Vendor Management: Issues and challenges for the Modern Day Library and information professionals

by

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Abstract:

Today's Library and information professionals, huge challenge lies in managing the different vendors are a herculean task. There are two key challenges faced by the present day librarians and library managers in their jobs, are to provide satisfactory information services to the customers and managing the service providers. To succeed these hurdles, it needs a proven professional competency to come out successfully and beneficial to their respective organizations. In this era of shrinking budgets and growing/ diversified user demands, triggered with the management's impression of Library and Information Centres a spending organisations than an earning organisations. We witness, in this critical juncture, library managers have to carefully select the information products which suits to organisations ongoing projects, more importantly price, access and usage. In an interesting development witnessed by everyone today, is compliance to IP and innovation, which has become the mainstay for any organisation. This trend pushed library managers further to become extra cautious while dealing with vendors/ publishers in order to protect the interest of company without hurting the business interest of vendors. Balancing these would call for an extremely vigilant approach on part of Library and Information Centre managers. In this article, authors have emphasised all the above traits to their best efforts of practical experience in dealing with various vendors. Authors intend to share their experience; learning's and best practices to help upcoming professionals to gain some clues to enrich their skill in vendor management.

Keywords: Vendor, Publishers, Subscription, Open Access, Library subscription.

Introduction

In the post Gutenberg era, it witnessed a great deal in science communication and the way scientific community were interacting. The origin of scholarly communication through a formal means such as journal dates back to 17th century, when a group of scientists decided to move from scripting-to-printing research results. This resulted in a significant shift, that the scholars were active in conducting experiments and observations; the knowledge thus produced was being communicated through the new means of communication; publishing through the journals. Therefore prior to the origin of journals, knowledge sharing was based on writing communication among scientists. In the 16th and the 17th century the speed and periodicity in print increased and correspondence of scientific inventions were more regular in the form of Journals, serials, annual book catalogues, newsletters, almanacs and newspapers (Waldrop, 2008).

Scientific publishing dates back to 1665 when Henry Oldenburg started Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London and Denis de Sallo, in France, published the first volume of the first print journal called 'Journal des Scavens' on January 5, 1665. Because of its convergence and periodicity (MacDonell, 1999), this journal was known as a scholarly serial. To maintain quality and higher standards, the system of 'peer review' was introduced, which indeed helped in building the body of scientific literature, scientific reputation, increases the status of the university and institute's research. This process of peer reviewing went on for nearly 300 years. This also is the main reason why libraries subscribed to core periodicals in several disciplines. Although, this system of peer reviewing was valuable, but not free from flaws such as time lag in publishing new ideas and delay in sharing knowledge.

Journal/ Serial Crisis

Scholarly communication is a multi-faceted subject area, which is undergoing a profound transformation. In this article we tried to focus on journals and Database vendors. When we talk about journals and cost associated for the subscription issues of them points to especially on the "serial crisis," in the late 1970's. The rapid increase in

subscription rates of journals (at the rate, more than inflation), with shrinking library budgets in which libraries couldn't afford to pay for the subscriptions in the ever growing specializations of the nature of the disciplines which makes the librarians or library administrators all the more difficult to cater to the ever growing demands for the scholarly literature published in the form of journals.

Modern day Librarianship

All the above developments have made the job of Librarian all the more challenging from the custodians of books to the role of a marketing, promotion, and funds generator through the value added library services. This shift was more on one side inventing new means and ways to finding the sources of budget as well as catering to the specific needs of the library users on the other hand. Subsequently, this shift has called for librarianship and librarian/ information professionals to acquire newer skills (both professional and Managerial skills) to provide user specific services with the limited (and, ever shrinking) budget. Those who are working for Corporate sector (which includes private R&D, Software development and Financial Institutions), does varies kinds of Information delivering jobs.

The modern day information professional should not only equip to handle the traditional aspects of library but also modern and changed requirements form the ever changing business requirements. This notable change occurred in multinational corporations in the disciplines of Research and Development, Software Development and Financial Services.

Issues Faced by the LIS Managers

There are several issues and challenges faced by the modern day Library professional compared to the Library professionals few decades ago. In this article authors only discuss the issues and challenges faced by managing the vendor base. Although there are several other burning issues are been faced by the modern day "Troubled Library professional".

As said earlier, we would be looking into only vendor management and dwell into he issues and challenges faced by the "Troubled Librarian/ Manager", such as

- How many vendors should I consider?
- Are there any set parameters set to select a vendor?
- How best not to get cheated by the vendor?
- Did I do the proper Needs mapping?
- Do we have a criterion in place for selecting a database vendor? The trial run is enough (flaws in trial run?)

Vendor base for any Library Information Centre can comprise of following

- Book publishers and sellers
- Journal Publishers (Online and print)
- Database Publishers
- Journals and database subscription agents (prefers more of Print subscription and supply)

Challenges Ahead

1. Big fish survival by stampeding on small fish
2. Publisher driven pricing strategies
3. Decisions driven by lack proper data analytics on part of librarians

A Ray of Hope

Open access (Open Access Journals, Open archives and Institutional Repositories) Initiatives

- **Advantages:**
  - Speedy publishing process and quick access
  - Increased awareness on part of Scientific community on part of Publishers stringent copyright policies
  - Reduced on non (commercial) publisher involvement
  - Author is a copyright owner
  - Author pay/ project pay for the OA (one time) publishing

- **Disadvantages:**
  - Challenging the 350+ years established process of Commercial Publishing
  - Can the OA movement survive against the vicious commercial publisher lobby
  - Non-Willingness from the scientific Community to publish in OA Journals
  - Author concern on impact factor and citations
  - Participation on part of authors in OA movement and hybrid OA initiatives

Conclusion

The question remains same, such as below...

We learn about Books and Journals acquisition, but do we learn about how to proceed (do we have any set process in place), negotiate with the vendor who would be a hardcore management graduate and well versed with the aspects and communication and convincing skills backed with a great financial support and a big deal of hidden agenda?.

- Do we have the capabilities to understand and tackle the clause mentioned in a subscription agreement?
- Do we have the preparedness to tackle any calamity which may result on any infringement of the publisher interest? Did we learn, did they teach that art of Negotiation?
- Role of Library Schools in building the required skills in the out-going Library Science graduates.
- How many libraries have a robust subscription policy in place?
- Are we capable of putting things that would make sure the vendor agrees/ abides to it?
- What is the role of Organising Talks, Conferences and Workshops in creating awareness among professionals?

- What is the role of discussion forums, professional bodies in bridging the gap between information haves and have not's.

- What is the role of experienced professionals in guiding the coming generations in tackling these issues and challenges?

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