

UC Berkeley

UC Berkeley Previously Published Works

Title

WHAT WILL COLLECTION DEVELOPERS DO

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2v2258mk>

Journal

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND LIBRARIES, 14(3)

ISSN

0730-9295

Author

BUCKLAND, M

Publication Date

1995

Peer reviewed

Buckland: What will collection developers do? *Information Technology & Libraries*. 1995. 1
Preprint of "What will collection developers do?" *Information Technology and Libraries* vol 14,
no 3 (Sept 1995): 155-159. Published version may differ slightly. This paper can be treated as a
supplement to chapter 6 of *Redesigning Library Services: A Manifesto*. (Chicago: American
Library Association, 1992), available at <https://archive.org/details/redesigninglibra00buck>

What Will Collection Developers Do?

Michael Buckland¹

Abstract

What would collection developers do in the absence of local collections? Collection developers partition the universe of documents, privileging selected documents for acquisition and retention. Their selections of documents, based on expected demand and perceived value, direct the actions of technical services staff. A comparable selective privileging of documents, based on demand and value, and a similar direction of reoriented technical services activity appears needed with networked electronic resources. Collection developers will be needed for value-based privileging more than for demand-based decisions.

What would collection developers do if and when the emerging environment of networked electronic resources were to lead to the absence (or reduced significance) of local collections?

There can be little doubt that the rise of network-accessible electronic resources appears to offer a substantial alternative in access to library resources to both of the traditional options of between holding materials in local collections or dependence on interlibrary loan. As one example, J. P. Migne's *Patrologiae cursus completus*, (Latin series), 221-volume compilation of the writings in Latin of the early nineteenth-century of the writings in Latin of the early Christian fathers, has become available in electronic form. Thus, it would appear that almost any material of interest to library users could become available in electronic form. Consequently, access to networked electronic resources offers, in principle, an alternative to the assembling of local collections—although there remain many significant problems to be addressed¹. Indeed, in the special case on indexing and abstracting services, the searching of remote databases has already tended to replace subscription to paper editions.

We are not and need not be concerned here with whether, how, how completely, or under what circumstances access to networked resources will replace local collections in paper. Instead, we examine the consequences that such a replacement might have for collection developers.

The mere idea that access to networked electronic documents could substantially replace local collections raises intriguing questions about the purposes of local collections and the work of collection developers. What do collection developers do now for library users? At the superficial level of process, what they do is clear: They make a stream of decisions telling the library's technical services staff which items should be acquired and cataloged for the local collection, which should be weeded, and, the largest category, what should not be acquired. However, the *purpose*, as distinguished from the *process*, is less clear. There are large literatures

¹ **Michael Buckland** is Professor at the School of Information Management and Systems, University of California, Berkeley.

Buckland: What will collection developers do? *Information Technology & Libraries*. 1995. 2
on collection development, on how new library-related technologies are evolving, and on the
issue of a shift in emphasis from ownership to access.² Important though these topics are, they
are primarily concerned with process (with “how”) and so can distract attention from
examination of purpose (of “why”). A period of time in which significant technological change
is occurring provides a good opportunity not only to emphasize purpose, but also to theorize
about the nature of what we do.

There has, in recent years, been a significant shift away from viewing the role of
technical services staff as that of managing a grand apparatus for establishing usable local
collections, toward a notion of their role as providing the user's gateway to the bibliographic
universe.³ In what follows, I argue for and predict a comparable change in the role of collection
development staff.

