E-BASS25 Project – Examining Models for Consortial PDA

Orbis Cascade Alliance Case Study

E-BASS25 is a JISC-funded project looking at the possibilities for employing the patron-driven acquisition model for e-books within the context of a purchasing consortium of academic libraries.

The Orbis Cascade Alliance is a consortium of 37 academic libraries in Oregon, Washington and Idaho serving faculty and the equivalent of more than 258,000 full time students. This consortium has successfully procured e-books using a patron-driven model, and the following case study examines the consortium's approach to this exercise.

Orbis Cascade Alliance – Key Details:

- Established consortium of 37 academic libraries in Oregon, Washington and Idaho, supporting total 250,000+ staff and students (FTE).
- Includes diverse range of libraries – community and 4-year colleges, public and private, one specialist health sciences library.
- Closely integrated consortium with established infrastructure and strong culture of collaboration:
    - Governing Council
    - Consortial collection development strategy
    - Inter-lending infrastructure with union catalogue and delivery service
    - Collaborative Technical Services Team

Consortial Approach to E-Book Acquisition:

- As with the development of 'shared' print collections, the original aim of acquiring e-books as a consortium was to deliver access to a greater quantity and broader subject range of content than could be achieved by individual libraries.

    The consortium has a history of collaborative collection development and resource sharing through ILL, and "considers combined collections of member institutions as one collection". However, there is a concern that this being lost as individual member libraries moved to buying e-books, because although Orbis had a role to act as a purchasing consortium for negotiating e-resource deals on behalf of individual member libraries, the e-books purchased by individual libraries could not be shared across the consortium due to licence restrictions. Therefore, members sought to maximise benefits of acting as a consortium by developing shared e-book collections.

- Large scale acquisition of e-books would also offer opportunity to "jump-start e-book adoption in the smaller schools" which had not yet developed major e-book collections (Serials Review, p132).

- Managing acquisition as a consortium would also bring shared efficiency gains.

The E-Book Pilot:

- An e-book task force was established to address issues of concern arising from e-books. The task force delivered recommendations which were taken forward by an e-book team.
- Pilot of PDA in 2011-2012:
  - Started planning January 2011.
  - Launched pilot 1 July 2011, initially for six months but subsequently extended to 12 months to enable the consortium to gather more data on the viability of the PDA model and the consortial programme.
- Pilot deemed successful, approved as an ongoing programme for the consortium in 2012.

Project Management:

- Allowed sufficient time for planning.
- Defined goals, set project parameters.
- Designed workflow, developed communications.
- Emphasis on communication to all member libraries:
  - Used written guides and YouTube videos to brief library staff at all libraries.

Choice of Business Model:

Which e-book business models were considered?
Pay-per-view and subscription models were considered, however these were rejected as they did not support the purchase of new stock. The consortium also rejected the idea of purchasing large collections as they were too expensive and much of the content would be unsuitable for many of the libraries.

Which model was selected, and why?
Patron-driven models offered desired benefits:
- Titles purchased would have use (customer demand model)
- Studies showed PDA titles generated greater use than library selected titles
- Selected titles would be immediately accessible to end-users
- Potential for saving staff time

However, PDA models also enabled librarians to set parameters of content to be made available, this enabled the collection to be designed to fit the needs of the consortium. PDA provided an efficient and scalable mechanism to purchase individual e-books as a consortium. In addition, there had previously been successful PDA pilots at two member libraries. The consortial pilot provided an opportunity to explore PDA for those member libraries which had not yet tried it.

The PDA-purchase and PDA-rental models were considered because charges before full-price purchase "would allow the Alliance to use its budget more wisely ... [and get] strong value for their acquisitions dollars" (Against the Grain, p38) "patrons would have access to more e-books than single title purchasing could permit"

Choice of Supplier:

EBL (E-Book Library http://www.eblib.com/) was selected as the supplier for the pilot, working in partnership with YBP (http://www.ybp.com/), the preferred book vendor for consortium. EBL were chosen because of their ability to provide diverse content, a clear business model, tools to monitor use and purchase, clear pricing, waived platform fee, a single licence, evidence of good customer service and liaison with libraries.

Choice of Content/Parameters of Pilot:

- **Who decided which titles should be available, and how?**

    The aim was to develop a collection relevant to the different types of libraries in the consortium. These decisions were made by existing consortium groups which established parameters for the content profile for the pilot.

- **Were some of the pilot titles already available in print in the library collections?**
    Yes, but not intentionally. The aim was to provide new (i.e. unique) content, but with a large consortium it was inevitable that some libraries would already hold some of the titles in print or as e-books.

- **Were any of the titles selected for the pilot already available as e-books for purchase or subscription, or did publishers make new titles available for this project?**

    Titles were already available from EBL, but had to negotiation had to take place with publishers to make them available for consortial purchase. Not all publishers were prepared to make their content available, and this was a significant limitation on the range of content that the pilot could deliver.

- **How many titles were made available?**

    At the initial launch 1,700 titles; with 300 titles added per month as new content was published. The focus was on front-list titles, so new titles were included in PDA as they were published, which also helped to minimize duplication.

- **What PDA parameters were used, e.g. number of rentals before purchase?**

    Set 10 loans before auto-purchase. A $250 maximum price limit was set.

