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White Paper

The Costs of Print Book Collections: Making the case for large scale eBook acquisitions

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Executive Summary

This paper explains how large scale eBook acquisitions are a strategic investment that makes better use of library funds than storing print collections. Recent work in this area indicates that many such acquisitions can achieve cost savings which justify their purchase.

The focus here is on making the real costs of physical storage more transparent, and how these alone are a strong argument for investing in eBooks on a large scale.

Considerations of human resources, real estate (and its attendant costs) offsite workflows and missions are outside the scope of this brief, though we encourage further exploration of these factors by libraries and in the literature.

Introduction to the Costs of Keeping Print Collections

The relationship between digital and print collections is complex, dynamic and unique to every library, but there is a common tension between digital and print; cost.

A large scale eBook collection can be a substantial purchase, especially where titles are already available at the library in print. However the costs of keeping a print collection are also considerable, and need to become clearer if librarians are to be able to make accurate cost/benefit decisions concerning their digital and print collections. When catalog matching; comparing print and electronic holdings, librarians need to take into account the potential cost savings of moving to the electronic version. This is especially true of titles little used in print.

A growing number of libraries are undertaking digital preservation projects, illustrating that they see the value in large scale ebook holdings[1]. Meanwhile, independent digital preservation projects, such as CLOCKSS and Portico demonstrate the well-established need for and availability of the preservation of digital holdings by libraries and publishers. Large scale, digital eBook collections are part of the landscape.

This paper examines some of the ways libraries can estimate the cost of digitization projects and acquiring digital collections, and storing and managing print collections, and then moves on to look at recent work on the curation of eBook collections.

What is 'Large'?

The Springer Book Archives, of around 100,000 titles dating back to the 1840s, is very large, by just about any measure. But, what any given library considers a large-scale acquisition will of course vary. For the purposes of this discussion, 'large' can be applied where:

- there is a significant overlap between the digital collection and local print holdings
- the eBook collection covers a treatment, discipline or time period new to the library
- the electronic resource may substitute in scope and quality for local print holdings

Physical Collections: The Cost of Growing Storage Needs

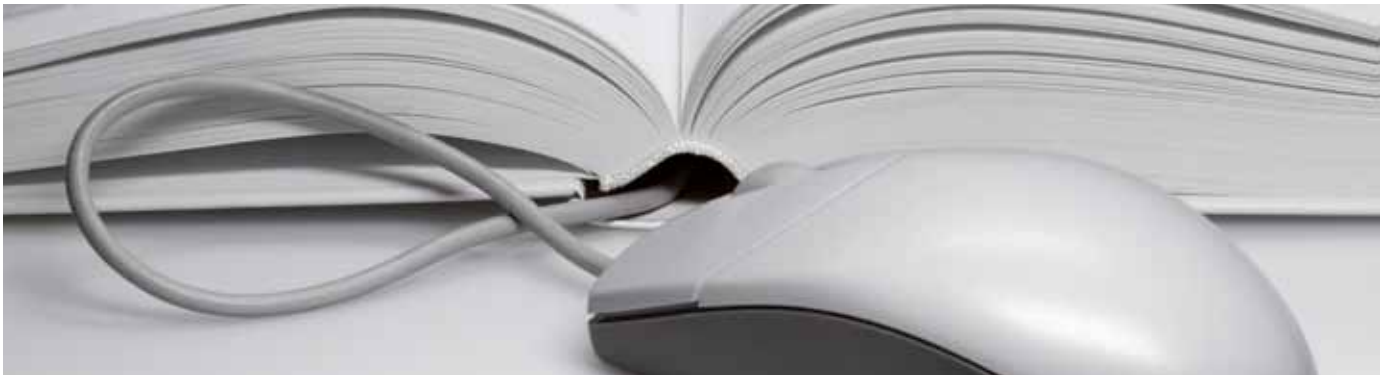
It's long been acknowledged that the cost of keeping a printed monograph is far more than the initial purchase price:

