Single, Separate, or Something in between:
Results of a Survey on Representing Electronic Serials in the Catalog

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ABSTRACT
Binghamton University Libraries have used a single record to catalog both print and electronic serials for many years. Proliferation of access to electronic serials has caused the Libraries to consider whether their current cataloging model is the best way to present electronic serial holdings to patrons. In order to assist with the decision whether to change current practice and, if so, what changes to make, the author undertook a survey of current practice and perceptions regarding electronic serial record displays in the library catalog. This article describes current cataloging practice at Binghamton University, outlines the survey methodology, and presents and discusses the results of the survey.

KEYWORDS: cataloging, electronic serials, electronic journals, e-journals, single or separate records

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Introduction

Binghamton University Libraries have used a single record to catalog both print and electronic serials for many years. (Hereafter "electronic serials," "electronic journals," and "e-journals" are used interchangeably.) When the Binghamton University Libraries gain electronic access to a serial title, a record for the corresponding print serial often exists in the catalog already; in such cases the existing record is used to provide descriptive information and access to the electronic serial. If there is no record for the print version in the catalog, a record for the electronic version is imported or created. Cataloging is performed only in cases where the Libraries have subscribed to the specific title individually or as part of a package; titles available through aggregator databases are not cataloged.

As the number of electronic journals available to the Libraries has proliferated and electronic has become the preferred format for most patrons, cataloging all serials to which the library has access has become increasingly desirable and necessary. In the present circumstances, an electronic journal web page (generated through a third party electronic journal management provider) constitutes the only complete list of electronic serials available to patrons. Since print serials are not included in that list, patrons must check at least two places, the e-journal list and the catalog, to determine whether the Libraries own or have access to the content they seek. It is not uncommon for patrons to check *either* the e-journal list *or* the catalog and submit interlibrary loan requests for items that would have been found by searching in both places.

The most likely scenario for adding titles from aggregator databases to the catalog is for the Libraries to start using MARC records from their electronic journal

management service. This, in turn, means that the Libraries are giving serious thought to switching from a single-record cataloging approach to a separate-record approach in which the Libraries would maintain their own catalog records for print serials, but import separate records for each electronic serial. In cases where an electronic serial is available through more than one provider, multiple access points would be included on one bibliographic record, so that in most cases there would be no more than two records for each title.

In order to assist with the decision regarding whether to change current practice and, if so, what changes to make, the author undertook a survey of current library practice and perceptions regarding catalog displays for electronic serials.

Literature Review

The complexities of locating and interpreting libraries' serial holdings are not limited to electronic serials or online catalogs. Kathy Fescemyer discusses problems associated with one-word serial titles and points to several studies concerned with locating serials in the card catalog and locating print serials using the online catalog.[i] Patricia M. Wallace reports on a survey of serial holdings data and the pros and cons associated with summary holdings statements.[ii]

Several authors have examined the specific question of single or separate records for print and electronic serials. Vinh-The Lam takes a broad look at the challenges of providing access to electronic serials.[iii] In addition to outlining issues associated with descriptive cataloging, Lam delineates pros and cons of the single- and separate-record approaches. Wayne Morris and Lynda Thomas outline their rationale for using separate records for every version of a serial.[iv] Mary Curran reflects on the question of whether to

switch from single to separate records at her institution, along the way referencing several relevant task forces and initiatives.[v] Vera Giles examines pros and cons of single and multiple records and concludes that the overall catalog interface is more important to the user than which type of record is used.[vi] Finally, Barbara Dunham explores the feasibility of linking records together for display purposes, potentially mitigating some of the concerns associated with using separate records.[vii]

Electronic journal management tools facilitate access to e-journals outside the catalog, but often provide a MARC record service as well. Jim Cole reflects on the use of e-journal lists in place of catalog records and the more limited access points that such tools generally afford.[viii] Peter McCracken discusses one vendor's approach to providing MARC records and outlines challenges associated with such a service.[ix] Maria Collins explores areas of change in serials cataloging brought about in part by the use of e-journal management tools.[x]

Access to serials in aggregator databases is a special concern, since it is often these titles that are the most dynamic and that add the most to the workload associated with electronic journal cataloging. Yiu-On Li and Shirley W. Leung discuss the experience of integrating e-journal cataloging records for aggregator databases into the catalog at Hong Kong Baptist University.[xi] Likewise Jina Choi Wakimoto describes adding vendor-supplied MARC records to the catalog at California State University Northridge.[xii] A companion article by Charity K. Martin and Paul S. Hoffman in the same journal issue reports on the results of a survey on the same topic.[xiii]

Methodology

In order to assist the Libraries' decision making about possible changes to their electronic serials cataloging practices, the author queried several discussion lists about other libraries' practices and perceptions. After receiving a handful of replies, she decided to conduct a more thorough survey on the topic. The survey was distributed to 11 discussion lists based in the United States and United Kingdom.[xiv] List scope fell into three broad areas: general interest, technical services, and public services. The survey, created and disseminated using SurveyMonkey, was made available for 12 days from the date of posting.[xv]

17 survey questions were developed to address both library practices and perceptions of librarian and patron satisfaction. The survey also included seven questions about respondents' demographic information. In order to comply with institutional regulations regarding human subjects research, all questions in the survey were optional.

