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**2014–2015 Technical Services Committee Annual Project:  
Exploring Shelf-Ready Services**

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<http://www.carli.illinois.edu/exploring-shelf-ready-services>

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**I. Pros and Cons of Shelf-Ready**

**II. Feedback from Users of Shelf-Ready Services**

**III. Shelf-Ready Resources**

**INTRODUCTION**

Over the past several years, shelf-ready—the outsourcing of cataloging and processing services—has become a controversial topic in the library world. This report examines the implications of shelf-ready services, both operationally and organizationally. Additionally, general questions include: What is the interest in setting up a shelf-ready service? What is involved in implementing such a service? What is the impact on workflow and staffing as a result of this service? How can quality control be assured?

Before delving into such details, the first question should be, just what is ‘shelf-ready’ exactly? In short, a very basic definition of shelf-ready is as follows: a collection of materials received from a vendor or publisher that comes with catalog records and physical processing already in place.

A report from a research team at the University of California Libraries (The Power of Three team) broadens this definition to include prospective collections in all formats, including electronic monographs, acquired on a title-by-title basis, as well as retrospective processing of existing collections.

For those of us completely new to this topic, there are a variety of shelf-ready options in the marketplace. For example, vendors offer a range of services from brief order records, e-invoicing, final catalog records, and any number of physical processes such as: attaching barcodes, property stamps, anti-theft strips, spine labels, dust jacket covers, paperback book cover reinforcements, etc. It is also worth noting that these services can be customized in a flexible way to a modular or granular level, depending on each library's needs. When beginning a shelf-ready program, the library sets up a profile designating which services and processes the vendor should apply to a given category of resources. Some time may be spent after this in testing and adjusting those parameters.

It may be helpful to keep in mind some of the most common reasons for considering shelf-ready services. Two main reasons for shelf-ready implementation across libraries of all sizes are: (1) the need to improve materials turnaround time and (2) the desire to redeploy staff for other projects or tasks.

## **I. PROS AND CONS OF SHELF-READY**

This part of this report is not an exercise in persuasion for or against starting an outsourced shelf-ready program. It is an attempt to think through as many pros and cons, pluses and minuses as we can. It is important to remember that all choices have consequences and outcomes, and some decision may have both pros and cons to deal with.

### **Pros**

For libraries that are understaffed, either chronically or temporarily because of budget cuts, moving to shelf-ready cataloging and processing can be the difference between getting any materials processed or not. If your library does not have the staff to deal with even basic copy cataloging of your acquisitions, this may be the only real option. It is important to remember that a wholesale move to e-books eliminates processing activities and costs; but e-books are no different from physical books in their need for rich and in-depth cataloging. Nor are they free from the costs of database maintenance and cleanup.

Even if your library is not understaffed, circumstances can change; worsening state budget problems, enrollment downturns, or changes in university or library administration can force change on a library. It may be in your library's best interest to have at least studied and considered the option of a shelf-ready program.

In libraries that have sufficient technical services staffing, shelf-ready can free up staff time for other important tasks that may have been ignored, neglected, put off indefinitely, or performed incompletely. Some of these are:

- *Database cleanup*, such as correcting errors in legacy descriptive cataloging and obsolete MARC coding
- *Updating subject and name headings*, especially because of numerous changes to authorized headings that were mandated by RDA
- *Describing and providing access to "hidden collections,"* such as gift collections awaiting description or manuscript or archival collections with minimal or no subject description
- *Introducing new projects*, such as OCLC WorldShare Collection Manager for continual improvement of cataloging. This service has been available for some time now, under differing names such as BibNotes. It notifies a library when an OCLC master record to which a library's holdings are attached has been updated.
- *Upgrading of legacy catalog records that need enhancement.* OCLC WorldShare Collection Manager doesn't provide retrospective improvement, only those going forward from when you began your subscription. OCLC's aggressive record merging project was probably necessary, but presents a challenge in the I-Share environment. The need to identify local records that have been merged, suppressing them, and then replacing them is a time-consuming project.
- *Upgrading OCLC master records to reflect enhanced cataloging in the local catalog*, especially added/enriched contents notes, summaries, and subject and name headings. Some libraries' practice has been to do this enhancement in the local catalog, but not transfer the enhancements to the OCLC master record. Enhancing the OCLC master record is essential to those libraries that

use WorldCat Local as a primary discovery layer, since searching there is on the OCLC master record, not the local Voyager record. But it should be part of every OCLC library's job to upgrade the master record when possible. And with the establishment of OCLC's Expert Community, catalogers with full-level authorizations can make more extensive changes on many OCLC master records.

