Fundamentals of Electronic Resources Management

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Preface

This book aims to provide both new and seasoned information professionals with a practical foundation for electronic resources management: how it came to be, where it is today, essential tools needed to get the job done, and expectations for the future. You can anticipate an overview of the essential concepts, processes, and concerns associated with electronic resources management.

Electronic resources and their management are dynamic and ever-changing. We encourage you to consult the further readings included at the end of each chapter for historical information and context. For the most up-to-date practices, you can look to sources such as the *Journal of Electronic Resources Management*, the Electronic Resources in Libraries (ERIL) listserv, and the Electronic Resources and Libraries (ER&L) Conference.

In this book, you will be presented with scenarios that apply to the management of electronic resources. Keep in mind that the relevance of specific workflow processes will depend on the type of library, local mission, institutional goals, and library staffing and structure. Every library is unique, and an important aspect of starting in any new job or field is adapting to local processes and culture. This book aims to set the groundwork for the concepts behind workflows and the interconnection between workflows and systems.

In the world of electronic resources, librarians and their vendors use a plethora of acronyms and jargon. In this book acronyms and jargon are used as they are on the job, because the proper use of terminology—no matter how esoteric—is essential for successful communication. Some acronyms and jargon may be familiar to readers with a background in library science—such as
“MARC” and “OCLC”—while other terms may be entirely new due to their specificity to electronic resources. Readers are encouraged to consult the glossary at the end of the book for additional definitions, context, and related terms. Glossary terms are bold-faced when first used in the text of each chapter.

Finally, if you are reading this book and are new to the library profession—we welcome you! Whether you have decided to pursue electronic resources or simply are exploring the profession more broadly, this book will have something for you. Information and concepts build on each other, especially in the field of electronic resources. With that said, take in the whole book at once, or pick a chapter and skip around. One word of advice, though it may be cliché: the best way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time. Expertise comes with time, and masters of any field will tell you the same. We are glad you’re here, and don’t hesitate to reach out to other information professionals for help, advice, and questions.
Getting Your Feet Wet

A Background in Electronic Resources Management

Electronic Resources Management (ERM) refers to the processes associated with the acquisition and maintenance of library resources in electronic format. The last two decades have seen increased user expectations for immediate anytime anywhere access to information because of the enhanced availability of information on the Open Web. Libraries are acquiring more and more electronic resources, and as a result there is increasing demand for competent professionals to manage these resources.

Electronic resources involve new and, at times complex, acquisition models. For example, print resources are purchased outright, claimed, processed, and placed on a shelf for patron use, whereas electronic resources have individual

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• Education and Training
• The Role of the Electronic Resources Librarian within the Organization
• Electronic Resources Lifecycle and Workflows
• Electronic Resources in the Modern Library
• Wrap-Up and Where to Go Next
**license agreements** that govern how and when a resource is used, and once processed, they are visible only when discovered through the library’s catalog systems. Electronic resources librarians need to understand some degree of legalese—beyond copyright law—to successfully negotiate license agreements that will allow access for users. Further, electronic resources affect nearly every library department because they are used by nearly every library patron, so it is important that electronic resources librarians translate jargon to public services staff and patrons alike. Therefore, to be successful electronic resources librarians should have excellent communication skills. They need to know not only whom to contact and what to ask, but also how to answer a complex array of questions from other librarians as well as end-users.

Today’s electronic resources librarian works in an ever-evolving field, where workflows, tools, and technologies require not only technical know-how, but also creativity and flexibility. Perhaps not surprisingly, the evolving nature of the format requires that electronic resources librarians continually update, revise, and scale their workflows from acquisitions and implementation to access and discovery. As a result, electronic resources have spurred fundamental questions about the future of library collections, such as:

- What is the future of the library without, potentially, a physical collection?
- How do electronic resources serve our patrons’ needs today?
- How can we ensure that today’s electronic resources support the needs of our patrons in the future?
- Is the library constantly playing catch-up with the evolving field, or are there opportunities to advocate for local needs to influence change?

