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Redundant Journal Access: Why Pay More than Once?

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I’d like to start this afternoon by sharing a story I heard a couple years ago on the NPR program “This American Life”
You will be hearing from Alex Blumberg, the producer of the program:
Alex Blumberg, “A Little Bit of Knowledge,”
Episode Number 293 (22 July 2005)

• This story illustrates the problems that are inherent in making assumptions
• Assumptions are the biggest challenge facing libraries today
• Alex’s embarrassing experience was based on a set of faulty assumptions
• How many of you attended the North American Serials Interest Group (NASIG) meeting in 2008?
• For those of you that attended, please indulge me as I summarize on of the keynote presentations for the next 4 or 5 minutes
• That presentation, given by Mike Kuniavsky, was, for me, the genesis of the project I will be discussing today
• This summary will be about three-fourths summary and one-fourth my interpretation of his presentation
• So, Mike Kuniavsky spoke at the NASIG 2008 annual conference about ubiquitous computing
• However, he started by analogizing the world of electric motors to the world of computing
• In 1910, “electric motors were expensive, so you bought one for the house and then you bought attachments for it. The motor was a general purpose tool that was adapted as needed.”
• As motors got cheaper, you started having multiple motors in the home
• Instead of an attachment for a fan, you had a fan
• Instead of an attachment to wash clothes, you had a washing machine
• Eventually, we ended up with hyper-specialized electric motors (for example, there are now, on average, 20-30 motors per car)
• This led to many unintended consequences (vacuums -> wall-to-wall carpeting)

• We see the same thing happening with computers today as what happened with electric motors at the turn of the century
• We have entered the 3rd stage of computing (mainframe -> desktop -> ubiquitous computing)
• The phrase ubiquitous computing was phrased in 1988 by Mark Weiser
• He describes it as follows:
“The most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable from it.”

Mark Weiser

- The most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable from it.
- Just like hyper-specialization of the electric motor led to some interesting changes, so will ubiquitous computing
- Mike Kuniavsky continued by saying the following:
“Ubiquitous computing gives us tools to track, trade and share objects much more efficiently than any previous technology.”

Mike Kuniavsky
NASIG 2008 Annual Conference

- Ubiquitous computing gives us tools to track, trade and share objects much more efficiently than any previous technology.
- What does this mean in real terms?
- Here are just a few real world examples:
You are all familiar with Netflix

Ubiquitous computing has led to a tracking system that allows for cheap and easy movie rentals and, now, even movie streaming

This model is challenging the way we think about ownership of movies

Why would you need to own a movie when you can just stream a movie straight to your TV anytime you want to watch it (you don’t even need to get out of our chair to put in the DVD)

Here’s another example:
Another example is ZipCar – rent a car anytime you need one
This is a very different idea of ownership than what we are used to
Mike described it as living in a world where everything has dotted lines around it
Instead of owning a car, you own the right to use a car

The idea of subscribing to something instead of owning it is, of course, nothing new to librarians
We have dealt with serials and aggregators for many years now
However, with the advent of ubiquitous computing, the possibilities for what we can have access to without having ownership are almost endless
It was not financially feasible to do this even just a few years ago, however, today we can get access to entire libraries
In the past, the words access and ownership were synonymous in the library world – those two terms were inextricably entwined.

There was no way for librarians to provide access without owning the material.

Interlibrary loan changed that to a certain extent.

However, it has only been since the advent of ubiquitous computing and the network that access and ownership have been truly decoupled.

Going back to Alex Blumberg and his assumptions about Nielsen families, the **biggest** assumption librarians are now questioning is that we must own content in order to provide research-quality resources.

Just how far will this idea go?
• How many resources are really so critical to a research library's mission that we **must** own them?
• And how many of our resources would it be okay for us to just have access to them?
In other words, the big question is ownership vs...
access
• There is no one-size-fits-all answer
• However, access, rather than ownership, may be the best answer in many cases in the future
• Finding the optimal mix (the right answer) all depends on where we are willing to see dotted lines in our world
• But most of all, it depends on how willing we are to go back to the assumptions we made about Nielsen families as a kid and really start to question them

• So, it was with these ideas in mind that I created a tool to help our library analyze the overlap we had in our journal collection
• I should probably start with a brief background so you know what type of institution Brigham Young University is
BYU is an ARL library with an FTE of about 30,000.

Our serials budget is around 5 million dollars.

Our serials have traditionally been paid out of a common pot of money.

Our collection development coordinator, with the help of subject librarians, is the one that determines the distribution of that pot of money.

As might be predicted, this lead to a "Tragedy of the Commons" problem and has created some inefficiencies in the way the serials budget is handled.

The other problem with our serials is that many librarians have not traditionally viewed library databases as an actual part of our collection.

Sure, they are a nice addition, but they are not the collection.

This has started to change over the last few years and has allowed us to move forward with a project like this.
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So I keep mentioning this project, I should probably give a brief description of the purpose of this project:

Like all libraries, we have access to many of our journals in multiple formats. We subscribe to some titles in both print and electronic formats and then, we also have access available to us through library databases and aggregators. We wanted to eliminate this overlap by looking at where and how we had access to all our journals. For this project to be successful, we needed to have all of the following information:

1. Price/Budget information - how much were we paying for access to these various journals and what budget were they being paid from?
2. Usage information - how much were the electronic and print versions of our journals being used?
3. Overlap information - where each journal was accessible to our patrons and what were the dates of coverage?
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• I will spend the next few minutes describing where I got this information from and then talk about how I used that information
• First, I needed to have a list of journals that our library paid for individually (this included some that were purchased as packages such as Elsevier or Wiley, but the point is that we needed a list of titles for which we received itemized invoices for which Elsevier and Wiley both provided for us)
• The easiest place to get this information was our ILS system
• After talking to our database administrator, he was able to generate a report from our system that included all the titles we paid for, along with how much we paid, what budget it came out of and the ISSN of the titles
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COUNTER Usage Reports
ScholarlyStats, Vendor-direct and In-house usage
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Overlap

Link Resolver
SFX
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The Tool

Magic
PHP Scripts and MySQL Database
2008 Journal Overlap

- Albert Winkler
- Andy Spackman
- Barbaraella Frazier
- Betsy Hopkins
- Brian Champion
- Chris Ramsey
- Connie Lamb
- David Day
- Gail King
- Greg Nelson
- Howard Bybee
- John Christensen
- Julie Williamson
- Kathy Johansen
- Lety Camacho
- Mark Grover
- Marsha Broadway
- Michael Whitchurch
- Peter Zuber
- Rachel Wadham
- Ranny Lacanienta
- Richard Hacken
- Richard Jensen
- Robert Maxwell
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- Thom Edlund
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Total Usage 67
Results

Over 3% in cuts
Results

$164,000 in savings

- These are savings without losing access to content
- From the patron’s point of view, we are providing the same level of service
- We are just doing it much more cheaply
Future Projects

No Overlap
leave no money on the table
Questions?

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