Results

480 responses were collected during the open response period. 84 responses were considered to be incomplete based on the fact that respondents answered only the two questions on the first screen of the survey, leaving 396 responses to be analyzed.

Of respondents who chose to answer demographic questions (344 answered at least one), 85% reported working in an academic library and 79% reported their libraries to be in the United States. Over half (57%) indicated that their job responsibilities include electronic resource management; other most frequently checked areas of responsibility were cataloging (54%), serials (50%), collection development (40%) and reference (36%).

Most respondents (331 or 84%) reported that their institutions catalog at least some electronic serials. Of those, 51% use a single record for both print and electronic and 45% use separate records, with 13% reporting use of both a single record and two separate records. Another 10% use one record for the print version and multiple separate records for electronic versions. Those using a single record report usability of the public display and quality of patron experience as the two most common factors influencing their practice, but a plurality (35%) indicate that only 1-25% of e-serials are represented in the catalog. This is in contrast to respondents who use separate records, 68% of whom report that 76-100% of their e-serials are represented in the catalog. Those using separate records are much more likely to cite compliance with cataloging standards as a reason for their choice (54 % of those using separate records vs. 32% of those using a single record) and most frequently cite staff workload as the reason for their current practice, followed by usability of the public display.

Of the 64 respondents (16%) who reported not cataloging any electronic serials, responses showed a slight preference for using two separate records over a single record for print and electronic serials (48% and 42% considering or definitely planning to use each respectively). Only 17% indicated that they were considering one record for print serials and multiple separate records for electronic serials, and no one reported definite plans to do so. 28% of respondents were not considering any of the three choices offered, for reasons overwhelmingly related to staff workload; two commented that they use an electronic journal web page as *the* access point for electronic journals. In all cases, staff workload was most frequently cited as a reason for the approaches under consideration,

followed closely by staff workflows and the usability of the public display. Compliance with cataloging standards was cited by only 28%.

Overall, most respondents expressed satisfaction with the percentage of electronic serials represented in the catalog (228 or 66% of those responding chose very satisfied or somewhat satisfied); although they expressed less satisfaction with other aspects of e-journal cataloging, especially staff workload, overall satisfaction with current practice stood at 67%. Those using separate records reported higher satisfaction with the percentage of electronic serials represented in the catalog, staff cataloging workflows, compliance with cataloging standards, and staff workload; those using a single record reported more satisfaction with usability of the public catalog display and the quality of patrons' experience. Overall, however, the difference in satisfaction was slight: 74% of those using separate records and 71% of those using a single record were very or somewhat satisfied with their libraries' current practice. Perceptions of patron satisfaction were slightly lower, with 68% of those using a single record and 66% of those using separate records reporting that patrons were very or somewhat satisfied with current practice.

Striking differences were found between those who reported job responsibilities in reference or instruction, but not serials or cataloging, and vice versa. Overall satisfaction among reference and instruction respondents was 60% as compared with 72% for serials and cataloging. However, satisfaction dropped to 47% among reference and instruction staff who did not report doing serials or cataloging work, while satisfaction among serialists or catalogers who did not report reference or instruction duties was almost unchanged (73%). Perceived patron satisfaction was higher among

serials and cataloging staff (66%) than reference and instruction staff (57%), and this gap also widened among respondents who worked in serials or cataloging but not in reference or instruction (71%) as opposed to those who worked in reference or instruction but not in serials or cataloging (52%).

Discussion and Conclusion

The close division between the use of single records and the use of separate records suggests that, at least among academic libraries in the United States, there is no consensus regarding the best approach to take when cataloging electronic serials. This finding is in keeping with anecdotal evidence from conversations among Binghamton librarians before the survey was conducted and many e-mails from discussion list subscribers expressing interest in the survey results. There are tradeoffs associated with both a single record and separate records. Using separate records may increase the number of titles available via the catalog and alleviate and simplify the work associated with cataloging them; on the other hand, using a single record may increase the usability of the catalog and cause less confusion in interpreting the display. Many survey comments explained the intricacies of institutional practice, but few if any commenters expressed unreserved enthusiasm for their approach.

