Rebuilding Library Collections – Common Guidelines help public Libraries to update their Collections

Aija Laine
Planning Officer/
Digital contents for public libraries –project
Turku City Library/Helsinki City Library
Turku, Finland

Virva Nousiainen-Hiiri
Head of Acquisitions and Cataloguing
Helsinki City Library
Helsinki, Finland

Session: 139 — *Treating print in an increasing digital collection: issues, dilemmas and directions* — Acquisition and Collection Development

Abstract:

The Library environment is rapidly changing. The way that people gather and process information has changed thoroughly. The use of mobile devices and the increasing amount of digital content place libraries in a new situation. Public libraries have to adjust their collection to the new era. In Finland the Council for Public Libraries launched a project, Electronic material for public libraries, and assigned a committee to work on it. The main task of the project is to obtain electronic material for patrons in public libraries. The project will also examine how the emerging amount of digital material will change the library collection.

1. Introduction

The number of digital materials has grown steadily, whereas the digital collections in libraries have not evolved correspondingly. Changes in the operational environment, and especially the way customers handle and process information and culture has also changed and these factors should be taken into consideration when creating collections.

In Finland, the Council for Public Libraries set up a project whose aim is to assess the role of public libraries in the digital distribution system. The project was named *Digital contents for public libraries*. The task of the project is also to formulate basis for e-material strategy for public libraries, a strategy which outlines aims concerning library collections, training and communications.

This article examines firstly the environment in which public libraries operate in Finland. Secondly, the focus is on project's operation and its formulation of e-material strategy basis, and within it, especially the policy alignments in terms of collections. Thus e-material policy alignment also defines the role of printed materials in the overall collections.

2. Changes in operational environment

There have been many changes in library's operational environment, changes which have an effect on planning library services and collections. Trends move fast across borders in a globalised world and these changes occur in rapid cycles. Those changes which are likely to have concrete effect on library operations can be highlighted. Such changes are at least those which occur in the media sector, the increased use of mobile devices and services, changes in information retrieval methods and reading habits, as well as internet's role in people's daily lives.

2.2 Media-sector

Publishing sector is going through tremendous changes in Finland as well as globally. Newspapers and magazines publish digital versions along with the printed ones and traditional media loses its share to the new digital services. Digital publishing of newspapers and magazines enables more and more customised and profiled products. This also facilitates quicker and more efficient distribution. In the book publishing sector big online retailers conquer ever larger portion of the global book market.

In Finland, the media sector is seeking solutions via Next Media project. The aim of the project is to investigate and find new ways of media distribution and consumption. Its aim is also to elevate Finnish media sector into a major international player. Part of the Next Media project is the eReading project which concentrates on digital production and distribution methods as regards newspapers, magazines and books.

2.3 Mobile services and solutions

At the end of 2011, one third of Americans owned some kind of device suitable for digital reading. In Finland the user statistics aren't quite as noticeable, but growth is evident also here. The favourable reception of tablet devices on a global scale has surpassed even more optimistic prior estimates. It is possible, that mobile devices will eventually replace PCs. In 2011, more tablet devices were sold in Finland than desktop PCs. World's mobile data is expected to increase 18 fold by 2016 and the number of mobile devices to exceed 10 billion, which means 1.4 device per person in the world. (Anderson 2012, 3). Ever growing prevalence of mobile devices may also have an effect on internet services as well as on contents. The number of applications designed for mobile devices will increase in the future. Consumers want easy and reliable applications, which function well particularly on mobile platforms. The danger is that device specific applications will carve out an ever greater share of the open access web services. (Anderson, 1012, 3-6).

2.4 Changes in information retrievals and reading habits

Information retrieval methods of the Google generation and diginatives have been examined in numerous studies. According to these studies, it appears that young people have good digital skills, whereas source criticism and the ability to read & digest information are noticeably inadequate. What matters most in information acquisition is first and foremost how fast and easily information can be retrieved. Digital reading has morphed into browsing in which conclusions and deductions are based merely on headings and abstracts. Browsing has replaced in-depth reading. (Nicholas 2012, 94—95). (Rowlands 2008, 306).

By far the most information acquisition channel, especially for the young, is internet. In an OCLC study of 2006, 89% of the students began their search via internet and only 2% via library's web-pages (Rowland, 2008, 292-293). Students had very poor idea of digital

services offered by libraries. Library's digital services were viewed as cumbersome to use and did not provide the same intuitive user experiences as the search engines. (Rowlands 2008, 293-296).

2.5 Internet

Information and communications industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. Internet business's share in the EU sector's GNP is 5.6% and the growth shows no signs of slowing down. Services provided on the internet are becoming global. This enables e.g. the development and adoption of cloud services. (Liikenne- ja viestintä 2012, 2-6).

89% of 16-74 year-old Finns use internet. Internet use outside home has also increased substantially. Internet use via portable devices outside home has tripled. Internet is used mostly for taking care of daily business, information retrievals and communications. (Tilastokeskus 2.11.2011).

