

Review

Selecting and Managing Electronic Resources: A How-to-Do-It Manual for Librarians (rev. ed.)

Vicki L. Gregory, with assistance from Ardis Hanson

Neal-Schuman Publishers, New York, 2006, 139 pp., ISBN 1-55570-548-0, Price £43.50

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This book is a revised and expanded edition of a work previously published in 2000. It is aimed particularly at practitioners coming new to the electronic resources area, as well as at more experienced professionals interested in new approaches. Eight chapters of varying length cover collection development policies; selection criteria and the selection process; budgeting and acquisitions; organisation and access to electronic resources; evaluation and assessment; digital rights management and intellectual property; preservation issues; and the future of selecting and managing electronic resources. The text begins with a four-page preface explaining the book's rationale and outlining the coverage of each chapter, at varying levels of detail. The book concludes with a selective bibliography of some 150 items arranged in eight sections, six of which match the chapter titles, with the other two covering general works and electronic journals (the latter substituting for the budgeting and acquisitions topic). It also includes a seven-page index.

Chapter 1 provides a very good introduction to collection development policies, covering their purposes, contents and approaches to dealing with electronic resources. The author offers a compelling case for “mainstreaming electronic resources into a reworked integrated collection development policy”, rather than maintaining separate policies for traditional and e-resources. She identifies numerous issues related to the development of integrated policies, including some useful discussion of policy related to freely available (“non-proprietary”) internet resources and comments on acceptable use policies. Apart from one sidebar quote from a journal article and a set of URLs for a few American academic and public library policy statements, there are no in-text citations to the literature; the related bibliography for this chapter offers some suggestions for further reading, but most of the items listed were published in the 1990s. This chapter could have been enhanced with fuller guidance on the format of policy statements by providing a sample contents list and extracts from actual examples, rather than simply listing URLs whose permanence cannot be guaranteed.

Chapter 2 covers many factors affecting the selection of e-resources, again including points specifically related to Internet resources, but gives minimal attention to the key issues of currency and frequency of updating, either in the text or accompanying selection criteria worksheet. The next chapter, on budgeting and acquisitions, is the shortest of the main chapters at six pages, but provides a good overview of the main pricing models and resource allocation strategies, as well as briefly discussing consortial purchasing and individual article purchases.

However, the “web tools” listed at the end of this chapter are an odd mix of review resources and other selection tools (which would have fitted better with those listed in the previous chapter), together with details of a few dealers, directories of publishers and US postal and telephone information. Established UK and US book and periodical price indices are surprisingly not mentioned as useful resources here.

Chapter 4 on organisation and access to e-resources is contributed by Ardis Hanson and is the most substantial in the book, distinctive for its inclusion of in-text references to literature cited in the accompanying bibliography. It provides good clear coverage of technical access problems, prefaced by introductory comments on wider collection management issues – which overlap with previous chapters, but offer additional examples and insights. This chapter outlines technical solutions such as link servers/resolvers, gateway/portal services, digital object identifiers and CrossRef, as well as discussing relevant standards and protocols (e.g. MARC, ISBD, Dublin Core, XML, EAD, SOAP). Chapter 5 on evaluation and assessment is less effectively focused on e-resources than others, with only about two pages directly addressing the topic. Significant collaborative initiatives, such as the international COUNTER project (Counting Online Usage of Networked Electronic Resources) are not discussed in the text, although there are some relevant references in the related bibliography.

Chapter 6 on digital rights management (DRM) is another extended treatment, which provides more detailed consideration of licence agreements and their negotiation, in addition to discussing the copyright regime in the US and (to a lesser extent) elsewhere. The last part of the chapter covers DRM systems and their application in the library environment, with a clear diagram of a model DRM system and screenshots for journal article requests. Chapter 7 discusses preservation of both “born-digital” and digitised documents, covering obsolete formats, institutional repositories and collaborative approaches, such as LOCKSS and JSTOR. However, it does not mention the important activities of national libraries in this area and the US bias is evident again in the exclusive focus on DSpace, with no reference to other software (e.g. EPrints, Greenstone) in the text or bibliography. The final chapter on the future of e-resource management suggests that internal and external collaboration, as well as authorisation and authentication issues, will increasingly characterise this area of library work; but more could have been said here about digital asset management for all types of libraries.

Overall, I feel the book provides a good introduction to the subject for both new professionals and more experienced staff venturing into this area for the first time, identifying key issues to consider. The use of sidebar quotes from the literature is a nice feature of many chapters, but could have been extended and arguably should have been accompanied by more in-text referencing of key sources to complement the appended bibliography, which would have increased the book's value as a learning resource for students. In the first three chapters the reader suffers from a surfeit of bullet points, but the rest of the text is more discursive, with a better balance struck between facilitating navigation and assimilation of content. The American bias is less marked than in many library science texts, but the bibliography contains only a handful of publications from other countries, which is a significant weakness in view of the number of interesting developments in Europe and Australasia, in addition to the many international initiatives in this field. The index is extensive, but has a lot of redundancy, with several sets of entries in effect duplicating the chapter sections listed on the contents page.