    NB. Parameters (number of titles, number of loans) deliberately conservative to avoid rapid spend seen by other libraries / consortia using PDA, and ensure funds lasted for at least six months, "to give all participants an opportunity to use titles within the pilot and build a useful body of evaluative data" (Serials Review p133)

- **Were there any changes to the supplier's standard PDA model for individual libraries, e.g. reduced fees, extra content, different 'trigger points' for rental / purchase?**

    The purchase price was charged at 5x list price (usually just list price for an individual library). The consortium used data on history of print purchases to negotiate this.

- **Were the parameters changed during the pilot?**
    Yes, initially the rate of spending was slow, with no titles purchased outright after two months and only 4% of the budget spent. So, a decision was taken to change the parameters to increase spend and the number of titles purchased. A further 10,000 titles from 2009-2010 titles list were loaded into the pilot. The auto-purchase threshold was decreased from 10 to 5 loans.

Costs:

- **How much money was dedicated to the PDA pilot?**

    The initial budget for the pilot was $462,000. For the ongoing PDA programme, the budget is planned to increase to $750,000 for fiscal year 2013, and $1,000,000 for fiscal year 2014.

    It is recognised that usage, and therefore costs increase as more content added.   However, increased budget may attract new publishers to make content available.

- **How were costs distributed across the consortium?**
    The funding model for the pilot established a central budget to which all member libraries had to contribute. Contributions were scaled to FTE numbers, and ranged from $2,500 for community colleges up to $15,000 for institutions with over 17,000 FTE.   It was clear that this was model for the duration of pilot only, and that would be reviewed if the service were to be extended beyond the pilot phase.

    Following the pilot, the formula for contributions was changed to:
    - 30% equal distribution (to create a flat-rate entry-level fee for all participants)
    - 35% scaled to FTE numbers (to recognize the potential to benefit from content)
    - 35% scaled to the size of the library's materials budget (to account for ability to pay).

    Contributions from member libraries under the revised funding model ranged from $8,000 to $100,000. (For more detail on the funding model, see DDA report and recommendations, February 2012)

- **Was there any method for ensuring all libraries saw a 'return' on their contribution?**

    Partly, through the initial planning of the pilot. Existing collection development policy for the consortium used to set parameters for titles to be made available through the pilot, and ensure that there was content that was potentially relevant to each member library. Also the alliance ensured that pilot would run for long enough to ensure that all libraries would get chance to use the content, and that funds were not quickly exhausted by high use at larger institutions.

    Analysis of usage data from the pilot assessed the spread of usage across all member libraries, and calculated a return on investment per institution which compared list price of titles accessed by each member library with the level of usage (see Report 2012, Appendix 2). The alliance considered the level of usage as a possible element of the funding formula, but it was felt that this would penalize libraries for higher use and so was not included in the revised funding model.

Reflection:

- **What was the definition of success?**
    - Greater access to content than could achieve through purchasing alone
    - Achieving project goals of building shared collections, despite diversity of consortium

- **What were the key factors for success?**
    - Clear, aligned goals/strategic agenda.
        - (i) Need good communications for "getting everyone on board with the concept of [PDA] and what we're trying to achieve with this program" and to keep focus on "the big picture".
        - (ii) Need to be able to show evaluate project to determine if successful in meeting goals.
        - (iii) To provide data that demonstrates return on investment and value to all members.
    - Careful planning of workflows, with designated team to manage them.
    - Established funding model.

    (Serials Review p132 – p136)

NB "A pilot's success is not defined by the total absence of [...] those problems to the extent possible, learning from them when they inevitably occur, and taking steps to address them promptly" (Serials Review p133 - p136)

- **What were /are the key challenges? What could be done better?**

  - **Gaining Publisher Commitment**
    There is a need for more publishers to provide a broader range of content. Data on print purchase history can help to negotiate purchase price and possibly reassure publishers about loss of income from sharing. Data from PDA showing both purchases and rental fees should demonstrate possible revenue sources. PDA also makes content available to smaller libraries, and so broadens a publisher's market reach.

  - **Managing Metadata & Workflows**
    Some of the biggest issues involved managing metadata (for both discovery and access). All libraries in the pilot used their own ILS; some libraries also used a discovery system (most commonly WorldCat local); all libraries used their own proxy system.

    The consortium already had an established Collaborative Technical Services Team which modelled workflows for each library, dealt with issues including source of records, loading records, tracking purchased titles, removing records, ensuring URLs correct, how to display records, whether to include in WorldCat etc.

    The pilot highlighted several needs, including:

  - Need to increase automation of workflows .
  - Need for improved integration for metadata flow between supplier and OCLC.
  - Need for improved tools for management and reporting.
  - Need to focus on simple process that met majority needs, rather than complex process that covered every need.

  - **Agreeing & Communicating Goals**
    There was a need to ensure messages about the PDA pilot were received by all member libraries, as still some lack of awareness of how project / PDA model supposed to work.

    It is particularly of note that is a challenge for the consortium to sell *both* the benefits of PDA model *and* the benefits of acting as a consortium. There is still a tendency from some librarians to see lack of purchases as 'failure'.

    The pilot aimed at 'ownership' from the start – the original brief was that success factor was to end up owning content. It was "easier to get more traditional collection managers on board with the ownership approach" (Serials Review p135) It was difficult to decide on the initial purchase threshold due to lack of previous data from consortia-scale projects, so the consortium lowered the purchase threshold from 10 to 5 loans mid-way through the pilot to increase number of purchases. This decision needed to be communicated to all participating libraries as changes were made which affected the progress of the pilot.

References

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