3. Digital contents for public libraries -project

Finnish Council for Public Libraries set up a project in spring 2011 whose aim was to assess public libraries' acquisition and distribution of e-materials in a changed operational environment. Council named a task force for the project whose 10 members represent public libraries around Finland. Both Finnish and Swedish speaking libraries are represented in the task force. The project was named as *Digital contents for public libraries,* and it is funded by Ministry of Education and Culture.

Project's main task is to get Finland's public libraries engaged in the distribution of e-materials, to assess public libraries wishes and aims as regards the acquisition of e-materials, their distribution and use, as well as planning of joint training, communications and marketing channels as regards the distribution and use of digital materials.

3.1 E-material strategy

Ministry of Education and Culture asked the project to draft basis for the e-material strategy, which would set down guidelines for the joint aims in terms of digital materials. Supply of digital materials in Finland is still rather modest, and thus the fear is that public libraries will not get properly involved in the distribution of e-materials.

In Finland, digitals materials' share of the public libraries overall material acquisition expenditure is only 2.6%. One fourth of the public libraries do not purchase any materials with a price tag. The situation is alarming, since libraries should be able to provide services for all citizens, also those who have increasingly started to use digital services.

The aim of e-material strategy is to illustrate public library's ever changing operation environment, set a framework for improving e-material acquisitions, give rough guidelines for creating collections, as well as for nationwide training, communications and marketing.

The next step of the strategy is to demonstrate on concrete level those procedures with which the collections, the level of staff skills as well as communications and marketing are brought to the level that reflects today's needs and demands.

3.2 Collection guidelines

Public libraries must already start preparing for the situation in which more and more materials are in digital format. The supply of digital materials has thus far been modest in Finland. It is possible that within the next ten years the division between printed and digital materials will be such that digital materials equal those of printed materials.

It is therefore necessary to create joint national collection policy for the e-materials which delineates those e-materials which each library should offer for their customers. This will ensure that equality is maintained and inequality avoided.

It is advisable that in future each municipality in Finland should be able to offer Finnish literature, newspapers and magazines in both printed and digital formats. Swedish speaking municipalities must ensure that Swedish language materials are offered also in digital format.

Public libraries should examine proffered digital materials with an open mind and try out new service methods. For example, in Denmark libraries offer immigrant materials comprehensively in digital format. Digital immigrant materials are particularly suitable since up-to-date printed materials are hard to come by.

In terms of music materials, customers' consumer habits should be monitored. If the number of music loans keeps going down, popular music, for example, should be offered in digital format in which case CDs and digital music would support one another and so perhaps attracting new customers for music libraries.

Public libraries offer different databases. However, the use of reference databases in particular is modest when compared with their cost. It is therefore important to examine the use of these databases when creating digital collections. It is pointless to purchase materials which the customers don't actively use. It gives no added value to the digital services nor will it improve customers' skills. It is worthwhile to invest only in services which satisfy demand.

Acquisition of e-materials should be as flexible and quick as possible thus enabling immediate response to customers' demands. Concerted acquisition of digital materials is a practical solution when it is done in cooperation with client libraries and their customers. In Finland, the public library consortium can be such a practical solution in terms of digital material acquisitions. Thus the National library's internationally renowned FinElib service unit could be used as a support. In this way the expertise of both could be utilised in the public library sector.

Printed materials have a firm foothold in Finnish public libraries. There is nothing on the horizon that would endanger printed materials' place or role in the collections. Situation is different with other material types. It is worthwhile to consider whether digital materials would work better as regards audiobooks, music recordings or movies and would digital material better satisfy customers' needs than physical collections. The starting point should always be customers' needs and genuinely up-to-date collections, collections which are at the same time sufficiently comprehensive to for library customers. Balance between digital and printed materials can be found thus enabling both to complement one another.

4. Summary and conclusions

Libraries are going through a period which alters their operations in many ways. This new situation demands deliberation and joint policy alignments with which public libraries can modernise their services and collections. At the same care must be taken that traditional services are guaranteed. Thus the collections have to been seen as a totality in which digital and physical materials together reflect customers' needs today as well as in the future.

Sources

Anderson, Janna Quitney & Rainie Lee (2012) The Web is Dead? No. Experts expect apps and the Web to converge in the cloud; but many worry that simplicity for users will come at a price. Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Future-of-Apps-and-Web/Overview.aspx?src=prc-headline

Liikenne ja viestintä 2016. (Ministry of Transport and Communications publications 2/2012. Available only in Finnish) http://www.lvm.fi/web/fi/julkaisu/-/view/3446547

Nicholas, David & Clark, David (2012) "Reading" in the digital environment. *Learned Publishing* 25 (2): 93-98.

Rowlands, Ian, Nicholas, David, Williams, Peter, Huntington, Paul & Fieldhouse, Maggie (2008) The Google Generation: the information behaviour of the researcher of the future. *Aslib Proceedings: New Information Perspectives* 60 (4): 290-310.

Tilastokeskus 2.11.2011: Internetin käyttö kodin ja työpaikan ulkopuolella yleistyy. http://tilastokeskus.fi/til/sutivi/2011/sutivi_2011_2011-11-02_tie_001_fi.html