

Patron-Driven Acquisition – Working Collaboratively in a Consortial Environment: An Interview with Greg Doyle

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Abstract

Patron-driven acquisition models for electronic and print books have become extremely popular in the past two years and in most cases this service has been implemented at many individual libraries. One unique collaborative model of patron-driven acquisition was created by the Orbis Cascade Alliance through a partnership with Ebook Library (EBL) and Yankee Book Peddler (YBP). This unique project is an example of libraries, consortia, and vendors working together to develop new business models during times of financial constraint, where libraries and consortia are exploring various “just-in-time” acquisition models. *Collaborative Librarianship* spoke with Greg Doyle about the project at Orbis Cascade.

Keywords: Patron-Driven Acquisition; Consortia

Greg Doyle is the Electronic Resources Program Manager at the Orbis Cascade Alliance. Prior to joining the Orbis Cascade, Greg was the Electronic Resources Librarian for Multnomah County Library and a Network Trainer/Account Representative for OCLC. He received his B.A. in Journalism from Humboldt State University and his M.L.I.S. degree from the University of Oregon.

CL: Please provide some information on the Orbis Cascade Alliance.

Doyle: The Orbis Cascade Alliance is a consortium of [37 academic libraries](#) in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho serving faculty and the equivalent of more than 235,000 full time students. Orbis started with seven libraries in 1993 and 13 libraries were added up to 2002, when Orbis and Cascade (7 public academic institutions in Washington) merged together to form the Orbis Cascade Alliance. Additional members have joined since the merger, with the most recent member library, University of Idaho, joining in December 2011.

CL: What types of services do you provide to libraries?

Doyle: The Alliance provides a number of services that support cooperative collection development, leveraging resources and resource sharing. For example, [Summit](#), is our system that allows students, faculty and staff to easily search and request library materials owned by member libraries; a courier service offering delivery of library materials in Oregon, Washington and Idaho; the [Northwest Digital Archives](#), offering enhanced access to primary sources in the Northwest US; cooperative purchasing of databases, ebooks and ejournals, and other digital library services. In all, Orbis Cascade serves more than 280 libraries, museums, archives, and historical societies in seven western states that participate in some or all of our services.

CL: Collaboration among libraries can be challenging, due to different needs or different discipline focus. How has Orbis Cascade overcome these challenges?

Doyle: Member libraries have a strong culture of working together to enhance services to their user communities. Libraries in the Pacific Northwest have never had enough resources to



do everything they want to do. Member libraries have always seen the advantages of working with each other, sharing the expertise of their staff and information resources to collaborate on projects. The result is often services provided at the network level that allow member libraries to best deploy their staff to serve their unique patrons.

CL: Recently, Orbis Cascade implemented a consortium-wide electronic book patron-driven acquisition project. How did this project get started?

Doyle: Orbis Cascade Alliance has a strong resource sharing history with the Summit union catalog, patron requesting and the ability to move materials around the system with the courier program that we manage. The Alliance Council adopted this Collection Development Vision Statement in 2007:

“As an Alliance, we consider the combined collections of member institutions as one collection. While member institutions continue to acquire their own material, the Alliance is committed to cooperative collection development to leverage member institutions’ resources to better serve our users.”

Our Electronic Resources program, while robust, has always operated on an opt-in basis. Ebook proposals would come through the ER Program, but we were mostly not successful in gathering enough commitments to purchase ebooks that would be accessible by all the member libraries. Libraries were beginning to purchase ebooks, but licensing restrictions or simply the ability to efficiently share the materials restricted resource sharing.