Most processing tasks and some cataloging tasks are relatively low-skill; "double DLC" copy cataloging is the primary example of a low- or medium-skill cataloging task that could just as well be done by a vendor. A shelf-ready program can help reduce the amount of low-skill work that library staff will need to perform and to supervise. Remember labor costs!

Catalogers who have faculty appointments can gain time for other professional activities: teaching, collection development projects, liaison outreach to teaching faculty, and research.

### **Cons**

Additional costs will be incurred. Shelf-ready services have some yearly fixed costs, and some per-item costs. Either new budgetary resources must be advocated for, or the funds must come from somewhere in the library's budget--either from materials budgets or from other areas. If at all possible, we should avoid "robbing Peter to pay Paul." If new resources or the required budgetary flexibility are not allowed by library or institutional administration, then it may not be possible to use shelf-ready services.

Starting a shelf-ready program can be a time-consuming process. Library staff will need to carefully evaluate current cataloging practices and workflows and may need to reconsider if they are worth continuing, especially those that would be difficult for a vendor to duplicate. Department heads should anticipate resistance from technical services staff. It is easy for local practices to perpetuate, sometimes with no apparent justification for them. There also will be many hours spent in setting up profiles that describe the actions you want the vendor to do or not do. Profiling may take several rounds of testing and re-doing of the profiles. This will require significant attention of several library staff for a span of time.

Libraries will also need to spend time changing workflows once the shelf-ready program is running. You cannot allow the system to run itself. At the same time, in order to achieve gains in staff time, you also cannot check all the work done by the vendor. Some method of sampling or spot checking of the vendor's work must be established. Moving from piecemeal to batch processes is a major conceptual shift. Also, not all materials your library acquires will have shelf-ready services available, as not all vendors provide this service. Your library's workflows will likely multiply, at least into "main" and "exception" categories. Ironically, very small libraries, especially one-person technical services departments, may not be able to start a shelf-ready project because they cannot spare the expertise required to set up and monitor the project.

There are three related issues that, for want of a better term, we call "strategic" issues:

- At college libraries, low-skill jobs like book processing and shelving are often done by students, who need the income and often enjoy a break from their studies. These kinds of entry-level jobs are often the entry point for people into librarianship. We all know of many librarians who have taken this route into librarianship. Is it wise to reduce or eliminate a route for mentoring or recruiting of the next generation of librarians?
- Cataloging is a high-skill job, requiring training and a broad education to be done well. Career opportunities are already being limited by state budget trends and other, larger trends in our

economic/business/political culture. By hiring an outsourcer are we reducing work opportunities for ourselves, newer librarians, and future librarians?

- We may want consider whether employing an outsourcer is a “slippery slope,” or “allowing the camel’s nose into the tent.” In other words, is it wise for us to allow the idea that if some jobs in a library could be outsourced, maybe they all could or should be outsourced? We really don’t know the answer to this question, and each library’s situation will look different. But we need to anticipate the possibility.

We can also identify an ethical issue. By hiring an outsourcer, are we supporting a type of sweatshop? Hiring our own students 10 hours per week to stick on call number labels is not creating a sweatshop, since they are also students. Paying non-students minimum wage with no benefits may well be a sweatshop. It may be wise to keep in mind the old adage to “think globally and act locally.”