Perhaps the most interesting result of the survey is the gap between staff in what have traditionally been called technical services and public services. Overall high levels of satisfaction with both single and separate records initially mask this gap. The respective satisfaction levels suggest that increasing cross-departmental communication and possibly cross training would be beneficial before deciding on a course for handling electronic serials access. Those directly involved with getting electronic serials into the

catalog may be more satisfied because they know how much work it was to arrive at the current state of affairs, whatever it may be; those working directly with patrons may be less satisfied because they know how much could be improved.

One commonality among a variety of respondents was recognition that, no matter how electronic serials are cataloged, many patrons are not using the catalog in any case. As one serialist wrote, "We are beginning to accept that the OPAC is no longer the center of the universe. Most patrons access ejournals via our A-Z list or Google Scholar." Standing in contrast was a hope that some kind of clustering, through use of the FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records[xvi]) model or some way of linking records, would significantly improve the catalog display and bring patrons back. User studies and user-centered catalog design would be an important step in this process.

Finally, among respondents who matched Binghamton University's demographics, 61% reported using a single record, but over a third were considering separate records. No one was considering a switch in the other direction and overall satisfaction with current practice was relatively low, at 56%, even though the amount of content in the catalog was relatively high (61% said they have 76-100% of electronic serials cataloged). At the time of this writing, Binghamton is still considering its options, but has contracted with its electronic journal management service for full MARC records, making a final decision to switch to separate records very likely in the near future.

Acknowledgement

[ii] Kathy Fescemyer, "Serials Clutter in Online Catalogs," *Serials Review* 31, no. 1 (March 2005): 14-19.

[ii] Patricia M. Wallace, "Serials Holding Statements: A Necessity or a Nuisance?" *Technical Services Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1997): 11-24.

[iii] Vinh-The Lam, "Organizational and Technical Issues in Providing Access to Electronic Journals," *The Serials Librarian* 39, no. 3 (2001): 25-34.

[iv] Wayne Morris and Lynda Thomas, "Single or Separate OPAC Records for E-Journals: The Glamorgan Perspective," *The Serials Librarian* 41, no. 3/4 (2002): 97-109.

[v] Mary Curran, "Separate or Single: That Is the Question," *The Serials Librarian* 49, no. 4 (2006): 31-38.

[vi] Vera Giles, "Single or Multiple Records for Print and Electronic Serials Titles: When Less Is More (More or Less)" *The Serials Librarian* 45, no. 1 (2003): 35-45.

[vii] Barbara Dunham, "Different Formats: Linking Serial Titles for Display Through Bibliographic Relationships. Is It Possible?" *Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 3-17.

[viii] Jim Cole, "Impacts of the Abandonment of Catalog Records for Electronic Serials," *The Serials Librarian* 45, no. 1 (2003): 27-33.

[ix] Peter McCracken, "Beyond Title Lists: Incorporating Ejournals into the OPAC," *The Serials Librarian* 45, no. 1 (2003): 101-108.

[x] Maria Collins, "The Effects of E-journal Management Tools and Services on Serials Cataloging," *Serials Review* 31, no. 4 (December 2005): 291-297.

[xi] Yiu-On Li and Shirley W. Leung, "Computer Cataloging of Electronic Journals in Unstable Aggregator Databases," *Library Resources and Technical Services* 45, no. 4 (October 2001): 198-211.

[xii] Jina Choi Wakimoto, "Utilization of a Set of Vendor-Supplied MARC Records to Provide Access to Journals in an Aggregator Database," *The Serials Librarian* 43, no. 1 (2002): 79-95.

[xiii] Charity K. Martin and Paul S. Hoffman, "Do We Catalog or Not? How Research Libraries Provide Bibliographic Access to Electronic Journals in Aggregated Databases," *The Serials Librarian* 43, no. 1 (2002): 61-77.

[xiv] SERIALST (serials processing), ERIL-L (electronic resource management), SERIALSSOLUTIONSUSERS (users of any Serials Solutions product), PACS-L (end-user library computing), USABILITY4LIB (applying usability to libraries), LIS-SERIALS (serials processing), LIS-LINK (general library list), STS-L (science and technology librarians), LIBREF-L (reference), ILI-L (instruction and information literacy), AUTOCAT (cataloging)

[xv] http://www.surveymonkey.com

[xv] See http://www.frbr.org for information and news about FRBR

Table 1. Factors influencing the plans of institutions who do not currently catalog electronic serials

Factor	No.	%
Staff workload	47	73.4
Staff workflows	36	56.3
Usability of public display	35	54.7
Quality of patron experience	30	46.9
Amount of content represented in the catalog	25	39.1
Compliance with cataloging standards	18	28.1
Other	13	20.3
Difficulty of changing practice	7	10.9

n=64 (respondents)

Table 2. Factors influencing the current practice of institutions who currently catalog electronic serials