In 2009 the Council of library directors called for the formation of an Ebook Task Force to explore ways to pursue consortial ebook purchasing with the goal of providing access to the content by all Alliance member libraries. The Task Force’s report, adopted by Council, led to the formation of a new Ebook Team that would focus on the specifics found in the previous team’s recommendations:

- Leverage our existing relationship with YBP
- Ensure access to purchased titles by all members
- Develop a funding model to support the program
- Use the expertise of staff in member libraries to support the selection of materials and cataloging and processing of the collections

The new Ebook Team began working in 2010. They identified possible models for consortial ebook purchasing and surveyed our Collection Development and Management Committee to gauge their interest in the models. Based on their responses, the team drafted an RFI and sent it out to selected publishers and Ebook aggregators. In the end, the Team recommended a Demand Driven Pilot with partners EBL and YBP.

The Team thought the Demand Driven approach would minimize the efforts to select materials. Secondly, we wanted to ensure that we would be paying only for titles that demonstrated actual use. Finally, we thought the variety of titles would provide support for the curriculum of our members.

Council approved the recommendation, including a mandate that all member libraries participate by providing a share of the funding needed for the Pilot. This was the first time member libraries were expected to participate in an e-resource effort.

CL: Funding collaborative projects can be challenging, especially in this economic environment. How was this project funded? Did the participating libraries feel the project was funded equitably?

Doyle: The important piece was the Council decision that all member libraries participate in funding the pilot. The Ebook Team grappled with the funding model as they were essentially operating in the dark. We were the first group of this size (FTE pool of 235,000) doing a Demand Driven Pilot. EBL provided a lot of usage stats and perspectives, but all of that was based on individual library activity.

As a starting point, we decided to collect approximately \$1/FTE for an expected six month pilot. The \$231,000 was allocated out to all 36 libraries on an FTE basis:

\$2500: community colleges
\$5000: 1-4000 FTE
\$7000: 4001-8000 FTE
\$10000: 8001 - 17000 FTE
\$15000: 17,001 + FTE

The Team made it clear that this was the model for the pilot and that if it is going to be extended beyond the pilot phase into something more permanent, continued funding would take into account usage among other factors.

No doubt there was some skepticism about the value of the pilot by some libraries. Our evaluation process will include a Return on Investment that compares the total of the list price of titles accessed by users of an institution to the amount of their contribution.

CL: The Patron-driven electronic book project involved some vendors. How did the collaboration with vendors come about and what process did you use to select the vendors?

Doyle: YBP has been our preferred monographic vendor since they were identified after our Collection Development and Management Committee issued an RFI in 2007. We encourage our member libraries to do their monographic selection through YBP so each library has a picture of the activity by all members at the point of acquisition. If several copies are already purchased, the library can decide to use their funds to purchase something else. The initial Ebook Task Force saw value in leveraging our relationship with YBP and encouraged the next team to consider this in any future projects.

Some of our libraries were already customers of EBL and both Oregon State University and University of Washington were conducting their own demand driven pilots with EBL. They gave positive recommendations of EBL based on their experience and the Team contacted other customers of EBL.

It was important that EBL and YBP could work together and we've found them both to be very responsive and supportive of the pilot. In fact, representatives from both companies attend our meetings and have provided assistance throughout the pilot.

CL: How are you assessing the impact of the program for the consortia, as well as specific members?

Doyle: We have a formal evaluation plan that can be viewed here:

http://www.orbiscascade.org/index/cms-filessystem-action/collection_development/dda-faq-12-13-11.doc

In short we will be using usage reports, including drilling to down to individual library use; usage of purchased titles by number and type of libraries; discovery and issues related to record quality; and library ROI.

CL: Give us an update on how the program is working. Any unforeseen challenges?

Doyle: We started very conservatively with only 1700 titles in the initial load in July. The pool was limited by the number of publishers that agreed to participate and that we limited titles to 2011 e-imprints. Usage was low and by mid-September we had only spent 4% of our budget and had not purchased a single title. The Implementation Team met in September and decided to increase usage in two ways: 1) lower the trigger to purchase from 10 Short Term Loans to 5 STLs and 2) add titles with e-imprint dates of 2009 and 2010, recognizing there would be some duplication of titles already purchased by members in either print or electronic formats. This retro load increased the pool of titles by about 9700.

