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Direct Purchase As a Function of Interlibrary Loan: Buying Books versus Borrowing

Nancy Lichten Alder

ABSTRACT. Instead of borrowing a book for a patron via interlibrary loan, many libraries buy the requested book. The process is often faster and, sometimes cheaper, than interlibrary loan.

A discussion of workflows and information about purchasing faculty requests instead of borrowing items is included. The discussion emphasizes successful strategies to solve the problem of the overlap of responsibilities and potential conflicts among collection subject selectors, acquisitions staff and interlibrary loan staff. Discussion focuses on implementing purchase on demand once the library has determined that Direct Purchase is part of the Interlibrary Loan process. doi:10.1300/J474v18n01_03

KEYWORDS. Interlibrary loan, Direct Purchase, collection development, acquisitions, purchasing, monographs, purchase on demand

THE PROBLEM

One of the most discussed interlibrary loan topics is whether it is best to buy or borrow a book. For faculty, support of their research projects...
requires that the library provide needed books as expeditiously as possible. The patron cares little about how books are acquired. They want it quickly, and to keep it for as long as they need it.

The Harold B. Lee Library (HBLL) of Brigham Young University has a policy that states, “Where funds and space allow, the library continually endeavors to meet [collection] expectations placed upon it by its numerous constituencies.” In other words, HBLL aims to acquire and house an excellent collection of books in a myriad of formats. Notwithstanding this commitment to collection development, HBLL simply cannot purchase, process, and house everything. HBLL, like most institutions, is experiencing an increasing workload. The library administration has increased emphasis on, and allocated funding to, the development and refining of interlibrary loan policies and procedures.

With increasing frequency, interlibrary loan staff finds that fulfilling the patron’s request for books in the most timely and cost-effective manner leads to expedited purchasing rather than borrowing. The problem is how to manage the process to yield the best result for the patron while avoiding ignoring existing procedures and staff in other library departments. To be immediately responsive to patron requests, while honoring the purposes and processes of other library departments, requires a degree of finesse and establishing appropriate procedures. See Figure 1 for Workflow Chart.

**BACKGROUND**

HBLL Interlibrary Loan occasionally receives faculty requests for books that cannot be obtained from any lending library. These requests fall into two categories: (1) esoteric, inexpensive formats, and (2) monographic and media books that may be of value if added to the library’s collection. HBLL felt it necessary to establish Direct Purchase for faculty in order that items too new for interlibrary loan or items that libraries decline to loan for other reasons could be provided for faculty in a timely fashion. Sending a request to the relevant Subject Selector for consideration to purchase simply took too long. Routine acquisition channels are not designed for speed.

In the past, Interlibrary Loan staff had purchased a limited amount of inexpensive esoteric books for faculty. These items are generally grey literature. Costs for these books are usually less than $25.00, about equal to the cost of an interlibrary loan obtained from a non-consortia library. HBLL has purchased these items using an existing interlibrary loan in-
voice account. The book is considered a non-returnable book for the faculty member’s use. The book is not considered for addition to the library’s collections.

As demand has increased for items too new for interlibrary loan to obtain from other institutions, the interlibrary loan staff’s concern focused on developing a process that would allow interlibrary loan staff
to “fill” faculty requests for books. Particularly books that would be of value, not only to the faculty member, but also to other patrons. Because prompt delivery is a major emphasis of interlibrary loan, HBLL wanted to create a process that would expedite the purchase and processing of the book and yet support the Subject Selectors’ control of their collections.

In 2005, interlibrary loan instituted a procedure named Interlibrary Loan Direct Purchase. Staff developed the Direct Purchase process in collaboration with the Document Delivery Services Manager, the Acquisitions Manager, the Chair of the Collection Management and Development Committee and the Chair of the Technical Services Department. The Direct Purchase process permits an immediate response to the patron’s needs, while making the best use of procedures already in place and keeping all concerned parties “in the loop.”

THE DIRECT PURCHASE PROCESSES

The decision to have the Interlibrary Loan Department purchase rather than borrow is reasonable only if purchased titles can be obtained in approximately the same turnaround time as books borrowed through traditional interlibrary loan channels.

Direct Purchase items are purchased only in response to a request for books not available via interlibrary loan. Requests are verified by the Interlibrary Loan Manager, are determined to be necessary for faculty research or curriculum support and it is confirmed that the book must be procured quickly. It is expected that interlibrary loan will make limited use of this process. Records are kept and reviewed periodically to assure that patrons do not abuse the process.

