Amazon.com VS. EBSCO’s GOBI Library Solutions: Evaluating New and Used Book Vendors While Building a Diverse Collection

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**RQ1:** How does our institutions’ collection of LBGTQ titles compare to selected regional academic institutions’ titles when conducting keyword and subject heading searches using the same terms?

**RQ2:** How does the acquisitions experience between Amazon.com and EBSCO’s GOBI Library Solutions compare?

**RQ3:** How does the final purchase cost between Amazon.com and EBSCO’s GOBI Library Solutions compare?

**RQ4:** How does the reconciliation workflow process compare between Amazon.com and EBSCO’s GOBI Library Solutions?
INCREASING THE # OF LGBTQ & TITLE IX TITLES

• Desired Future State
  • The need to expand the LGBTQ and Title IX titles held by this institution stemmed from this institution’s presidential directive

• Assessment of Current State
  • In 2017, at the time this study was conducted, the library provided access to (owned and leased) a total of 3,657 non-unique print and eBook titles about LGBTQ and Title IX topics when searching subject heading in the library’s discovery service (EBSCO Discovery Service with index)
IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING A DIVERSE COLLECTION
“The librarian’s professional obligation is to develop balanced collections that reflect and meet the educational and recreational needs of these diverse user communities and are not biased by the librarian’s own cultural identity and personal experiences.”
BUILDING AN LGBTQ COLLECTION
“Time and time again, sexual minority adults say that as young people they turned to libraries to try to find out something about LGBTQ realities and identities - usually, until recently, to little or no avail other than for dictionary definitions.

Silence is ‘a text easy to misread.’

Indeed, silence is complicity.”

Alvin Schrader,
“Librarians have the power to act as catalysts for social change. They have the potential to build inclusive library policies, collections and services within a framework of human rights and social justice, reflecting core values of access and intellectual freedom, inclusivity, diversity and equality.”

Alvin Schrader,
WHY ARE THERE SO FEW TITLES ABOUT GENDER STUDIES?
VENDOR RELATIONSHIPS
“They [vendors] can’t exist without us, but likewise, we can’t exist without them.”

Reid, 1984.
RETAILER RELATIONSHIPS
Johnson (2014) argued “libraries occasionally purchase from retailers if they need an item quickly and the retailer can guarantee speedy delivery”. She mentioned, “one frequently used retailer is Amazon.com”.

Johnson, Fundamentals of Collection, 166.
SECONDHAND MARKET RELATIONSHIPS
“Coming up with a really obscure book one never thought could be found can quite make your day” as “there are bargains to be had if one works at it.”

A list of 75 LGBTQ and Title IX titles were identified for acquisition by library staff by:

- reading book reviews on books related to gender studies on these topics and
- based on the recommendations of a regularly updated list of curated titles from GOBI Library Solutions which are hand-picked by their staff of former librarians

For the purposes of this study, the library chose to only purchase print titles because Amazon.com only offers eBooks in the Kindle format (not a library-licensed model)
METHODOLOGY

• The researchers at this institution conducted keyword and subject heading searches of their institution and of eight regional academic institutions’ public facing portals to evaluate their current LGBTQ and Title IX collections.

• The following institution’s collections were searched:

  Goldey-Beacom College  
  The Pennsylvania State University  
  Rowan University  
  University of Delaware  
  University of Pennsylvania  
  Villanova University  
  West Chester University  
  Temple University  
  Drexel University
METHODOLOGY

• The following keyword and subject heading search terms were utilized during the researchers’ independent searches: “lesbian”, “gay”, “bisexual”, “transgender”, “queer”, “Title IX”, “homosexual”, and “homosexual and gay”.

• All of the chosen keywords were included in MacDonald and MacDonald’s Suggested Keyword Searching: Initiating Research on Popular Topics Using Electronic Databases.

• Furthermore, all of the chosen keywords were previously entered by students, staff, and faculty during database searches within the last six years at this institution.
RESULTS
RQ1

How does our institutions’ collection of LBGTQ titles compare to selected regional academic institutions’ titles when conducting keyword and subject heading searches using the same terms?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword Term</th>
<th>Keyword Searches</th>
<th>Subject Searches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average amongst 8 regional libraries</td>
<td>% Difference between this institution and 8 regional libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>This Institution’s Library</strong></td>
<td><strong>This Institution’s Library</strong></td>
<td><strong>This Institution’s Library</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>45,450</td>
<td>21,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>20,397</td>
<td>10,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>9,682</td>
<td>3,204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>38,638</td>
<td>65,663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title IX</td>
<td>3,727</td>
<td>3,152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>53,836</td>
<td>28,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>103,407</td>
<td>145,436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Homosexual and Gay)</td>
<td>36,299</td>
<td>16,961</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ2

How does the acquisitions experience between Amazon.com and EBSCO’s GOBI Library Solutions compare?
Step #1
Search for title.

Step #2
Add to cart.

Step #3
Continue searching and adding titles to cart until all are found.