The purposes of collections

Library collections can be viewed in terms of four roles.⁴

1. Preservation: If a document is to be available now and in the future, then at least one copy needs to be collected somewhere;
2. Dispensing: The principal reason why libraries acquire most of the materials that they add to their local collections is not for preservation but because of the need to provide convenient physical access to materials where and when users want them;
3. Advisory (or bibliographic): The array of materials on the shelves can itself alert the reader to what is available, just as any bibliography or catalog can. Certainly the array on the shelves is a selective, incomplete guide. It is limited to what has been added to that collection and, within that, is biased towards the less-popular material that happens to be on the shelves at any particular time. Nonetheless, a library collection plays an advisory role like that of a selective bibliography, drawing attention to material that has been identified as worth adding to the collection. Browsing books has some attraction over browsing in bibliographies or among catalog records. It is largely for this advisory role that the materials are arranged by a subject classification scheme.
4. Symbolic: It can also be argued that the acquisition of extensive collections and, especially, rare and prestigious materials adds status to a library and its parent institution.

Of these four roles the vast preponderance of actual expenditures is attributable to the second and third roles—the two roles that seem most likely to be transformed by the new technology.

Book selection theory

Lionel McColvin's classic *The Theory of Book Selection for Public Libraries* (1925) begins with the following words: “Book selection is the first task of librarianship. It precedes all other processes—cataloguing, classification, or administration—and it is the most important. No matter how thorough and efficient the rest of the work may be, the ultimate value of a library depends upon the way in which the stock has been selected.”⁵

McColvin begins with the need to have available the materials that will be in demand, not only because of the practical need to have in stock what users ask for, but also because

Buckland: What will collection developers do? *Information Technology & Libraries*. 1995. 3
there will be no benefit derived from acquisitions that are not used. No demand means no use and, therefore, no benefit, McColvin argues. But he also argues that a passive adapting of collections to demand would betray the mission of the library. "If, however, we consider the library as a social force with the power to direct to some extent man's demand, (or, to use the usual expression, if we consider the library as an *educational* force) we will not be content to leave demand our only consideration."⁶ In brief, McColvin, like other writers on collection development, provides a frame with two dimensions—demand and value—which can be regarded as relating to the dispensing and advisory roles of collections noted above.

There is a specialized literature by Lister, Slote, Trueswell, and others on the quantitative techniques that can be used to adapt collections to patterns of demand⁷ However, much discussion of collection development—especially that concerning "balanced" collections—has to do with librarians' value-laden departures from purely demand-driven collection development. It is a matter of deliberately privileging some documents over others as a separate matter from the anticipation of demand. The books placed in the shelves—in the reader's face, so to speak—carry an implicit endorsement: these you should know about; these are good books for you; or, these are books you will like. Other materials, those not selected for (or weeded from) the collection, are actively, though implicitly, treated as less suitable for readers. They have been deliberately judged less satisfactory for whatever reason. The evaluations may well be derivative, based, for example, on book reviews or faculty recommendations.

Collection developers will consider both demand and value. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that this function, the privileging of some works over others, is different in kind from the narrowly logistic task of anticipating demand to maintain high immediate availability. The specialized literature on quantitative collection development techniques developed by Lister and others for ensuring high immediate availability is essentially irrelevant to this second task of privileging of some documents over others.

Networked electronic resources

With materials on paper, the development of well-selected local collections dominates the quality of service, as McColvin stressed. There are gradations of local availability (on reserve, out on loan, in storage, etc.), but there is a basic, binary distinction: What is held locally is accessible and what not held locally is relatively inaccessible. Recourse to interlibrary borrowing is an unsatisfying substitute for local holdings. Put simply, by the process of selection the collection developer is imposing a partitioning of the universe of library materials into two populations: those that are to be made more accessible by being held locally; and those that are to be kept less accessible because not added to the local collection. Structurally, the effect is the same as the compilation of a selective bibliography and of an online search: Some items are selectively brought forward to the reader's attention—acquired, listed, and retrieved respectively; while others—those not acquired, listed, or retrieved—still exist and are still accessible, but are left in less-accessible obscurity.

With networked, electronic resources, however, this binary distinction between local (and accessible) and non-local (and less conveniently accessible) becomes less clear. In principle, all resources become equally (more or less) accessible. The distinction between locally held and not locally held loses significance and, in a sense, all collections everywhere can become locally-accessible collections. A consequence relevant to technical services is that the local catalog, essentially a guide to what is locally-held, loses its past pre-eminence relative to union catalogs, remote catalogs, and bibliographies of network-accessible resources.

