Cancellation and Replacement Review

Abstract

With ever-changing program offerings and a shift in usage of resources, some resources will need to be cancelled. Chapter 7 of Library Technology Reports *(vol. 49, no. 2) "Techniques for Electronic Resource Management" covers the process once the decision has been made to cancel and replace a resource. First, notify the patrons of the change. Begin evaluation of replacement products, and do not forget that there may be open-access alternatives. The next phase is then to start the process all over again.*

In the digital environment, electronic content and services provided to access electronic content are constantly evolving and changing. What seems appropriate now may not be as relevant two to five years later. This is especially true regarding service provision to access electronic resources. This is an area where the market is still extremely volatile and where new services and tools come to market every three to six months. After reviewing the content collection or the service provider, it may be determined that it is time to cancel access to this content due to low usage, cuts to budgets, or something else that has become more significant and important to your institution. It may be that a provider has made a significant platform change and the new platform does not allow you to provide access to content and functionality as seamlessly as you were able to previously. Another change may be that significant content is no longer available through an aggregator supplier.

In addition, the amount of open-access (OA) content available continues to grow both from national governments and through ever-growing digital repositories. The publication of the Finch Report in the United Kingdom and its subsequent support by the Research Councils UK will see a behavioral change in the way research in the United Kingdom is published.[1] A move towards gold OA where authors pay processing charges rather than subscriptions could see up to 6 percent of the world's research (the United Kingdom's contribution to global research) available via open access. Locally, an institution that may have a multi-year deal with a publisher should consider writing in a clause for a cost break if there is the likelihood of its faculty publishing five or more APC articles with that publisher in any given year. Will publishers set up their subscriptions to drop by 6 percent as they offset the costs through APC? Will aggregators be able to justify providing access to this free content in their resources while still charging for the privilege? These are just a few of the questions for librarians to consider as gold OA and OA mandates proliferate.

If you are buying resources through a consortium, you may need to consider the needs of the consortium as a whole when making your decision to cancel and replace resources, as it may not be possible in any given year to cancel and replace consortium-purchased resources. The consortium may elect to move away from specific resource deals that may make purchasing too expensive for your institution alone. Electronic resource managers should establish a review planning schedule for determining relevance and retention of electronic resource content and services every three to five years to ensure purchases are still fulfilling the needs of their home institution. More than likely, this review will be scheduled to coincide with the renewal or contract expiration of a given resource. For standard serial subscriptions, the review is often undertaken every year.[2]

Consult with Stakeholders

Content and services in most libraries are not purchased in a vacuum but often can be retained in one. They are purchased because there was a demand either from faculty and students or from other members of your organization for the services being offered at the time. In some cases, the content or service may be available on more than one platform or through more than one interface. Part of the evaluation described in chapters 5 and 6 should be to look at how resources are being used and if they are still filling the purposes for which they were purchased. After the review of usage and content provision, share the results of the review with all interested parties for a retention decision. The sharing can be as broad as posting cancellation lists to a library's web pages for faculty and student input or coordinating cancellation previews through library and campus department liaisons.[3] There may be a small but vocal minority who deem this content or service essential, and it is important to understand all uses and arguments for retention of the resource in question. Be sure to include in the evaluation and consultation your local content editors and the need to maintain resources due to ongoing scholarly input from your institution's scholars.

If it is found that a resource to be canceled is edited by local faculty, it may be appropriate to meet with deans of faculty in order to benefit from the wider view. If there is a 5 percent cut in overall budgets, then something will have to go regardless of what different factions in the faculty say. Liaising with senior management in the faculty can help with these difficulties and puts the onus on the faculty themselves to make difficult decisions. Another avenue may be to negotiate for funding from other areas on campus that have a vested interest in the research production and creation at your institution.

Be sure to include any significant reports or usage issues from your troubleshooting mechanism to show why use may have dropped off or if there has been a significant shift in the content being offered. For instance, an aggregator database may have renegotiated terms of access for content and suddenly a library is experiencing an eighteen-month embargo period to content instead of a twelve-month embargo period. This sort of information will be revealed through the troubleshooting mechanisms in place as opposed to announcements from the content provider.

Share with your stakeholders what the postcancellation rights will be for the content. Will your library retain the right to access the years previously purchased or not? Will perpetual access be made available through a third-party site or be delivered on CD-ROM or hard drive to the library? If so, will there be an opportunity for the library to host the content locally? See if you can identify possible OA replacements for the content being lost and find out if you can retain any local scholarship in your institutional or digital repository.