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**Acronyms and Jargon Defined**

Throughout this book acronyms and jargon are used as they are on the job. Understanding terminology used by both internal and external peers will be essential for success. Look out for boldfaced terms and be sure to flip back to the glossary for a refresher on new or unfamiliar acronyms and jargon! For a full list of jargon and acronyms defined, see the glossary.
The concepts behind these questions are truly expansive, but should not be a deterrent to embarking into the field. Electronic resources management is a rewarding and stimulating career option for librarians and information professionals interested in collaborative problem-solving and new technology, and for anyone with an inclination toward life-long learning.

The Landscape of Electronic Resources

In the days before the World Wide Web, Dialog Information Systems offered users the ability to broadly search multiple indexed databases from file servers. Though Dialog may be a thing of the past, such functionality may sound similar to today’s discovery interfaces, such as Summon, EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS), and even Google Scholar. Today’s patrons would likely find Dialog unrecognizable, clunky, and unintuitive, especially now that patrons have begun to access information resources using mobile devices. Whether library users are inclined to use smartphones to access library resources, the ability to do so has an effect not only on how a library presents itself and markets its resources, but also how publishers and vendors design their platforms and databases for information retrieval. Electronic resources are here to stay, and as their technologies continue to change and improve, so will the technical specifications for access.

Library acquisition budgets increasingly allocate more funds to electronic resources than to print materials, yet many libraries still struggle to keep up with the services and infrastructure needed for consistent, effective, and scalable electronic resource management. The reason for this disconnect can be found in the history of library collection practices: library structures were initially developed to meet the demands of print materials, which involved linear workflows for items that moved physically from one workflow stage to the next. Electronic resources defy that traditional linear path, however, by moving through cyclical stages as intangible, digital objects, which is commonly referred to as the electronic resources lifecycle. Lifecycles vary from resource to resource and are comprised of repetitive stages that are not always obvious (see figure 1.1). Because electronic resources are not physically shipped and delivered, there is not an absolute marker to trigger workflows and thus more proactive, anticipatory management is needed.

Driven by the complicated nature of electronic resource renewals, libraries are continually adapting and revising management techniques. For
instance, at the 2015 Electronic Resources and Libraries (ER&L) Conference, librarians from the Newman Library at Baruch College (CUNY) presented their analysis of local internal workflows for electronic resources, which uncovered a good deal of inefficiency and redundancy—mostly related to passing information to relevant parties via email—in day-to-day processes. These kinds of workflow analyses are crucial to electronic resources management, because workflows need to be continually updated, reviewed, and revised in order to keep up with the evolving market. Such analyses can also be a great way to determine whether there is need for additional staff, staff training, or enhanced workflow software.

Modern libraries have always had some means of automating their internal workflows. The Integrated Library System (ILS) first appeared in libraries around 1970 and was designed to facilitate print acquisitions and discovery. For this reason, present-day functionality of the ILS generally falls short of meeting the nuanced demands of the electronic resources lifecycle. As a solution, Electronic Resources Management Systems (ERMS) entered the market in the early 2000s with the promise to improve information sharing and to help keep track of the full lifecycle of electronic resource holdings.

Early vendor-developed ERMS were built to accommodate the needs of libraries of all types and sizes, but did not allow for easy customization. As a result, homegrown systems began to appear, ranging from the ERMS built on Google Sites from the University of Alaska Fairbanks to the popular open source systems CORAL and CUFTS, developed by University of Notre Dame and Simon Fraser University, respectively. The most recent evolution for electronic resources workflow solutions is the “next generation ILS,” which promises to replace both the ILS and ERMS by integrating workflows for print and electronic materials. For any workflow solution to be truly successful, a good deal of manual setup and ongoing maintenance is required, such as associating each of the library’s electronic resources with the correct vendor and annual subscription price, as well as entering contact information for vendor representatives and administration credentials for things like usage statistics. For libraries with thousands of electronic resources, this is no small task! No matter the system or trend, the most important thing to keep in mind when working with a system or considering a new one is its suitability—of price and in function—for any task at hand.
Education and Training