Local Collections in the Electronic Network Environment

“In the library of the future there will be no library. All will be navigation!” I have heard from an academic acquaintance. This declaration does not imply an end to library service or to librarians (who are all good navigators, of course). Some of us may prefer “bibliography” to “navigation” as the term of choice and, obviously, some repositories (collections) of electronic materials must be located somewhere. What is placed in question, though, is the future of the *local* collections that have hitherto dominated library service and have accounted for most of libraries' expenditures once the full costs of selecting, acquiring, processing, and housing local collections are properly attributed.

Clearly there will continue to be local collections of two kinds: (1) materials on paper, microfilm, and other localized media for which the reader and the document must be in the same place; and (2) “Caches” of electronic documents that are used often enough to justify local storage.

The population of documents in the localized caches will be transient and transparent. In general, users need neither know nor care which documents are stored locally and which are not at any given time. Automatic algorithms (essentially the same as those developed by Lister and the others noted above) can be designed, based on expected frequency of use, unit storage costs, and the costs and delays (“latency”) of obtaining a copy from remote storage, to adjust the cache dynamically. The design of such algorithms is a task for industrial engineers rather than subject specialists. Site licenses will need to be negotiated, but that seems likely to become more like negotiating a blanket order than traditional title-by-title, copy-by-copy book selection.

There are localized electronic media, notably CD-ROMs, that must be selected and acquired like books or microfilms. But CD-ROMs can be put on networks and their contents can be stored in repositories. CD-ROMs seem a transitional technology or, at best, a temporary storage device.

As for the local collections in localized media (paper, microform, etc.), indications are that they will be a diminishing portion of what is used and will no longer define, as they have in the past, a library's ability to provide service. So the question remains: What will collection developers do as local collections diminish in significance relative to networked electronic resources? Will collection developers' professional lives be enriched by the assignment of other, different duties? The answer, I suggest, lies in the closer examination of the *purposes* of what they do now, or in McColvin's distinction between demand and value.

In traditional collection development, or in building local collections of localized media, the single act of acquisition is the common response to both demand and value. One procedure addresses both concerns. One cannot know by examining a book on the shelf whether its acquisition resulted from an expectation of demand, from an ascribed value, or from some combination. In an electronic, networked environment, however, considerations of demand and of value diverge because they require different courses of action. The logistics of catering to high demand, in detail a matter of caches, can be delegated as primarily a mechanical task, and one would have a welcome opportunity to economize on collection developers if that were all they were to do.

But what of the concern for *value* in the electronic library environment, for the privileging of some books over others? If there is more to collection development than responding to demand, then the value-laden role of privileging some resources over others

Buckland: What will collection developers do? *Information Technology & Libraries*. 1995. 5
needs to be continued unless the purpose of library service is to change. How is this other, remaining task of collection developers to be accomplished? If it can no longer be done obscurely, combined with the logistical task of meeting demand by placing copies on the shelves, it will need to be addressed directly and separately.

Collection developers and technical services staff have been more closely co-conspirators in achieving the library's mission than libraries' organizational charts have indicated. Acquisitions departments and catalogers process only those items that the collection developers select. Collection developers and technical services staff play complementary and interdependent roles in establishing an ordering of the universe of documents, in determining the relative accessibility of different documents, for their local users. There is no clear reason why that purpose and that partnership should cease. Quite the reverse, as electronic resources multiply, the need for a convenient ordering of differentiated accessibility, increases. Technical services have been evolving away from being the grand apparatus that constructs the local collection and towards the construction of gateways to the bibliographic universe. Value judgements are still needed concerning which resources are most suitable for any given user group.

