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ONLINE DATABASES

A Rough Road Ahead

By Carol Tenopir

AS LIBRARIES AND THE INSTITUTIONS that fund them prepare their 2010 budgets, things look grim. Both the Association of Research Libraries and the International Coalition of Library Consortia have issued statements calling on scholarly publishers to work with libraries to find common ground on materials pricing in a prolonged period of economic downturn. In response, database companies that sell mostly to libraries are preparing a variety of strategies to cope with their customers' budget pressures. In our recent survey of information companies for the Database Marketplace 2009 (see *LJ* 5/15/09, p. 22), this theme echoed again and again in response to the question about what this year will be the "major trend."

Price and productivity

Recently, Patrick Sommers, president of Gale Cengage Learning, sent an open letter to libraries in which he promised that his company would work "to find a way for you to maintain the same level of service at a price you can afford." Another Gale Cengage strategy is to remove authentication (upon request) on resources that "support local economic development," to be shared by the library with local government, chambers of commerce, and small business associations through a business resource search widget. The aim is to make the library more visible to library funders in government and business who may be able to increase support for the library.

Taking a more standard tack, Annual Reviews and Rockefeller University Press announced a price freeze for 2010. Others are offering enhancements or content at a reduced cost. American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc. (APPI), for example, added three psychiatry textbooks to its premium ebooks collection without increasing the price. Similarly, BioOne says that it is getting a variety

of requests for different pricing and subscriptions options.

Alexander Street Press (ASP) is working toward offering free MARC records for every collection, and other primary publishers provide searching of bibliographic records at no cost. ASP, along with Oxford University Press (OUP), also now sells perpetual access in addition to yearly subscriptions.

Resources) statistics this year, joining more than 90 other publishers.

A spokesperson for Books24x7 summarized the decisions that libraries must make with usage data: "We believe the databases that can demonstrate the greatest value, and show a track record of having 'low cost-per-use,' will be most appealing to libraries this year." Others, including CABI and EBSCO, empha-

Tough economic times mean additional pressure on library collections and services, as well as on vendors

Holding the line on its product pricing, Elsevier stated the main challenge confronting libraries in lean times: "Facing the declining economy, libraries have the opportunity to help their administrations focus on productivity in terms of the research output of the institution. The quality information resources and tools provided by the library are the foundation for research and innovation and are touted by the prevailing administration as the path to economic recovery."

Using usage data

According to ProQuest, "It's critical that the library spend [its] limited dollars on content that's highly valued by its stakeholders. That means an increased emphasis on demonstrating high usage as libraries try to hold onto their budgets."

Several companies, including BRILL, UKPress Online, and CQ Press, became compliant with COUNTER (Counting Online Usage of Networked Electronic

sized the need for measuring the return on investment of library collections or measuring useful results to constituents.

Purchasing power

Decreased purchasing power affects libraries and publishers. The OUP spokesperson quoted a library consortium as saying "flat is the new up," meaning any subscription price increases on existing subscriptions will be difficult to manage. The spokesperson noted that shrinking investments by publishing houses owing to slow sales likely will cut back on new products.

ABC-CLIO sees the same trend: "Tighter budgets all around tend to mean lower development and marketing budgets." Ironically...tough economic times usually mean increased use of the public library and an increase in the number of people who go to college, putting additional pressure on collections and services.

Whether you embrace these efforts by the information industry or take a more cynical view, information companies undeniably rely on libraries to spend money on their products. Libraries and the information industry that serves them are in this economic crisis together.

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