If the decision is made in the demand-driven acquisition plan for available resources to change significantly, then the stakeholders should be notified. If the plan is just being tweaked to adjust for a low-performing subject area or publisher, it may not need to be brought to the attention of the stakeholders. However, if a significant number of MARC/XML records are going to disappear or be removed from the OPAC, then it is important to let the stakeholders know the reason for the removal of the access points or perhaps change over to a new provider. The stakeholders may have valuable input as to why certain resources underperformed in a given year or time frame, such as curricular changes, a major research shift, or a called boycott of a given publisher. In addition, there may be good reasons for maintaining records for older content within the catalog for some but not all subject areas, and this discussion should happen where all the stakeholders can communicate needs to retain older content accessibility.

Notify the Provider or Vendor

Once the decision has been to move away from a product or service, inform the vendor as soon as possible. Be honest, and explain the evaluations undertaken and why the product is no longer meeting the demands of your institution. In the cases of moving a resource to another platform or provider, explain honestly why the move is being made. If the move is based on a much cheaper price quote, share a ballpark figure to allow the original provider the chance to counteroffer. This information may result in more reasonable pricing on the original platform and improvements or development of the product by the original vendor or provider. If the choice is to replace a given product with another one from the same provider, changing out products may result in a discount on what is to be purchased. Again, be very frank in explaining why one product may be more suitable for your library.

If in the end the cancellation or replacement comes down solely to cost, make sure to let this be known as well. There still tends to be an idea that libraries have a choice when it comes to what is purchased, but more and more, the decisions being made at a given library are what can be readily let go in order to preserve what is truly core or essential to a given institution.[4] Cost may be the deciding factor, but only for resources where content is not king.

Be sure to share with providers and vendors when subscription products are being paid for using one-time funding mechanisms. This indicates to the provider that in the next year they are likely to lose business, and the cancellation will come as less of a surprise.

Do not burn any bridges! Many resources have

postcancellation access, which means you need to keep up a working relationship with suppliers; this might also incur a platform access fee going forward, so this needs to be budgeted for in future years. Review the license to fully understand what your postcancellation rights to access may be. In addition, you may resubscribe to the resources in future years. Content is bought and sold by publishers and vendors. Therefore, you may end up back with your original vendor a year or two down the line!

Notify Your Patron Base

Once the decision has been made to cancel and replace a resource, notify the patrons of the impending change. This can be done by simply adding a notation to the A–Z listing of resources for databases or by annotating a holdings record in the catalog to indicate the cancellation.

For large-scale journal cancellations, it is always best to provide a cancellation list on the library's web pages that alert the faculty and students about forthcoming cancellations. If possible, do this at least one to two months in advance of the change. Many electronic resource services allow publicly displayed notes that can be presented to your patrons. Use this functionality to announce future changes and cancellations. If the cancellation is to be to a large collection or of a substantial nature, you may want to explain the changes via your library's web presence or through newsletters or e-mails to your patron base, if possible.

When notifying your patron base, make sure to offer alternatives where possible and to note any postcancellation access. Give your patrons enough notice in order for them to transfer any notes or saved searches from their personal profiles in the resources that are about to be cancelled. If possible, indicate alternative resources that may be available more readily on mobile devices and remotely from the library. One way to do this is to record quick instructional videos showing how alternative resources can be readily accessed on mobile devices or from other areas on campus.

With demand-driven access, you may need to be able to explain why content from a given year is no longer available or is available on a different platform. Always try to focus on the positive aspects of the change in service, such as more current content being made accessible or a new platform having more functionality.

Notate Your Records

In your integrated library system (ILS), accounting system, or ERM system, note the decision, and mark each item for cancellation for each resource to ensure that subsequent invoices are not paid erroneously. Also, record for the future the reasons for cancellation, as staff changes often result in the loss of this type of information. If you have been subscribing to the resources through a third-party vendor or consortium, make sure the third-party vendor or consortium contact is fully informed about all the resources to be cancelled.[5] Have a shared drive space or internal communication mechanism where cancellation spreadsheets or databases can be archived and retrieved for informational purposes.

You will need this evidence in future years as journals, in particular, have a nasty habit of sneaking back into the collection around the time of the big deal renewal. In some cases, access may also reappear if the title transfers publishers or platforms.