The privileging of the better and, by default, the non-privileging of the rest, remains a significant needed service. If we accept McColvin's statement for library service, written in relation to documents on paper, on what grounds would we deny it for library service using documents on disk drives? Should the choice of technology for the storage medium determine the mission of the library? Let us re-read McColvin in relation to networked electronic resources: "If, however, we consider the library as a social force with the power to direct to some extent man's demand, (or, to use the usual expression, if we consider the library as an *educational* force) we will not be content to leave demand our only consideration."

What collection developers do now is to select items for local acquisition. The purpose of the process is to manipulate the universe of documents so that some subsets—on grounds of demand and/or value—are made more accessible than others. Some documents are made visually prominent by being placed on the local shelves, while others are deliberately not. As paper documents on the shelves cease to be the technological medium of choice, different but comparable procedures are needed for a different technological medium.

In the provision of navigational (alias bibliographic) tools to the universe of documents, it seems contrary to common sense and to the historic traditions of library service to make all material equally accessible. There is simply too much material and, while we may agree that it ought *all* to be accessible, it would be unhelpful to make it all equally accessible. Some degree of differentiation is needed. Some items are demanded more frequently than others, some may be regarded as more valuable than others. It has not been the purview of technical services staff to select which items should be privileged over others, but rather to implement that privileging for (and only for) the documents designated by the collection developers.

The design of a gopher service provides a simple example. Not all items can be equally accessible at the same, highest hierarchical level. It makes for efficiency if items that will be looked for often are given a privileged place high in the hierarchy of gopher levels. It makes for effectiveness if items we regard as valuable for library users and wish to have seen are placed high in the hierarchy. Other items remain accessible, but can be left in (or presented as if in) deeper, less convenient levels of storage. If book selection is seen as deciding which items to privilege, then the need for those with that ability would appear to increase as a local paper collections diminish relative to networked electronic collections—and the traditional partnership with technical services should be just as tight.⁸

Privileging Networked Resources

What collection developers will do, procedurally, in the future with the new technology can be expected to differ in various ways from what was done in the past with the old technology:

1. Hitherto the privileging of documents has been dominated by a binary division: Items acquired for the local collection and those not acquired or not retained. In the environment of networked resources any such abrupt division seems improbable. A much finer gradation of degrees of accessibility and privileging seems likely.
2. Hitherto all users of a given library have been supplied with one and the same collection. This “one-collection-for-all” approach has been technologically inevitable, but it is Procrustean rather than democratic or egalitarian, since different users have different needs and users are unlikely to be equally well served by what the collection contains or by the way it is arranged. The popularity of branch and departmental libraries arises from their being customized to special needs as well as from geographical convenience. With the new technology, different forms of access (multiple “clients”) can be designed for different interest groups within the local population served.
3. Because of the inherent localness of local collections, collection development work has been specific to each location and has resulted in massive geographical inequalities in library holdings. Library users with similar interests but located at different sites have received radically different service. With the new technology it may well be that the task can and will become more specific to topical areas than to locality, which opens new opportunities for cooperative efforts. Similar forms of access could be shared by those with similar interests but who are at different locations—those in a topical rather than a geographical community.
4. Access and ownership, always separate in principle but hitherto rarely separate in library practice, are expected to diverge in the electronic network environment. One consequence is that “collection development is much less limited to one’s own materials, or that one can “privilege” the materials of others. A second consequence is that users can also do the same, designing ways of privileging materials not belonging to them, thereby providing self-help alternatives to supplement or replace the work of professional collection developers.
5. Because new technology is significantly more flexible than that of paper and cardboard, making multiple alternative approaches more feasible, issues of value and privileging now need to be addressed in more complex ways. Fundamentally, this involves a shift from traditional standardized provision in one or a few ways toward more flexible systems, designed to be adaptive and more responsive to users’ desires to invoke their own preferences in exploring the universe of documents. (This trend is already evident in discussions of online catalog design.⁹)
6. The notion of “materials budget” will evolve. Historically, a component of the cost of making privileged documents more accessible, a different deployment is inevitable if the

Buckland: What will collection developers do? *Information Technology & Libraries*. 1995. 7
traditional purpose is to be sustained in a changed environment.