### **Additional Considerations**

These last points are not really pros or cons, but are additional ideas to consider. First, libraries have already been engaged in various kinds of outsourcing for some time. One definition of outsourcing is using the expertise and shared work of others for our own benefit. The shared work may be free or purchased. Some examples include, but are not limited to:

- Purchasing of journal indexes because we don’t have the resources to analytically catalog our journals—some libraries actually did this, on the principle that the catalog should be a representation of everything your library owned.
- Purchasing card sets from the Library of Congress allowed local librarians to focus on other tasks.
- Shared cataloging on OCLC takes advantage of the work of thousands of other librarians.

The second point explores a tension: is cataloging an artisanal or an industrial activity? Or is it a bit of both? Cataloging, at its most basic, is a means to connect people with the information, learning, and knowledge that they wish to use. We librarians do this by writing short descriptions of the information resource. It used to be that we would write each one from scratch, according to established codes. Later we found ways to share this work, either by printed cards or computer networks. But piecework was always a part of the process—someone handled each physical or virtual item. It is easy to equate this with artisanship. That encounter, however brief, with information resources in our collections, is invaluable “fingertip” knowledge of our collections, and can be a source of great intellectual satisfaction. A fully fledged, order-to-shelf outsourced program takes away not only the piecework, but also the individual encounter with our resources. It can feel more like a manufacturing or industrial process than an individualized one. How do we resolve or accommodate this tension?

Perhaps we should think of cataloging as an organic process, carefully selecting our database maintenance projects and tools to add value and continuously improve our users discovery experience in our catalogs. The art and science of cataloging then becomes an individualized process, working not only for our individual libraries, but also for the “good of the all.

## **II. FEEDBACK FROM USERS OF SHELF-READY SERVICES**

CARLI’s April 17, 2015 Technical Services Spring Forum was largely devoted to shelf-ready issues. A panel of CARLI member librarians with shelf-ready experience answered prepared questions, followed by Roundtable sessions with additional questions and comments by panelists and participants. Below is a summary of those discussions.

Panel moderator: Mary Konkel -- College of DuPage

Panelists:

Library A – Medium Private Institution

Library B – Large Public Institution

Library C – Medium Private Institution

Library D – Large Public Institution

(not present; responded in writing)

Library E – Large Public Institution

(not present; responded in writing)

### **1. Why did your library implement shelf-ready services?**

- A Lack of staff; cost efficiency
- B & E Save time and money; improve workflows; help speed up distribution of materials to branch libraries; improve user experiences
- C Reallocate resources, i.e., put staff to better use; reduce exceptions, as seen in piece-by-piece processing; streamline workflows; simplify and standardize practices. We learned to embrace “good enough” as a quality standard.
- D Our then-dean heard about the successes that other libraries had had with shelf-ready and wanted us to try it. Specifically, he said that he wanted “to allow us to redirect staff efforts to address other long-standing issues in IRM [Information Resources Management, aka Tech Services], especially backlogs, cleanup, etc.”

### **2. What aspects were most important?**

- A Accuracy and professional appearance of materials
- B Quality control; timely access to newly acquired materials
- C Streamlining workflow; simplifying and standardizing practices; accelerating entire “selection to shelf” process

D None more than others, that I can recall.

E Application of library stamp, security strip, and barcode as well as the call number in Voyager holdings records.

### **3. What vendors did you consider, and why?**

A Vendors that CARLI recommended

B YBP, which we were already using; there are not many vendors out there.

C YBP, which we were already using

D To my knowledge, we only considered YBP, as they were and still are our primary book jobber.

E Just YBP as they are our primary domestic monograph vendor and they provide a robust service for this process.

### **4. Did you do a trial first and if so, what kind?**

A No trial

B No trial. We implemented shelf-ready in two phases. The first phase was implemented in the early 1990s and the second in 2010. In the second phase, we added firm-order books for the main campus library and added shelf-ready services for the health sciences library and its branch libraries.

C No trial, but instead we underwent a “slow immersion” into shelf-ready.

D Yes, we did a 6-month trial for firm orders and approval plan books. The vendor applied the property stamp, tattle-tape, spine label, and barcode, and worked with OCLC to provide the bib record.

