

Academic BRASS

Published by the
BRASS Business Reference in Academic Libraries Committee

Vol 4(1), Spring 2009

Van Houlson
Business and Journalism Librarian
University of Minnesota Libraries

Budget Reductions

As academic libraries begin planning for reduced budgets, collection managers must assume reductions as well. Perhaps you have already been given estimated reductions for your collection next year. If not, consider planning ahead for scenarios involving reductions ranging from 5% to 15%. At the University of Minnesota, our collection managers are planning for scenarios of 8% and 12% less funding for collections. Depending on your priorities and stakeholders, there are options to consider in how to balance expenditures among books, serials, and databases.

Expensive business databases are usually the first targets for cancellation, even though they are the most heavily used and important resources. Even if your library tracks usage statistics, you can always contact your sales representative to obtain the number of visits, downloads or monthly traffic patterns. If your business databases are bundled with other electronic resources collection that support the library, managers will generally agree to cancel high cost databases with low usage statistics and usage statistics can protect popular business databases.

Even when electronic collections have good usage statistics, duplication does exist among article indexes, full text news sources, directories, and sources of company financial information. Some combination is essential but reducing overlap is a reasonable strategy during a budget crisis. A business article index that covers trade literature and academic journals is essential. Article databases that include full text and contain reports for companies, products, and country analysis will add tremendous value. Newspaper databases are immensely useful for business research but databases that provide full text trade literature and news are comparable enough to satisfy most coverage of companies and products. Full text access to key business publications may be the ultimate factor in deciding which article databases to retain.

Financial information services and company directories also overlap. For research institutions, financial information about large public firms and private firms is increasingly important. Subscriptions to corporate information sources, despite their high cost and difficult licensing, may be more valuable than databases from library vendors that provide less international

coverage. Those with historical statistics are important for graduate and faculty research. Company directories now provide similar information about subsidiaries and divisions. Comprehensive directories may seem the most practical to retain, but if you ask program staff or faculty at your business school, they will likely prefer selective directories that focus on large firms. Since company directories are comparable, price may be the deciding factor.

Sources of industry and market research often serve different audiences. Industry databases that cover more specific segments are heavily used by students for assignments. Source that track major major industries and provide information on leading companies and financial performance are needed by graduate students and faculty researchers. Like sources of security analyst reports, retaining industry reports should be a high priority. Marketing databases are wildly popular for class assignments but expensive subscriptions to international sources of economic and demographic information may be less useful.

If you are sharing the cost of subscriptions with business departments, your options may be limited since specialized databases support key research, like those information on mergers and acquisitions. Even if usage statistics are not great, expectations of research faculty will carry more weight than instructional needs. Changes to subscriptions to be discussed and may need to postponed. Being locked into multi-year contracts will reduce your options for the next budget cycle.

Expensive journals that faculty insist on having may trump how your collection budget is spent. For libraries that negotiate big contracts with publishers, cancelling journals is disruptive and always sensitive. Consider journals or microfilm news subscriptions where the content is being provided in full text article databases. Your library may also subscribe to expensive journals that are no longer used. It is not uncommon for active researchers to request titles and then depart from the institution. The cost of these journals might be shared or picked up by another fund or simply cancelled. For example, a journal in operations research that is no longer of interest to business faculty may be getting used by the engineering program. If your journal cancellations must be submitted far in advance, share the list of current subscriptions. You may be surprised which ones they will identify that can be cancelled.

As online versions of classic print reference titles become more costly, choosing the less expensive print reference titles would seem to be one way to reduce your budget. Unfortunately, even the best business reference title gets little use in academic libraries. Print titles may still need to be kept for historical information, but reference staff need to be realistic about expensive print directories for brands, media, companies, and other organizations. If publishers offer archived versions, there will always be the possibility of purchasing these in the future.

Given the popularity of business databases and the politics of journal cancellations, shifting funds away from books would seem a prudent strategy with the least impact. Unfortunately, book funds do not represent a large portion of your collection budget. If your approval plan or book funds have grown in recent years, fewer scholarly books will have the least impact. Students and instructors seem to gravitate toward less expensive professional literature.

Libraries with substantial budgets for approval plans can modify their profiles and screen out expensive publishers and or manually select new books for particular call number ranges. Books in economics, for example, are prolific and each year repetitive titles are published on leadership, innovation, and popular topics.

So which funds would likely used the most to meet the targeted reduction? Below are some percentages being proposed in my library to make up the total amount needed to cover a reduction in the budget for social sciences.

Databases 42%
Books 32%
Serials 22%
Binding 2%
Contingency 2%
Total 100%

If you have collection funds for contingency or binding, these can be part of your overall strategy. But for our library, reducing the book budgets along with database and journal cancellations will be needed.