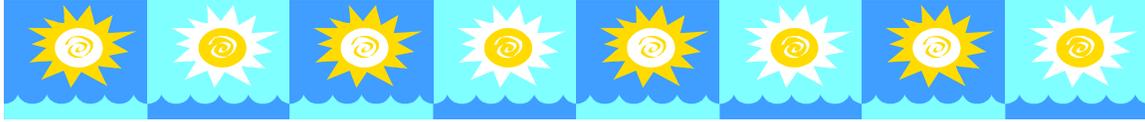# How to Make Decisions Regarding Database Subscriptions

So, how do I make decisions/recommendations about database subscriptions for the Library? Well, I ask myself the following questions:

1. **Will they provide us with a trial version?** If not, I'm far, far less likely to recommend we purchase it. A description isn't enough; we need time for our patrons and staff to test it out before we make a financial commitment.
2. **What is the return on investment?** A product can be really expensive, but if it's used a lot, it's worth it. I keep statistics on usage and compare that to cost to get a cost-per-visit calculation.
3. **What kind of support is available?** I don't have time to write or read extensive and multiple manuals, nor do I have time to make animated tutorials. If a company supplies them as part of the subscription (and they're good), I'm far more likely to buy their products.
4. **What will be the impact on the institution?** For example, we are more likely to spend more on a product that will help our College deliver important programming, be certified, or have courses as university-transferable, even if the cost-per-visit is higher than normal.
5. **Is the product actually useable?** I don't care if it has the content we need, if even the Library Staff can't use it, let alone the patron, we don't get it or keep it. We recently cancelled a subscription to a database that was seen as "important" because even the Professors in that subject area complained that they couldn't figure out how to use it so the importance was lowered by this difficulty in use.
6. **What is the cost over the long term?** Sometimes, it's good to pay on a yearly subscription. Sometimes, it's a big disaster to pay on a yearly subscription. It all matters whether or not the product is being constantly updated and that constant updated gives value to the product. If not, if it's a static product, it makes more sense to pay a one-time fee. It's important not to be suckered in by the lowest price.
7. **How easy is it to manage the database and subscription?** Nothing drives me crazier than persistent links... that aren't persistent! Even crazier are those companies out there that don't make it easy to renew your subscription. I've even had experiences with companies that cut

you off and then wonder why you want to give them money to continue connecting. What kind of business model are they operating on? Besides, don't they know their clientele are overworked librarians and if you make it easier for them, they're more likely to stay as your clients?

8. **How easy is it to share information with my co-workers?** I can't always be around to know everything and there needs to be succession and disaster planning. A software company that keeps records of our relationship with them, and even things like the "key" or "licensing agreement," are more likely to get my endorsement.

9. **What do the clients want?** I'd like to say this was my number one deciding factor, but we have a limited budget and sometimes the clients don't know what they want. One way I've found to get around this problem is sometimes I've chosen to recommend an index version of a database that I think people would want, instead of the full-text, and watched what happened. While I'd love if everything we offered was full-text, it's just not in the budget. So, by at least providing the cheaper index version, our students know what is out there and can request interlibrary loans. And if the demand becomes too high, it is clear that it's time to buy the full-text version.

10. **Is it easy for patrons to request interlibrary loans?** Over the last few years, several of the database licenses we're purchased through our consortium have included a feature called GODOT that will search the other databases to check if the article is full-text, if the article is actually in print on our shelves, and if neither is available, prompt the student to make an ILL request online. I love this feature, both as a student as a librarian!! It makes those index-only databases a viable solution for those times that we can't afford the full-text version. And if this feature isn't available, can the student easily print the screen, download the citation, or email it to themselves to take away with them to find the article? Why is it so hard for companies to add this feature to their products?

cost-per-visit is actually misleading; I just say that because it's easier to use that term to sum up a variety of calculations. It's actually a combination of cost-per-search, cost-per-viewing-abstracts, and cost-per-viewing-full-text articles.