The Interlibrary Loan Manager is responsible for two separate purchasing accounts:

1. The existing Interlibrary Loan invoice account to purchase grey literature to be given to the patron outright,
2. A Collection Development firm order account established for interlibrary loan to use to place Expedited Book Orders for items added to the library’s collection.

Staff established guidelines:

• Expedited purchase is available only to faculty.
• Requests for current popular or high demand fiction and juvenile literature are not considered for purchase.
• Items purchased may not exceed a cost of $80.00. Requests for items costing more than that are routed to the relevant Subject Selector.
• The relevant Subject Selector is notified.
• The Acquisitions Department uses their established procedures and sources for Direct Purchase.
• Payment for books comes from the Direct Purchase firm order account managed by the Interlibrary Loan Manager.
• Upon receipt, the book is routed to Faculty Delivery Services for checkout and delivery through their established procedure.

CONSIDERATIONS

In keeping with aim to avoid honor departmental boundaries, HBLL Interlibrary Loan consulted with other departments.

Because of the time-sensitive nature of the patron’s request, the usual opportunity for viewing a new book would not be afforded to the Subject Selector. Subject Specialists expressed a desire to be notified immediately of any title added to their collection. This “heads up” permits them to familiarize themselves with the book through other means, and explore with relevant faculty whether there is pressing interest in the particular topic.

Developing the process, staff asked the Acquisitions Manager a number of questions regarding the procedures to acquire materials:

• What is the average turnaround time for regular requests for Acquisition’s expedited purchases?
• How long the Subject Selector holds a request before forwarding it to Acquisitions for purchase?
• What is the average turnaround time expected from a RUSH vendor?
• What is the average turnaround for processing of a RUSH request?
• Does an Acquisitions staffer “walk” the book through the cataloging process to expedite its preparation for delivery to the patron?

Once familiar with the general process and timeframe, staff proceeded to establish parameters for Interlibrary Loan Direct Purchase.

HBLL allows the Interlibrary Loan staff to use expedited purchasing and processing to include items already on order for the collection as
well as new requests. This is consistent with the effort to deliver requested items to patrons quickly. It is left to the Acquisitions Department to decide how to facilitate this effort.

In order to preserve the integrity of the collection, strict adherence to established collection development policy is maintained. Items falling outside the policy, whether due to format or content, are purchased from funds held in the interlibrary loan invoice account and given outright to the patron. Items to be added to the collection are purchased from the collection development account managed by the Interlibrary Loan Manager, but only when:

- The need cannot be filled by another title available in the collection or available from other lending institutions.
- The need is immediate.
- The book is of value to other patrons.
- The book fits the philosophical basis for inclusion in the collection.

**TWO PROCEDURES**

For requests for new purchases, HBLL submits an electronic form. Acquisitions purchases the book using their rush vendors, and expedites processing of the book by “walking” it through the various cataloging and lettering tasks.

For books that are already in the purchasing process, HBLL submits the same electronic form and indicates, in the notes field, that the book is “Already on order.”

Staff has set up macros to enter relevant information to the request initiated by interlibrary loan, into the “special instructions” field. Acquisitions staff expedites the existing order, or cancels the original order and reorders using rush vendors.

Processing proceeds as with a new purchase. Once the book has been fully cataloged and ready for circulation, the Acquisitions staff inserts a routing slip that contains the transaction number and patron name. The book is checked out and delivered to the patron via Faculty Delivery Services.

Employing a “macro” for consistency and clarity in the E-mail, the Interlibrary Loan Manager alerts the relevant Subject Selector to the pending addition to the collection.

All Expedited Purchase requests are recorded in a log kept by the Interlibrary Loan Manager. Progress of requested books is tracked by the Acquisitions department and Faculty Delivery.
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

LibQual surveys and comments in less formal University and Library surveys indicate that Interlibrary Loan and Faculty Delivery Services are acknowledged by patrons as among the library’s premiere services. HBLL has consistently sought to improve service. The Direct Purchase policy is an example of enhancing service. Patrons are pleased with the speedy response to their requests for material.

It is gratifying that the necessary departmental processes can be successfully combined. Staff works in concert to give the best service to patrons. Each partner retains the integrity of their process while collaboration among the various library departments proceeds smoothly.

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