Dedicated electronic resources librarian positions began to emerge as early as the 1980s, with most positions created in the early 2000s. The position was developed to fill a growing need for the coordination of emerging access methods for digital resources: database searching, CD-ROMs, and the Internet. These new positions did not have much focus on instruction and reference duties, but as the needs of the job became more complex, a wider range of skills and qualifications were required. These requirements bridged responsibilities from many library departments, including serials management, acquisitions, information technology, and business and legal services. Not surprisingly, existing positions in the library did not require the same set of combined skill requirements, and new electronic resources librarians learned their trade on the job. Today, this trend continues as libraries create new or modified professional roles to manage electronic resources. As electronic collections grow in scope, it is increasingly essential to librarians to understand the complex issues associated with electronic resources and communicate effectively about them.

Perhaps the most official and significant update to the work of electronic resources librarians occurred with the publication of NASIG’s *Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians* in 2013. The publication assembles the essential skills and requirements for effective electronic resources librarians. The *Core Competencies* is the first attempt to distill electronic resources management into a single, vetted document. It can aid current electronic resources librarians in their daily work, and it has potential to be used by libraries when developing future job descriptions, planning organizational structure, assessing departmental goals, and evaluating Library and Information Science (LIS) coursework.

Despite the uptick in responsibilities, opportunities, and standards, graduate programs in LIS have been slow to incorporate true training for electronic resources into coursework and are often criticized for an imbalance of theoretical framework to practical applications. Far too frequently, recent graduates embark on careers in electronic resources management with little to no direct experience and face a steep learning curve on the job. In other areas of LIS coursework—such as cataloging, reference, and instruction—there are more opportunities for hands-on learning, including classroom activities, job shadowing, and internships. To be a successful electronic resources librarian, it is essential to have personal initiative to learn through alternative means (and reading this book accomplishes part of this task!).
Fortunately, a large network of librarians, publishers, and other information professionals are available for support. For the new or seasoned professional, becoming involved with national and international organizations can be an effective way to dive into continuing education. Library organizations that offer opportunities for training in electronic resources include:

- American Association of Law Libraries (AALL)
- American Library Association (ALA)
- Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)
- Association of Library Collections and Technical Services (ALCTS)
- Library Information Technology Association (LITA)
- National Information Standards Organization (NISO)
- NASIG (formerly the North American Serials Interest Group)

Opportunities with these organizations range from pre-conference meetings and workshops to lunch-and-learn sessions with content and systems providers and webinars. Attending national conferences—such as Electronic Resources and Libraries (ER&L) Conference and the Charleston Conference—as well as regional conferences—such as local chapter meetings and interest groups—are excellent opportunities not only to learn about the field, but also to network with fellow electronic resources librarians and vendor representatives.

Regardless of a librarian’s career stage or experience level, participation in the larger conversations surrounding electronic resources management is an effective way to stay up to date with new strategies, tools, and trends. For small libraries with a single staff member managing the entire electronic resources lifecycle, continuing education and networking opportunities can be critical, even if there does not seem as though there is enough time to allow for it. Finally, electronic resources librarians at any career level will find beneficial content within the Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship and The Serials Librarian, references to which can be found throughout this book.

The Role of the Electronic Resources Librarian within the Organization

Electronic resources librarians can be found within public services, technical services, or collection development departments, or they can be found bridging
between all three. Given the evolution of the position and its diverse requirements, such varied situations are not surprising. No matter the position in an organization, an electronic resources librarian will need to remain flexible to communicate resource terms of use and be able to troubleshoot access issues with patrons, public services and technical services librarians, and library vendors.

Just as organizational structures vary from one library to the next for electronic resources librarians, so does the actual management of resources. Two general methods of organizational structures for electronic resources management exist within library departments: the first option, centralization, involves a core set of librarians and staff dedicated wholly to electronic resources management; and the second option takes a decentralized approach by integrating librarians and staff from multiple areas—including acquisitions, continuations, and cataloging—who contribute to specific processes throughout the electronic resources lifecycle. Each model has its benefits.