Be sure that your knowledge base management staff are also well aware of the titles being cancelled so they can remove access appropriately or change holdings information as needed. It is a good idea to review the access points for the cancellations made a few months postcancellation in order to ensure that patrons are not being directed to content streams that are no longer available.

Sometimes you may cancel a resource several months in advance. If this is the case, remember to set up a reminder in your ERM system or on your calendar to remove access on your knowledge base on the date the subscription runs out. In the case of postcancellation access, you will need to check whether you need to change your holdings information to ensure that your users have up-to-date information and that your link resolver works efficiently.

Investigate Open-Access Alternatives

There is a growing field of OA resources, digital humanities websites, and information on freely available digital scholarship.[6] There is also a growing body of hybrid journals where an institution may have full access, not to a single journal title or even a journal issue, but to select articles from a title. The challenge for electronic resource managers is how to best provide access to this content. The first challenge is finding ways to identify the content available from hybrid journals and then how to provide access through knowledge bases.

University presses are also acting together to provide ready access to monographs that are open-access or where there has been a partnership undertaken with a library to publish works freely. These materials should be selected just as they would be for subscription materials, with an evaluation of the content and ready understanding of the functionality of the digital

copy. There is also a range of freely available textbooks, and these too should be evaluated for relevance and usefulness to the overall collection.

Use much the same criteria outlined in TERMS to assess OA content. Just because a resource is free does not make it of scholarly value. Subject these resources to the same rigor you would a possible subscription. In addition, linking can often be a problem for OA content. This can be a major source of user dissatisfaction, so make sure the resources are accessible as seamlessly as possible.

Sometimes these resources are overlooked and not added to a library collection simply because they are freely available, which diminishes their exposure to potential users and researchers. Libraries can have, and often do have, influence on these materials staying readily available when they are cataloged and included for standard preservation through library crowdsourced preservation mechanisms like LOCKSS and CLOCKSS.

LOCKSS
www.lockss.org

CLOCKSS
www.clockss.org/clockss/Home

Begin Evaluation of Replacement Product

In coordination with subject and liaison librarians and collection management librarians, the electronic resource manager should now return to the beginning of the electronic resources cycle described in chapter 2 and start all over again, either looking for replacements for any cancelled resources or looking to reaccess any continuing resources, as described in chapters 5 and 6, on an annual basis. New platforms for existing systems may also need to be implemented (chapter 4).

Notes

1. Dame Janet Finch, *Accessibility, Sustainability, Excellence: How to Expand Access to Research Publications*, Report of the Working Group on Expanding Access to Published Research Findings 2012 (London: Research Information Network, 2012), accessed November 6, 2012, www.researchinfonet.org/publish/finch; Research Councils UK, "RCUK Announces New Open Access Policy," news release, July 16, 2012, accessed November 6, 2012, www.rcuk.ac.uk/media/news/2012news/Pages/120716.aspx.
2. Kelli Getz, Jeannie Castro, and Nancy Linden, "Making the Impossible Possible: Practices for Running an Effective Annual Serials Review" (presentation, 31st Annual Charleston Conference: Issues in Book and Serial Acquisition, Charleston, SC, November 2–5, 2011), accessed November 6, 2012, www.slideshare.net/CharlestonConference/making-the-impossible-possible-by-kelli-getz-jeannie-castro-and-nancy-linden-university-of-houston-libraries.
3. Jill Emery and Dana Walker, "Anti-Acquisitions Librarians in the Era of Economic Downsizing" (presentation, 33rd UKSG Annual Conference, Edinburgh, Scotland, April 12–14, 2010), accessed November 6, 2012, www.slideshare.net/jillemery/antiacquisitions-librarians-review-copy.
4. Joseph Thomas, "A Beginner's Guide to Working with Vendors," in *E-Resources Management Handbook,* ed. Graham Stone, Rick Anderson, and Jessica Feinstein (Newbury, UK: UKSG, 2009), accessed November 6, 2012, doi: 10.1629/9552448-0-3.19.1.
5. Trina Holloway, "Cancellation Workflow," in *E-Resources Management Handbook,* ed. Graham Stone, Rick Anderson, and Jessica Feinstein (Newbury, UK: UKSG, 2009), doi:10.1629/9552448-0-3.22.1.
6. Charles Bailey, Digital Scholarship website, accessed November 6, 2012, www.digital-scholarship.org; Mauro Carassai and Elisabet Takehana, "Introduction," *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (2011): 000109, accessed November 6, 2012, http://digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/5/3/000109/000109.html.