E Yes, we started with just our Science DDC records and Performing Arts LC records and did test files of those to review call number assignments and record loads to ensure we had our bulk import settings set correctly. We then

expanded shelf-ready to cover more subject areas (based on the subaccount structure which we set up with YBP). We ended up dropping shelf-ready for DDC because we do require unique call numbers for accurate shelf retrieval. DDC required a very large number of the MFHDs to be reviewed and then edited to create a unique number. It should be noted that this is due to our very large volume count. Many smaller libraries may be able to use DDC and shelf-ready.

**5. Have you managed shelf-ready materials differently than non-shelf-ready materials?**

**6. What things did you find that required adjusting?**

A Yes, shelf-ready materials are handled differently. Nothing is ever completely shelf-ready.

We did not create a shelf-ready profile for music scores, so technically scores should not be handled by the shelf-ready vendor. Once one of our music scores accidentally went to YBP for shelf-ready treatment. Everything in the record had to be re-done or corrected.

B Shelf-ready materials are definitely managed differently than non-shelf-ready materials. Most processes are fairly complete, but if not, further work is needed. We accept full, minimal, and level 3 records. Hence, the quality of records we receive varies and incomplete records need more work. In general, we check title, date, and name and series authority headings.

We use Strawn's toolkit to check headings, and if we do not find a match we try to create authority records and contribute to OCLC.

Health sciences books come nearly shelf-ready. Selectors place orders through YBP's GOBI ordering site. Brief order records are first added to the catalog and then replaced by OCLC's PromptCat/WorldCat Cataloging Partners Records. YBP gets the shipment ready and then ships books directly to all of our health sciences libraries. The WCP full records need editing, as these records do not have complete call numbers. They come with class number, but without the Cutter and the date added (NLM stopped assigning the Cutter and date to the call number since 2010). The people at the health sciences sites add the Cutter and date, check the shelflist, create holdings, and finish shelf-prep.

Meanwhile, at the main library, the staff goes through the OCLC report for every record file that OCLC supplies for the site libraries. The staff identifies records from the report that do not have call number and MeSH headings and assigns them to finish cataloging. So, by the time the site libraries receive books, records are ready to be used further in creating holdings and shelf-

prep.

- C We found almost every part of our process required adjusting. We opted to have YBP do every step of the physical processing, except our property stamps and date due slips. We are doing these two steps internally, for cost reasons and to leverage already available student worker hours.
- D 5. At some point during our trial, everything [was managed differently]. During the trial, we closely inspected every shipment of shelf-ready materials, tracking issues and reporting them to YBP. We also tracked how long it took to process each item from receipt through delivery to Circulation for shelving.
- Before this trial, Acquisitions had one funnel for processing of materials: unpack box, check invoice, receive materials in Voyager, physically process, and send to Cataloging. With the shelf-ready project, there were three funnels: (1) books with full PromptCat records, (2) books with short bibs, and (3) books with physical processing still to be completed.
6. These problems were not consistent nor regular, but we would receive items without the property stamp or with barcodes placed incorrectly or with the spine label falling off during transit.
- E 5. Yes, [we handled shelf-ready materials differently]. For all YBP materials, we have a bib and MFHD loaded to Voyager that we have exported from YBP's GOBI online ordering site. A PO is also created at the time it is loaded. For non-shelf-ready materials, we then receive a bib record from OCLC through their WorldCat Cataloging Partners (WCP, formerly PromptCat) program, which overlays the bib loaded for the PO creation, and then the cataloger assigns the call number and enters it in the MFHD created at the time the PO was created.
- For shelf-ready materials, we also receive records from OCLC through WCP, but we have a different bulk import rule for these which creates a second MFHD to which the call number is mapped from the 852 in the bib coming from OCLC. So when we receive the piece, there are two MFHDs – one attached to the PO and one containing the call number. The person receiving the piece (or a cataloger, if it gets to a cataloger) copies the entire 852 field from the second MFHD into the first, which is connected to the PO, and then deletes the second MFHD, and the piece is ready.
6. We realized right away that YBP couldn't do our exceptional DDC classifications. They also could not check our catalog for duplication of call numbers. We originally had them create labels for the books but not apply them, so that we could review them first. In the end, we decided that the cost of having them produce and apply the labels was higher than we could do



here, so we create the label locally and apply it ourselves. This is indeed much cheaper and allows for much more flexibility in MFHD changes, yes, but also in placement and any needed adjustments for label sizes. We do have YBP stamp, strip, and add the barcode to the piece.