Step #4
Check out by signing into Amazon.

Step #5
Enter Business Order information such as a PO then continue.

Step #6
Enter Business Order information such as a PO then continue.

Step #7
Select shipping address.

Step #8
Confirm cart titles and confirm shipping delivery options.

Step #9
Verify credit card that will be used.

Step #10
Verify credit card that will be used.

Step #11
Place order.

Step #12
Receive an email confirming order.
AMAZON-ADVANTAGES

• Two-day Prime Shipping
• Amazon.com’s web-based portal required no additional assistance from IT to install and provide support for the application
• Purchasing titles requested for faculty took less time
AMAZON-CHALLENGES

• Time-consuming process of reconciling purchase invoices with the college’s business office.

• Books are suggested to purchase based off order history through the company’s algorithm; librarians do not curate the recommended books.

• Quality of used books was suspect and the library often had to return used books which was too time-consuming.
Step #1
Type in title of book, search, and find the title.

Step #2
Either add to cart or choose “GOBI Express” if this is the one book you are ordering.

Step #3
When ready to check out, go to “Order Cart”.

Step #4
Click on each book title to select each item in the cart. Note: You have the option to Rush the order but will lose discount doing so.

Step #5
Enter Business Order information such as a PO then continue.

Step #6
If not rushing the order, enter order details.

Step #7
Receive an email confirming order.
• The platform is web-based, so there is now software to install.
• Purchasing and selecting print books can be shared by staff.
• The number of libraries who have purchased a specific title is shown; in addition, there is a report showing how many peer institutions have purchased a specific title.
• Invoices can be tracked and a check request can be made with the college’s business office—streamlining the whole process.
GOBI-CHALLENGES

• Shipping time was slow for new books to arrive (average shipping time was 7-10 business days when not rushed).
• Rushed orders incurred additional fees.
• The discount price was not shown until the items were purchased.
• Training was necessary – the ordering interface was not intuitive.
RQ3

How does the final purchase cost between Amazon.com and EBSCO’s GOBI Library Solutions compare?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Amazon.com</th>
<th>Amazon.com with Prime</th>
<th>GOBI’s Library Solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total # of titles purchased</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total List Price</td>
<td>$1,763.62</td>
<td>$1,763.62</td>
<td>$1,886.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Net Price</td>
<td>$1,455.57</td>
<td>$1,455.57</td>
<td>$1,615.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipping Cost</td>
<td>$116.25</td>
<td>n/a Prime*</td>
<td>Included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Cost with Shipping</td>
<td>$1,571.82</td>
<td>$1,455.57</td>
<td>$1,615.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Discount %</td>
<td>21.22%</td>
<td>21.21%</td>
<td>17.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final List to Net Discount %</td>
<td>10.88%</td>
<td>17.47%</td>
<td>14.36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Prime membership is not factored into the purchase price as it is a separate annual membership fee.
RQ4

How does the reconciliation workflow process compare between Amazon.com and EBSCO’s GOBI Library Solutions?
1. Library staff duplicated the credit card statement that itemized purchases from Amazon.com during the previous month to an expense report (Excel worksheet).

2. Next, a library staff member printed each order invoice from the previous month and numbered the invoice to match the recreated typed photocopy in the Excel expense report. This process took at least 5 hours per month of library staff time.

3. Finally, the library director submitted the itemized report to the business office.

4. The report was frequently returned to the library for updates/edits as procedures frequently changed.
And what do you think the cost of the librarians’ time was worth to reconcile the credit card bill for the business office each month. . . .
Amazon.com Reconciliation Process

$450 each month
$5,400 pretax annually
GOBI RECONCILIATION PROCESS

1. An invoice is emailed to the library upon purchase.
2. Library staff complete a check request to pay the invoice.
3. Library director submits the check request to the business office for payment.
And what do you think the cost of the librarians’ time was worth to reconcile the credit card bill for the business office each month. . .
GOBI Reconciliation Process

$50 each month
$600 pretax annually
LIMITATIONS/IMPLICATIONS
Dannelly (1999) had cautioned librarians when selecting a specific vendor that the library should not accept the relationship developed by other libraries “as proof; the mix of orders and other vendors cited in such studies directly influences results. These studies may provide indicated areas of concern that need to be clarified, but all a vendor study can potentially accomplish is to evaluate services from specific vendors to a single institution”.
One former University Librarian pointed out “research and case studies conducted about libraries by librarians at small-to-medium sized libraries benefit all sizes of libraries. In particular, these studies, are also applicable to the greater library community because there are about 4,000 American colleges that can learn from the lessons shared by the researchers” (Sarah C. Michalak, personal communication, 2017).
CONCLUSION
FINAL THOUGHTS...

While Amazon.com with Prime provided the quickest shipping time, and a slightly lower final cost for the LGBTQ and Title IX book list examined for this study, avoiding the challenges experienced with reconciling Amazon.com orders proved to be beneficial to this library’s overall acquisitions workflow.
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