Factor	No.	%
Usability of public display	207	62.5

Quality of patron experience	184	55.6
Staff workload	179	54.1
Staff workflows	177	53.5
Amount of content represented in the catalog	177	53.5
Compliance with cataloging standards	132	39.9
Difficulty of changing practice	70	21.1

n=319 (respondents)

Table 3. Institutional approaches to cataloging print and electronic serials

Approach	Past practice	Current practice	Under consideration	Definite plans to use
A single record for both print and electronic	35.5% (116)	51.4% (168)	6.7% (22)	1.8% (6)
One record for print and one separate record for electronic	15.9% (52)	45.0% (147)	7.3% (24)	1.5% (5)
One separate record for print and multiple separate records for electronic	7.6% (25)	10.4% (34)	3.4% (11)	0.0% (0)
Other	1.2% (4)	4.9% (16)	1.5% (5)	0.6% (2)

n=327 (respondents)

Table 4. Respondent satisfaction with current practice

Factor	No.	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Not applicable
Percentage of electronic serials represented in the catalog	348	36.8% (128)	28.7% (100)	14.9% (52)	16.4% (57)	3.2% (11)
Staff cataloging workflows	343	21.3% (73)	41.1% (141)	21.3% (73)	8.5% (29)	7.9.% (27)
Usability of public catalog display	344	17.7% (61)	42.2% (145)	23.5% (81)	14.8% (51)	1.7% (6)
Compliance with cataloging standards	340	27.1% (92)	43.8% (149)	15.9% (54)	4.1% (14)	9.1% (31)
Staff workload	342	18.7% (64)	36.0% (123)	27.8% (95)	11.7% (40)	5.8% (20)
Quality of patron experience	345	17.7% (61)	39.1% (135)	28.4% (98)	13.3% (46)	1.4% (5)

Factor	No.	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Not applicable
Overall current practice	337	20.5% (69)	46.6% (157)	24.3% (82)	8.0% (27)	0.6% (2)

n=349 (respondents)

Table 5. Perceived levels of satisfaction with current practice of library staff who catalog serials

Factor	No.	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Not applicable
Percentage of electronic serials represented in the catalog	332	34.3% (114)	32.2% (107)	14.2% (47)	11.4% (38)	7.8% (26)
Staff cataloging workflows	331	19.0% (63)	45.0% (149)	20.5% (68)	9.4% (31)	6.0% (20)
Usability of public catalog display	327	18.3% (60)	46.2% (151)	18.0% (59)	7.6% (25)	9.8% (32)
Compliance with cataloging standards	325	22.8% (74)	47.1% (153)	16.6% (54)	4.3% (14)	9.2% (30)
Staff workload	328	17.7% (58)	37.2% (122)	26.8% (88)	11.9% (39)	6.4% (21)
Quality of patron experience	327	17.7% (58)	46.5% (152)	16.5% (54)	7.3% (24)	11.9% (39)
Overall current practice	316	18.0% (57)	51.3% (162)	18.0% (57)	7.3% (23)	5.4% (17)

n=333 (respondents)

Table 6. Perceived levels of satisfaction with current practice of library staff who work directly with patrons

Factor	No.	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Not applicable
Percentage of electronic serials represented in the catalog	333	28.2% (94)	31.8% (106)	22.5% (75)	12.6% (42)	4.8% (16)
Staff cataloging workflows	323	12.4% (40)	30.3% (98)	11.5% (37)	4.0% (13)	41.8% (135)
Usability of public catalog display	328	14.9% (49)	36.9% (121)	30.5% (100)	12.8% (42)	4.9% (16)

Compliance with cataloging standards	317	14.8% (47)	28.4% (90)	10.4% (33)	3.2% (10)	43.2% (137)
Staff workload	320	11.9% (38)	29.7% (95)	15.6% (50)	5.9% (19)	36.9% (118)
Quality of patron experience	328	14.6% (48)	41.2% (135)	28.7% (94)	11.9% (39)	3.7% (12)
Overall current practice	316	14.2% (45)	47.2% (149)	26.6% (84)	9.2% (29)	2.8% (9)

n=335 (respondents)

Table 7. Perceived levels of satisfaction with current practice of library patrons

Factor	No.	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Not applicable
Percentage of electronic serials represented in the catalog	330	27.6% (91)	34.8% (115)	23.6% (78)	6.4% (21)	7.6% (25)
Usability of public catalog display	330	12.1% (40)	46.4% (153)	27.9% (92)	10.3% (34)	3.3% (11)
Quality of patron experience	327	12.5% (41)	53.2% (174)	24.2% (79)	7.3% (24)	2.8% (9)
Overall current practice	318	13.5% (43)	51.3% (163)	24.8% (79)	7.7% (25)	2.5% (8)

n=333 (respondents)