The decentralized model is more focused on library collections and eliminates silos between print and electronic workflows. However, findings from a workflow analysis conducted at Duke University Libraries showed decentralized management can result in staff members having complex responsibilities without a strong understanding of the complete picture.5 The alternative—centralization—lends itself to strong administrative control over electronic resources but also risks isolating personnel from other library departments and services. No matter the organizational structure, the ever-evolving nature of electronic resources demands that information professionals remain flexible and willing to reevaluate workflows on a regular basis.

With so many structural and management possibilities in electronic resources, librarians and information professionals must remember to focus energy on long-term goals and strategic planning based on user needs and system requirements.

Electronic Resources Lifecycle and Workflows

The electronic resources lifecycle is nonlinear, repetitive, and ongoing. The most basic electronic resource lifecycle will last for a twelve-month period, beginning with an acquisition (purchase or renewal) then moving to activation and setup, and ending with ongoing maintenance and reevaluation for the next renewal period. From this most basic model, the electronic resource lifecycle grows more and more complicated: some lifecycles may span to two-to-five
year periods (or even longer), some may require incremental payments every couple of months, whereas other resources may be more elusive due to historic workflow inconsistencies ranging from incomplete ILS documentation and ILS tracking. For any given resource, lifecycle phases may occur in a predictable, annual rotation or they might skip around, thus requiring more diligence.

In 2008, Oliver Pesch published one of the earliest models of the electronic resource lifecycle, which captured the nonlinear nature of electronic resources management in six phases: Acquire, Provide Access, Administer, Support, Evaluate, and Renew. After first appearing in *The Serials Librarian*, Pesch’s model (figure 1.1) was later adopted by NASIG for the *Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians*.

In 2011, Jill Emery and Graham Stone developed *Techniques for Electronic Resource Management (TERMS)*, a wiki designed to engage electronic resources librarians in practical discussions on workflows and best

**FIGURE 1.1**
Oliver Pesch’s Electronic Resources Life Cycle

practices. Working with Pesch’s original model, Emery and Stone delved into the workflows contained within each phase of the lifecycle, elucidating how management occurs on the job. TERMS, a groundbreaking project, provides librarians with tools and a global network to address their own workflow challenges. Much of the literature published after 2011 is based on the TERMS outline for workflows and processes.

In the TERMS model shown in figure 1.2, the influence of Pesch’s original model is obvious, with one notable difference: the frequency of assessment with investigation, ongoing evaluation, and annual review. Local workflows will vary from library to library, but electronic resources management as a whole is governed by the lifecycles as described by both Pesch and Emery and Stone. At local levels, electronic resources management should be tailored to support the library’s mission, departmental structures, specific collections, and local patron needs.

**FIGURE 1.2**

Electronic Resources in the Modern Library

In the last two decades, the shift from ownership to licensed access has represented a seminal change in how libraries develop and measure the value of their collections. Electronic resources are consuming collection budgets, and collection development practices have become largely focused on assessment using data-driven methods to justify expenditures and ensure valuable acquisitions dollars are spent wisely. Armed with vendor-provided usage statistics, libraries can calculate the exact return on investment for each of their subscription by determining the cost-per-use (CPU) for a resource, a data point that helps when deciding if a resource’s continued subscription is worth the cost. During the Great Recession of the early 2000s—during which library acquisition budgets were crippled by subscription pricing that rose higher than the rate of inflation, combined with harsh reductions in library funding—libraries questioned the sustainability of both standard subscriptions as well as large package deals. Although packages like the Big Deal open up a large amount of content to library users at a huge discount from list price, typically the majority of usage in these packages is driven by a small portion of titles, despite the significant access and financial commitment. Publishers have responded to libraries’ changing collection needs by developing alternative business models, which still provide users with access to large amounts of content at a reasonable cost to libraries. These models, such as Pay-Per-View (PPV) and Demand Driven Acquisitions (DDA), require the library to pay for the content that is used and represent a shift from collecting “just-in-case” to collecting “just-in-time,” in which emphasis is placed on providing access right now, rather than acquiring content in perpetuity. It is important to note, however, that as of 2016 these new models have not been adopted as the norm and are still being evaluated in the scholarly literature for Library and Information Science (LIS).