### **7. What is the quality of bibliographic records for shelf-ready materials?**

- A            The quality of each record depends on what is available. If there is no OCLC record, then YBP makes a minimal-level record, which has to be upgraded.
  
- B            The quality varies depending on the level of record that's available in OCLC. We add RDA elements that are missing in the record. Sometimes we receive brief records that have to be upgraded.
  
- C            *(most positive answer)* 80 percent of the records we receive are at an acceptable level. The table of contents is usually what needs to be added locally. We purchased the "best OCLC records available" (from a three-tier selection). We strongly recommend that CARLI leverage its strength as a consortium to get YBP to consistently do full-level cataloging.
  
- D            The decision was made by the then-head of cataloging to get only DLC records. For anything else, a brief bib record was created by YBP. As long as we received a DLC record, the records were fine. However, we would occasionally receive non-DLC records.
  
- E            The GobiExport records are usually full records, and they are then overlaid with the OCLC WCP records.

### **8. Do shelf-ready materials affect local procedures and cataloging practices?**

- C            We have 6 different profiles for the different services they want YBP to do on various types of books.  
  
              Note: Cataloging is a fixed cost; processing is a variable cost (depending on which processing services the client wants).
  
- C            Local impact has been 100 percent. We are still cataloging some non-shelf-ready materials, but we now have time to do in-depth cataloging when warranted, plus time to do special projects. We have been able to move what have been staff-level tasks down to the student-worker level. We also went to

DePaul to see how they were implementing shelf-ready procedures.

- D Yes, we found that staff were spending more time fixing [shelf-ready-generated] problems than just doing these processes themselves, and many of the Acquisitions and Marking processes were done by student employees. Also, because of the restrictions that we placed on the project (only DLC records and only certain types of materials), we ended up creating more procedures [for ourselves].
- E Yes. We are going towards more LC cataloging (we have historically been a Dewey shop) at least in part to take advantage of shelf-ready. But we also want to drop the labor intensive exceptional DDC work in favor of LC as it meets the same needs that resulted in the DDC workflow (better browsing). We also can collaborate much more effectively with other libraries in shared metadata and cataloging projects with LC. It also allows more Acquisitions staff to be able to catalog materials upon receipt.

**9. What is the level of satisfaction with shelf-ready services?**

- A Rather low. Processing has improved greatly, and the materials look great, but the cataloging is less than stellar.
- B No major complaints. Nothing has been a big problem we couldn't resolve. We tweaked our profiles a couple of times, changed what goes in a certain MARC field, etc. We do intend to continue the program.
- C Cataloging became more streamlined; acquisitions became more complex.
- D Low. None of the materials were ever truly "shelf-ready." All books had to be touched in order to see if there were any accompanying materials, to delete the extra holdings record (a problem we were never able to fix), and to re-link the location.
- E We have not done a survey, but we are able to train staff and put more staff on a basic review of shelf-ready materials to get them turned around much faster.

**10. If shelf-ready has been a success in your library, do you see its role expanding to**

**include other vendors, other formats, etc.?**

- A            If the success rate were higher, we would more than welcome role expansion, especially with processing.
- B            In a sense we have already been doing a type of outsourcing, but calling it something else; for example, with Serials Solutions, we subscribe to their 360 MARC update service for both e-journals and e-books. [Serials Solutions is now under the ProQuest brand name.]
- We would not do shelf-ready with special collections.
- C            I doubt that we would expand, considering that it took two years from when we started doing our tech specs to when we got our first shelf-ready books.
- Regarding special collections: We have one sub-account for special collections. These items are cataloged by YBP up to a point, then we do the rest.
- C & E        We are not so much expanding per se, but we are embarking on more projects as a result of more freed-up time.
- Library C recommends finding ways to expand bulk cataloging via MarcEdit, etc.

