lifecycle management (though they do impose other costs, especially in the management of cataloguing, item, and holdings records.) PDA puts library resources conveniently into user workflows, especially when the library enables unmediated access to a title discovered in the catalogue by a user. Finally, titles selected through PDA are guaranteed at least one use, by the patron who requested the item. This ensures that investment in collections has a direct benefit to users. PDA for ebooks makes it possible to collect for the moment of need without bearing the full cost of collecting for the ages.

## PDA: A Disruptive Technology

The philosophical shift underlying PDA is profound and multi-dimensional. Instead of curating collections of tangible materials, libraries have begun to adopt a new role: curating a discovery environment for digital materials. Instead of deliberately trying to identify titles most relevant to curriculum and research interests within a discipline, broad categories of material that *may* be relevant are enhanced for optimum discoverability, immediate delivery, and partial or temporary

use. Instead of purchasing materials just in case a scholar may one day need them, PDA offers “just in time” access to needed titles or portions of titles. Instead of collecting for the ages, libraries are using PDA to enable more targeted collecting for the moment.

Although PDA is now most closely associated with ebooks, its origins lie in print resource sharing. In some respects, early work with print PDA served as a proof of concept. Good libraries have always incorporated some form of patron-driven acquisition, in the form of inter-library loan, direct borrowing from consortial partners, or special orders to vendors. Good collections officers have always studied ILL requests to learn what users had to search elsewhere for, and have modified their selection practices accordingly (Ward 2003). Many libraries have implemented programs to purchase, rather than borrow, titles appearing in ILL borrowing requests. The University of Vermont embarked on a bold experiment with print-based PDA, relying on a rush-order arrangement with their vendor. All of these approaches enjoyed some success, improving service for users and saving money for the libraries.

But while it was a step in the right direction, print-based PDA ultimately proved too slow and awkward to stimulate widespread uptake. Supply chains for tangible material, even at their best, require days for delivery rather than hours or even seconds. Services such as RAPID drastically improved delivery times for articles by delivering a scanned copy electronically, further raising expectations for speed of fulfillment for material requested from other libraries. Although it is not yet practical to apply this technique to books, the increasing availability of current ebook titles, combined with innovative transaction models such as short-term circulation, neatly sidestep the print-related supply chain issues. Under the right circumstances, immediate access for users is possible. It is clear that ebooks (and perhaps POD, given mixed feelings about reading book-length text on screen) are much better suited to the patron-driven model than past options.

However, even though ebook PDA solves many problems for libraries and users, its arrival on the market is accompanied by a sense of unease. The convergence of electronic monographs and support for patron-driven transactions constitute a new product, one that exhibits many of the characteristics of a “disruptive technology,” a concept introduced by Clayton M. Christensen in *The Innovator's Dilemma* (Christensen 2003). There are several elements of his definition that resonate fully with PDA, once the language has been adapted from the corporate world to an academic library context.