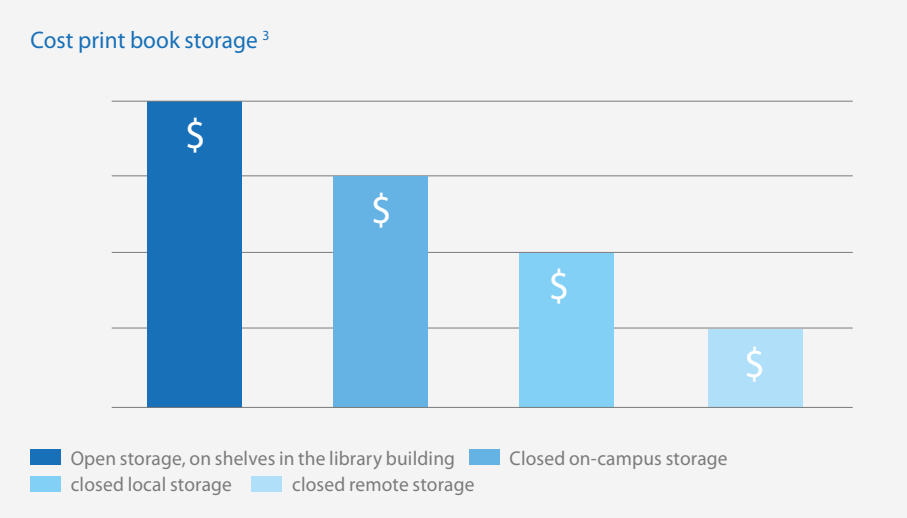
"…the expected cost of owning a monograph is more than seven times the monograph's purchase price. This has important financial implications for libraries that are building their collections: the initial cost of populating a collection is a small fraction of the ongoing cost of maintaining one."[2]

The largest cost for the book collection is storage. While digital storage costs are a real consideration, they pale in comparison to physical storage costs. These include the cost of shelving, maintaining the library building and, since library collections grow, constructing new buildings.

[1] *Are you Ready? Assessing Whether Organisations are Prepared for Digital Preservation* The International Journal of Digital Curation Issue 1, Volume 6 2011 Pauline Sinclair et al

[2] Life Cycle Costs of Library Collections: Creation of Effective Performance and Cost Metrics for Library Resources Stephen R. Lawrence, Lynn Silipigni Connaway, and Keith H. Brigham p548





It may be significant that the recent literature lacks such a substantive analysis of print collection costs. It would be easy to underestimate the amount of storage libraries need:

"As of summer 2007, 68 high-density library storage facilities in North America hold over 70 million library volumes."[4]

On open shelves, or closed on-campus storage, a library user generally can locate a book and check it out without the assistance of library staff. For local or remote storage a librarian must process the work in and out of the storage facility, and this adds to the cost of keeping it. This combination of costs means that the criteria for storing, processing and maintaining print books must take into account both the method and costs of storage, and the number of times a title is likely to be used, to arrive at a Cost Per Use figure. Staffing and preservation costs, where applicable, may also be used to refine this figure.

[3] *A Cost Comparison of Alternative Book Storage Strategies,* Michael D. Cooper, The Library Quarterly: Information | Community | Policy, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Jul., 1989), pp. 239-260
http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/4308379?uid=2&uid=4&sid=21102453149381
[4] *Library Storage Facilities and the Future of Print Collections in North America,* Lizanne Payne 2007
http://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/library/2007/2007-01.pdf?urlm=162901

Usage and Usability of eBooks Result in Greater Circulation of Content

eBook collections may not need storing, but they do still incur costs. A recent study from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) Library found that:

"eBooks offer libraries a better economic value than print books when comparing the cost of activities such as processing, circulation, storage and preservation."[5]

Circulation rates for print books, though difficult to monitor in open stacks, can be worryingly low, as reported in a recent long-term study, with some collections reporting no circulated items at all[6]. Digital collections see a far higher usage of titles, in part because content is more discoverable.

eBook usage is so much more visible than for print books and much more widely distributed across eBook collections, indicating a strong interest in older works. This helped to inspire the Springer Book Archives, which brings around 100,000 books back to life, including those of prominent scientists most of which have only been published in print until now. Additionally, these titles are more likely to be inaccessible even if the library holds them in print, because they may have been removed to closed storage, or perhaps lost or damaged over time.