**Additional Questions and Comments from the Roundtable Sessions**

**Question about costs:**

- C            Dewey classification costs more than LC

**Question about quality control:**

- A & C        Some overlay and discard issues
- A            Some labeling problems

**What tools do you use for batch processing of bibliographic records?**

- C
- Macro Express [a Windows utility] to automate repetitive data-entry tasks
  - MarcEdit to make batch changes to bibliographic records and MFHDs
  - Strawn Utilities to make batch changes to headings
  - Voyager Pick and Scan (soon to be significantly enhanced!) to make batch changes to bibliographic records and MFHDs

**Question about cost analysis:**

- D
- Our then-Acquisitions Librarian did a cost analysis of the trial. We had 2,734 items that went through pre-processing, which cost \$7,122.15. The additional cost of fixing errors was an additional \$2,843.36, making our total cost \$9,965.51. The cost to have a student worker do the same work would have been \$1,749.76. Between problems with both YBP and OCLC not following our profile, and the amount of extra time spent AND the additional money spent, it was not worthwhile.

**Question about “change in culture,” staff’s attitudes to change in workflow:**

- C
- This has varied depending on the individual (i.e., some people do not like change in general). Getting a “buy-in” from staff and stakeholders has initially been slow until the advantages are evident (e.g., time for special projects and work on legacy records).

**Some general discussion on the issue of “taking jobs away”**

—either from students or paraprofessionals

### III. SHELF-READY RESOURCES

Tomlin, N., & Kandarasheva, I. (July 2014). **Ready or not?: An assessment of shelf-ready materials management practices in US academic libraries.** *Library Resources & Technical Services*, 58(3).

This paper analyzes results of a survey on shelf-ready materials management and cataloging practices in US academic libraries with various collection sizes. The survey respondents consisted of managers and librarians in technical services operations. Survey questions addressed topics such as the volume of shelf-ready materials, perspectives on shelf-ready expansion, the effect of local cataloging practices on shelf-ready services, the amount of cataloging and processing errors, and quality control. The majority of participants were from small- and medium-size academic libraries, and print materials were the prevalent format for shelf-ready treatment. Two main reasons for shelf-ready implementation across libraries of all sizes were the need to improve materials turnaround time and the desire to redeploy staff for other projects or tasks. [Abstract from author]

[HTML Full Text](#) [PDF Full Text](#) (657KB)

University of California Libraries Next-Generation Technical Services Power of Three (POT) Group 2.1. (June 2014). *Report to the NGTS Management Team* [Report]. Retrieved from University of California Libraries:

[http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/groups/files/ngts/docs/pots/pot2\\_1\\_finalreport.pdf](http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/groups/files/ngts/docs/pots/pot2_1_finalreport.pdf)  
[http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/groups/files/ngts/docs/pots/pot2\\_1\\_finalreport.pdf](http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/groups/files/ngts/docs/pots/pot2_1_finalreport.pdf)

[http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/groups/files/ngts/docs/pots/pot2\\_1\\_finalreport.pdf](http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/groups/files/ngts/docs/pots/pot2_1_finalreport.pdf)

Next-Generation Technical Services (NGTS), an initiative developed by the University of California Librarians to redesign technical services workflows, established the Power of Three (POT) groups to conduct pilot projects including a comprehensive study of shelf-ready procedures.

The POT group prepared this report with a broadened definition in mind of shelf-ready services, to include prospective collections in all formats, including electronic monographs acquired on a title-by-title basis, as well as retrospective processing of existing collections. This report comprises four recommendations: (1) recommended service standards, (2) best practice recommendations, (3) recommended elements for a shelf-ready physical processing standard, and (4) capturing the value of efficiency.