Just as libraries are adjusting to changes in the market, publishers are also learning how to manage, price, and sell electronic resources to libraries. eBooks are particularly complex and pose more challenges than their electronic journal counterparts. Publishers have tried to maintain administrative control over ebooks by implementing Digital Rights Management (DRM), a practice that determines how ebook content can be used, such as the number of users that can gain access at a single time as well as the ability to print, save, and download book sections. For instance, if an ebook allows only one simultaneous user—which functions like a print book loan with a ratio of
one book to one reader—then a library will need to acquire multiple copies of that ebook so multiple users can access it at once. There is heated debate whether DRM protects a publisher’s copyright or if it is simply a means for publishers to increase revenue. To make matters worse, because different publishers enforce different DRM restrictions, an ebook hosted on one platform may have different functionalities than an ebook hosted on another. Users are unlikely to recognize the cause and will instead become confused and frustrated. And who wouldn’t be?

DRM also makes a large impact on a library’s ability to participate in resource sharing, or Interlibrary Loan (ILL). In theory, ebooks should be available anytime and anywhere, much like electronic journal articles. eBook publishers, however, have been slow to allow the lending of ebooks although such practices are standard in licensing for electronic journals. These restrictions severely limit a library’s ability to fulfill requests in a standard, business-as-usual way.

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**Keep Calm**

By keeping a clear focus and a drive for information, technology, and service, anyone can excel in this field. Communication is an essential skill for a successful electronic resources librarian. That, and keeping up to date with the latest trends in the field! For more information on the responsibilities of an electronic resources librarian, take a look at NASIG’s Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians.

Libraries are invested in increasing access to resources by making resources more discoverable. Many libraries have implemented **discovery layers** that enable users to more easily locate most of a library’s materials. A discovery layer is essentially a tool that sits on top of the library’s other access points—the OPAC, databases, research guides, open access collections, archival material, and institutional repositories—to funnel content into a single-search option, similar to a Google experience. The functionality of a discovery layer brings greater emphasis on accurate metadata and effective linking, which is required to have the content discoverable through the discovery layer’s central index. NISO’s *Open Discovery Initiative*, published in 2014, works to promote the effective and consistent sharing of metadata among content providers and discovery service vendors to prevent biased
linking and indexing of content. This trend in metadata sharing is essential as libraries focus energy on making information more discoverable to library users. To learn more about metadata for discovery, see chapter 6.

Libraries have also focused attention toward **Open Access (OA)** initiatives to supplement library subscriptions. Open Access resources are scholarly electronic journals and ebooks that are made freely available online without restrictions on access or use. Material becomes Open Access when authors self-archive their work or when work is published in an Open Access publication. Because all Open Access resources are electronic, the ability to use and access Open Access material is of growing importance for electronic resources librarians. Many libraries have chosen to make large sets of Open Access resources discoverable in library systems, and an increasing number of libraries implement **institutional repositories**, encourage faculty to create and adopt **Open Educational Resources (OERs)**, and promote the importance of Open Access during national Open Access Week each year. To learn more about Open Access, see chapter 4.

**Wrap-Up and Where to Go Next**

Electronic resources have come a long way in the past two decades. As electronic resources become more and more pervasive, librarians in all areas have begun to increase their focus on user experience. Whether a formal job responsibility of an electronic resources librarian or not, user experience is also at the heart of electronic resources management: access, discovery, and use are all elements of great concern to electronic resources librarians. In fact, it would be very difficult to identify an area of librarianship that does not touch on electronic resources in some way. Due to the evolutionary nature of the format, electronic resources librarians need to be aware of the many diverse functions of other library departments, just as other departments should keep up to date with the concerns of electronic resources management.

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