In terms of the impact of eBooks on workflow, large scale eBook packages help to streamline acquisitions and provide fast user access[7], reducing the Cost Per Use of each title, which is much easier to track for eBooks than for print. Less easy to track are processing times, which vary due in part to the different approaches of each publisher's platforms. The pace of change is another workflow factor, though on this count, a large scale purchase is likely to offer greater predictability than multiple small purchases made over time.

eBooks offer other clear advantages – licenses and formats permitting – that can factor into a favorable Return on Investment (RoI) analysis:

- unlimited simultaneous use online vs. purchasing and managing multiple print copies
- easy integration into coursepacks
- multimedia content
- third party digital preservation, e.g. CLOCKSS

Self-Digitization: More than Just Scanning Costs

Self-digitization projects in libraries demonstrate that large-scale ebook collections are valued. But do these projects offer any additional cost savings over print storage or the purchase of an ebooks archive? The George Washington University created a cost calculator for digitization projects[8] that takes into account not only the planning and scanning phases of a digitization project, but also that of making resources available to students, which is an on-going cost of any digitized title. The result is that the cost of self-digitization can be very high indeed.

Cost of digitization [9]

Per digital image, approximately equivalent to a printed page

[5] *Assessing the Value of EBooks to Academic Libraries and Users,* Tina E. Chrzastowski http://bogliolo.eci.ufmg.br/downloads/TGI061%20Chrzastowski.pdf

[6] *OhioLINK – OCLC Collection Circulation Analysis Project*, OhioLINK Collection Building Task Force, Julia Gammon and Edward T. O'Neill, 2011

[7] *The Challenge of eBooks, a Jisc project.* http://eBookchallenge.org.uk/report/

[8] *Cost Calculator, Cultural Imaginings Project*. http://library.gwu.edu/collections/digitize/cost-calculator

[9] *Breaking Down the Costs, What Are Your Digitization Projects Really Costing,* University of North Texas http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc29794/m1/1/

NON PRINTING AREA

Careful cataloguing with appropriate keywords and metadata can account for up to one-third of the cost of these projects [10], since these tasks require the time of a skilled librarian. But even this is only the beginning:

"Libraries are spending far more to create new resources than they are on maintaining and enhancing the ones they have already created.
Aggregate figures show the cost of ongoing support for all digitized special collections is just a fraction of the amount spent in any one year to create new ones ... This suggests a scenario where digitized collections, once created, are intended to essentially run without much active management, a situation that could ultimately hamper the ability of these institutions to sustain their projects and achieve the impact they desire." [11]

Publisher eBook collections are actively developed to enhance discoverability. For example, Springer provides free MARC records for eBooks and DOIs at book and chapter levels.

Many libraries will hold special collections that they feel a responsibility to digitize[12], but it doesn't follow that librarians should feel it necessary to digitize whole collections when publishers fulfill this role through the provision of eBooks and eBook archives.

Conclusion

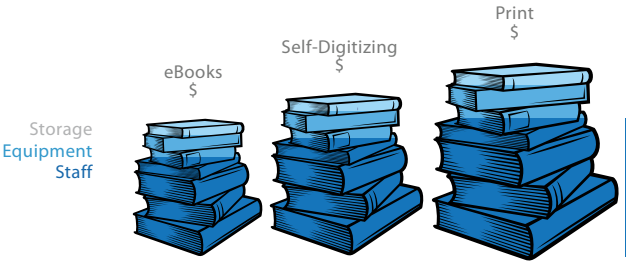
Libraries are challenged to spend their budgets more wisely and to reach the best RoI while serving their varied user base. Assessing costs is a vital first step. And if processing costs are moved from print to digital, and considerable storage costs eliminated, we can make a clear assumption that an eBook collection is more cost effective:

"The declining work involved in maintaining print collections has allowed the focus to be shifted into e-collection maintenance." [13]

The space, time and resources that are freed up by reducing print collections can be directed to other library priorities, be it acquisition or physical space renovation.

Digitization projects, while justifiable for the preservation and accessibility of unique documents, are not always the most cost-effective option when compared with an eBook purchase, especially when the book is within a large scale collection that offers access to many thousands of titles.