Woodward, J. (2013). **The age of high anxiety.** In *The Transformed Library: E-books, Expertise and Evolution* (pp. 47-60). Chicago: American Library Association.

Woodward, J. (2013). **Survival strategies for academic libraries.** In *The Transformed Library: E-books, Expertise and Evolution* (pp. 117-134). Chicago: American Library Association.

Woodward argues that, although futurists and prognosticators as a group make faulty assumptions when predicting the future, they do sometimes get things right. Are librarians and libraries facing oblivion, as some prognosticators claim? Woodward outlines the technological forces that have coalesced to "threaten" the future of libraries, including financial constraints, digital books, e-book-publisher approaches to libraries, outsourcing, downsizing library space, and librarians' reaction to perceived threats. The author offers "Survival Strategies" for academic, public, and school libraries. As the title suggests, many forces beyond librarians' control have already transformed the library. Evolution occurs in a changing environment (i.e., today's libraries) if an organism (i.e., a library) is able to adapt. Librarians and libraries have it in their DNA not only to survive and avoid extinction but also to thrive, says Woodward. In addition to endnotes, each chapter has references for further reading.

University of California Libraries Next-Generation Technical Services Power of Three (POT) Group 2. (2012). **Defining "shelf-ready."** Retrieved from <http://ucngts.tumblr.com/post/11672249038/defining-shelf-ready>

POT Group 2 was charged with defining and implementing a UC consortial shelf-ready program. To establish a common vocabulary and understanding of terms and definitions, POT 2 created the above cited glossary. It includes such terms as Levels of Shelf-Ready, Shelf-Ready Failure, Vendors, etc.

Ballestro, J. (2012). **Losing your control: Acquisitions and outsourcing.** *Technical Services Quarterly*, 29(2), 113-121.

Faced with a flat budget over the past five years, the acquisitions unit at Southern Illinois University's Morris Library has sought alternative schemas to save staff time and money. One decision was to begin a trial run of outsourcing the monographic processing procedures. During this five-month trial, acquisitions staff tracked the number of books funneled into the process, vendor error rate, cost, and the workflow changes regulated by the process. From this tracking, we hoped to determine and evaluate the tradeoffs between the money and staff time saved and the costs/benefits gleaned from outsourcing the pre-processing of our monographs.

Primary Research Group. (2012). *Survey of library experiences with shelf-ready vendor services.* New York: Primary Research.

This 87-page report presents data from nearly sixty public and academic libraries, with results broken out by size, type of library, and other variables. The report looks at library spending on shelf-ready services, what kinds of materials receive shelf-ready services, what types of shelf-ready services libraries are using, and how happy they are with them, among other issues

Shippy, S., & Krug, E. (2012). **Transforming technical services: Are you ready to go "shelf-ready?"** *Tennessee Libraries*, 62(2), 24. Retrieved from <http://www.tnla.org/?484>  
<http://www.tnla.org/?484>

The article presents two cases: Sarah Shippy, who discusses shelf-ready acquisitions (SRA) at a community college library; and Emily Krug, who discusses SRA at a public library to illustrate the potential application. It states that SRA is a way of streamlining the cataloging and physical processing of items for one's collection. Case one, involving Cleveland State Community College Library, is discussed, and case two, concerning Johnson City Public Library, is mentioned

Schroeder, R., & Howland, J. L. (2011). **Shelf-ready: A cost-benefit analysis.** *Library Collections, Acquisitions, and Technical Services*, 35(4), 129-134.

Brigham Young University's Harold B. Lee Library conducted a time-task cost study to compare the cost and processing time of shelf-ready books to non-shelf-ready books to determine if it could better use its human resources and if it should expand the use of shelf-ready to include its approval books. The results showed that shelf-ready was, on average, 5.7% cheaper, took 47% less processing time, and arrived on the shelves 33% sooner than books processed in-house. Based on the results of the study, the library moved its approval books to the shelf-ready program and was able to reallocate catalogers' tasks.

Jay, M., Simpson, B., & Smith, D. (March 2009). **CatQC and shelf-ready material: Speeding collections to users while preserving data quality.** *Information Technology & Libraries*, 28(1), 41-48.