Prior to the two changes we had a maximum of 95 STLs in a week and no titles purchased. Since the changes we've had a peak of 729 STLs in a week and have purchased 99 titles the members have perpetual access rights.

Our biggest challenge has been the discovery piece. We don't have a true union catalog.

Summit is a WorldCat Group Catalog, aggregating the individual catalogs. Most members use III Millennium as their local catalog although Evergreen is in use at one and the University of Idaho will add Ex Libris Voyager to the mix. Discovery complicated the picture since we have had to account for III Millennium, WorldCat Local, and WorldCat Group catalogs.

Because of our small pool of titles, we did not want libraries to start in the EBL interface. Instead, we wanted to rely on MARC records in the local catalog and/or Summit. Establishing the workflow to accomplish this was difficult. We relied on a working group from our Collaborative Technical Services Team (<http://orbiscascade.org/index/collaborative-technical-services-team-2011>) to document the workflow based on the library's local situation. A number of problems and issues were discovered along the way, most of which have been resolved.

Another challenge, actually more a disappointment, is the fact that some publishers are not willing to participate in our pilot.

CL: Has Orbis Cascade collaborated with other vendors or organizations for other projects?

Doyle: In addition to working with EBL and YBP, there are a number of instances of collaborating with vendors and other groups. To give you some sense of the variety:

- Working with the Colorado Alliance on an IR project
- E-resource licensing with PORTALS (now defunct Portland area consortium), the Washington State Cooperating Project, and the Greater Western Library Alliance
- Working with California Digital Library on The Western Regional Storage Trust (WEST) and developing and delivering training for the Archivists' Toolkit
- Conference planning (Code4Lib and ICOLC)
- Working with OCLC to develop WorldCat Navigator
- Working with ExLibris and Evergreen for integration with WordCat Navigator

- Senvoy, our Courier, to measure timeliness of deliveries

CL: Where do you see library collaboration going in the next decade?

Doyle: We see it increasing. For example we are actively pursuing Collaborative Technical Services and we'll be releasing an RFP for a Shared ILS in January. A number of people from our member libraries are taking an active part in writing and then evaluating the RFP. If contracts do get issued, we'll have a number of people working on implementation and problem solving with our vendor partners.

Although we are dispersed over a large geographic area, we are getting better at collaborating from afar.

Over time the Orbis Cascade Alliance has been exploring the circumstances under which we all commit to a project. As we look at member collections as one collection and seek better ways to share human resources, we increasingly find that it is important to know when it is important for all members to participate in a project. Opting in/out is clearly the way to go for some initiatives but we try to make sure that we don't lose the advantages of working in a more unified manner. In other words, we are trying to get good at answering the question "What do we all do?"

CL: How does the current economic crisis impact the effectiveness of collaborative projects?

Doyle: Constrained budgets are good motivators for people to look at building on the expertise and experience of their colleagues around the consortium. Along with this increased need, member library staff are stretched thin and must see collaboration as a priority. The Alliance is doing a number of innovative and risk-taking projects. Alliance staff can't do it on our own. Our role as staff is to support and facilitate the various teams and task forces that form around a project. Even though money and staffing is tight in the libraries, we have a number of successful projects that no one library could do on its own and Alliance staff couldn't do on their own.

CL: What do you believe are some of the greatest current challenges to library collaboration?

Doyle: Balancing the time and effort needed to participate in a consortial project while still addressing the particular needs of the institution. There aren't many, if any libraries that are increasing staff or seeing their budget grow. You have to recognize the threat of burn out and be careful about filling your plate too much. The Alliance Council encourages innovation, but is deliberate about setting priorities based on our Strategic Agenda (<http://orbiscascade.org/index/strategic-agenda>).

Communication is always an issue. It's important to explain the goals of the project and the projected benefit to the library. If this is accomplished, efforts to collaborate are seen less as a burden or added workload than something of benefit the project is successful.