7. Because the evaluative, privileging role will become a separate task from catering to demand, it can be expected to become a performance with greater visibility and accountability, with interesting consequences for professional behavior and new mechanisms for monitoring the quality of professional performance—as has already happened for catalogers.¹⁰
8. This new need for the evaluative skills of collection developers arises from the emergence of the new environment of networked resources, not from changes in the roles of local collections.

Conclusion

What collection developers will do, depends on how one regards what they do now. At the superficial, procedural level, it seems that there will be a much-reduced need for collection developers. However, if we are to take seriously the purposes underlying the procedures used in the development of local collections, then even though new and different technology brings new and different procedures, the fundamental purposes and the expertise needed for selection (as opposed to acquisition) will remain crucial in providing value judgments to guide those who design network access mechanisms. Thus, in the emerging electronic environment, whatever the fate of local collections, we should expect a fundamental continuity in what collection developers will do.

1References

- . For an excellent analysis of these problems see Clifford A. Lynch, *Accessibility of Networked Information Collections* (Washington, D.C.: United States Congress. Office of Technology Assessment, 1994; BC-TCT-109).
2. For example, Joel S. Rutstein, Anna DeMiller, and Elizabeth A. Fuseler. "Ownership Versus Access: Shifting Perspectives for Libraries," *Advances in Librarianship* 17 (1993): 33-60.
3. Barbara A. Norgard, Michael G. Berger, Michael Buckland, and Christian Plaunt, "The online catalog: From Technical Services to access service," *Advances in Librarianship* 17 (1993): 111-148; Michael Buckland, "From Catalog to Selecting Aid," *ALCTS Newsletter* 5, no. 2 (1994): Insert A-D. ("From Catalog to Gateway: Briefings from the CFFC," 2).
- 4 Michael K. Buckland, "The Roles of Collections and the Scope of Collection Development," *Journal of Documentation* 45 (1989): 213-226.
- 5 Lionel McColvin, *The Theory of Book Selection for Public Libraries* (London: Grafton, 1925), 9. For a convenient summary of McColvin see Robert N. Broadus, *Selecting Materials for Libraries* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1973), chapter 2; for a broader historical background see Rinaldo Lunati, *Book Selection: Principles and Procedures* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1975).
6. McColvin, *Theory*, 37. Emphasis in original.
7. For example, Winston C. Lister, *Least Cost Decision Rules for the Selection of Library Materials for Compact Storage*. Ph.D. dissertation, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, 1967 (ERIC ED 027 916); Richard W. Trueswell, "User Satisfaction vs. Size of Holdings at Three Academic Libraries," *College and Research Libraries* 30 (1969):204-13; Michael K. Buckland, *Book Availability and the Library User* (new York: Pergamon, 1975); Stanley J. Slote, *Weeding Library Collections* (Littleton, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1975); John A. Urquhart and N. C. Urquhart, *Relegation and Stock Control in Libraries* (Stocksfield, United Kingdom: Oriel Press, 1976); Gary S. Lawrence, "A Cost Model for Storage and Weeding Problems," *College and Research Libraries* 42 (1981): 139-47; R. E. Staynor and V. E. Richardson, *The Cost-Effectiveness of Alternative Book Storage Programs* (Clayton, Victoria, Australia: Monash University, School of Librarianship, 1983).
8. Lynch, *Accessibility*, 78-81.
9. For example, Michael K. Buckland, Mark H. Butler, Barbara A. Norgard and Christian Plaunt. "OASIS: A Front-end for Prototyping Catalog Enhancements," *Library Hi Tech* 40 (1992):7-22.
10. Ruth A. Hafter, *Academic Librarians and Cataloging Networks: Visibility, Quality Control, and Professional Status* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1986).