Libraries contract with vendors to provide shelf-ready material, but is the material really shelf-ready? It arrives with all the physical processing needed for immediate shelving, then lingers in back offices while staff conduct item-by-item checks against the catalog. CatQC, a console application for Microsoft Windows developed at the University of Florida, builds on OCLC services to get material to the shelves and into the hands of users without delay and without sacrificing data quality. Using standard C programming, CatQC identifies problems in MARC record files, often applying complex conditionals, and generates easy-to-use reports that do not require manual item review. [Abstract from author]

[PDF Full Text \(223KB\)](#)

Walker, M., & Kulczak, D. (2007). **Shelf-ready books using Prompt-Cat and YPB: Issues to consider (an analysis of errors at the University of Arkansas).** *Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services*, 31(2), 61-84.

In 2005/2006, the authors evaluated cataloging and physical processing supplied through the University of Arkansas Libraries' shelf-ready contract with YBP Library Services and PromptCat. The authors examined 298 titles from three samples, with emphasis placed on series headings. Results showed that while 99.33% of titles received records and 99.66% of records received correctly matched their corresponding books, 27.05% of records exhibited errors affecting catalog access, and records for 38.59% of titles needed modification. Moreover, 32.11% of series headings required further attention to comply with local authority procedures. This study should prove useful to other libraries contemplating a shelf-ready contract and the level of quality control they wish to exercise

Lâm, V. (2005). **Quality control issues in outsourcing cataloging in United States and Canadian academic libraries.** *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 40(1), 101-122.

This study was conducted to investigate the quality control (QC) issues in cataloging outsourcing programs implemented in U.S. and Canadian academic libraries. Most libraries provided the outsourcing vendors with detailed cataloging and/or processing specifications before the outsourcing programs started. They have set up QC procedures as an integral part of their outsourcing operations. In most cases, both librarian-catalogers and senior library assistants/technicians were involved in the QC programs. The error rates reported were low and the majority of bibliographic records provided by the vendors were either LC/OCLC records or records compatible with the Core-Level Standard recommended by the Cooperative Cataloging Council's Task Group on Standards. A large majority of these libraries were satisfied with the services provided by the outsourcing vendors. Based on the definition of quality of cataloging as a combination of accuracy, consistency, adequacy of access points, and timeliness, most libraries reported that the quality of their library's cataloging was not affected by the outsourcing programs.

Sweetland, J. H. (2001). **Outsourcing library technical services: What we think we know, and don't know.** *The Bottom Line: Managing Library Finances*, 14(3), 164-176.

While a considerable amount has been spoken and written about the subject of outsourcing, or contracting out, of technical services in libraries, there is little consensus on even the definition of the phenomenon, or its history. The available research shows that arguments in favor of outsourcing are based on supposed cost and time savings, while opposition tends to emphasize quality issues. Evidence as to whether outsourcing in general in fact saves money or time tends to be spotty, while there is some data supporting concerns about a decline of quality in many outsourcing projects.

Joy, A. H., & Lugg, R. (1998). **The books are shelf-ready; are you?** *Library Acquisitions: Practice & Theory*, 22(1), 71-89.

Over the past two years, shelf-ready services, the outsourcing of cataloging and processing services, has become the hot topic in the library world. This article examines the implications of shelf-ready service, both operationally and organizationally, for both library and vendor. Using the format of a dialog between librarian and vendor, the article discusses the following questions: Why are you interested in contracting for (or providing) these services? What do you hope to gain? What are the stumbling blocks to implementing a shelf-ready program? What is the impact on workflow and staffing in your organization? How many and what kinds of jobs are affected? How do library/vendor responsibilities change when shelf-ready procedures are applied to an approval plan ... to firm orders ... to standing orders? How can quality control be assured? Which errors really matter? Are the same standards applied to vendor staff as to in-house staff? How are standards affected by shelf-ready? How do both library and vendor know when they're "ready for shelf-ready" in a given situation?