Where librarians can be freed from manual print-book management, more effective support can be given to students and faculty. This translates to better research and learning outcomes for their institutions. And these outcomes are ultimately how libraries can prove their RoI. Some key considerations for RoI are identified in the Table on the next page.



[10] *An Introduction to Digital Projects for Libraries, Museums and Archives,* Trevor Jones, Illinois Digitization Institute http://images.library.uiuc.edu/resources/introduction.htm
[11] *Library Storage Facilities and the Future of Print Collections in North America,* Lizanne Payne http://www.arl.org/storage/documents/publications/digitizing-special-collections-report-21feb13.pdf
[12] *Digitization: Is It Worth It?,* Stuart D. Lee, Computers and Libraries, http://www.infotoday.com/cilmag/may01/lee.htm
[13] *The challenge of eBooks, a Jisc project, Newcastle University Case Study* http://eBookchallenge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Newcastle_Curation_Case_study_Nov2012_final.pdf

NON PRINTING AREA

Key RoI considerations	Print	eBooks (acquired)	Self-Digitizing
Direct costs:			
Acquisition cost	Benefit	Challenge	Challenge
Storage cost	Challenge	Benefit	Challenge
Requires additional hardware and/or space	Challenge	Benefit	Challenge
Staffing requirements:			
Requires specialized staff	Challenge	Benefit	Challenge
Requires library staff to assist faculty and students	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge
Access:			
Immediate Access	Challenge	Benefit	Benefit
Simultaneous Access	Challenge	Benefit	Benefit
Access independent of location	Challenge	Benefit	Benefit
Reliable perpetual access	Benefit	Benefit	Benefit
Usage can be reliably tracked	Challenge	Benefit	Challenge

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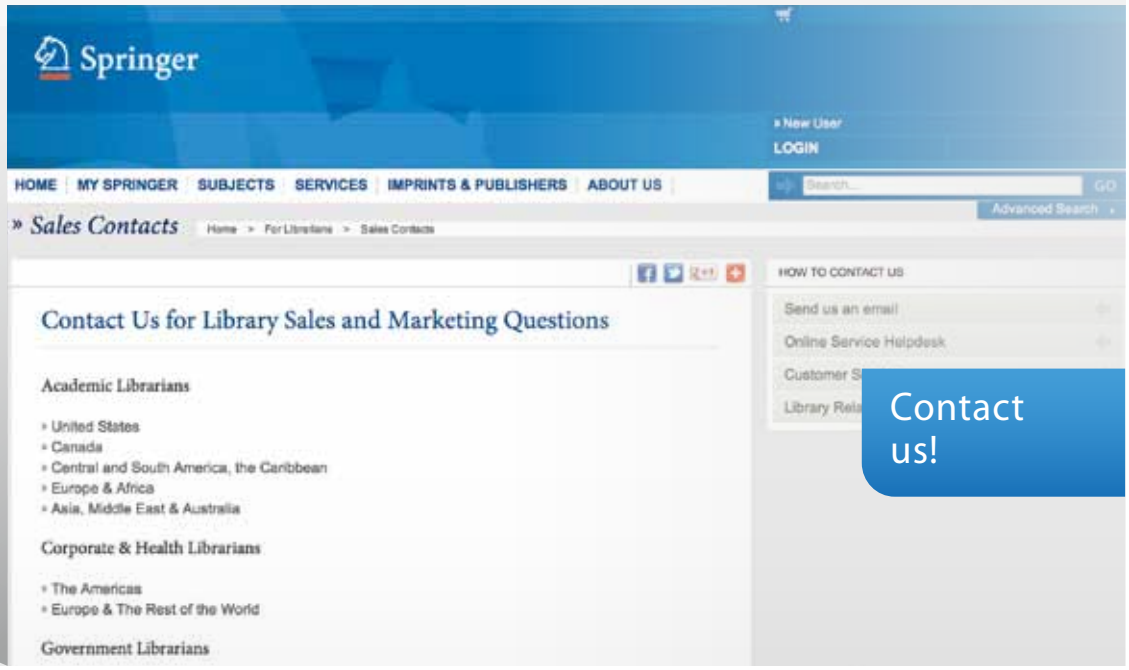

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