Abstract

Traditionally libraries have taken into their collections all the books they have been able to lay their hands upon. This has led to institutions with buildings full of collections and a large, sometimes even incoherent variety of subjects. However, in pre-Internet times this was needed because locating a book outside one's own library was difficult and a book in the collection was a safe bet.

In recent years the paradigm has changed. In order to serve patrons well, it is not necessary to own all possible books, they can easily be located elsewhere when needed. In addition, the costs of owning a big collection have grown considerably. The rent for the premises takes a big portion of the library budget. Therefore careful collection management is really needed. On the other hand, cooperation on the national as well as international level is needed in order to gain benefit on the global scale.

The size of a book collection can be optimized using the good old Ranganathan rule: every reader a book, every book a reader. In other words, every book should be placed in a collection or library where it has the biggest chance to be used. This can be done using different metrics and expertise of library staff. Libraries should increase the flexibility of their collections. One should not think about owning as much as access, de-selection is a modern choice. This paper describes a method how to manage the life cycle of a book and gives some examples of its usage. Even though the cases are from Finland, the method is universal. It can also be used on an international level as well.

Optimizing the book (and other type of printed) collections have many favourable consequences. Sending little used material to a remote storage facility - in Finland to the National Repository Library - saves a lot of space in one's own library. This can be used to increase study space or ease up the problem of too full shelves. Keeping heavy used books close to their users in faculties increases user satisfaction. All and all the total costs of the collections can be reduced even in a regional, national, and even international level.