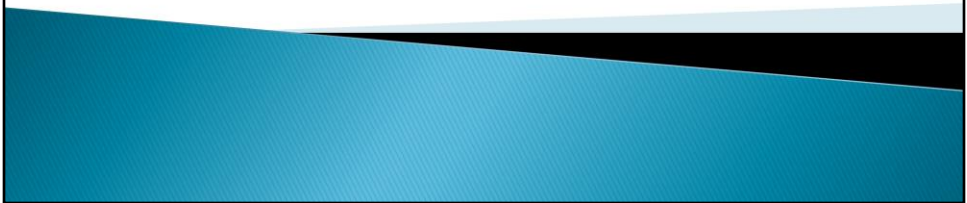


Keith Eiten

**Subject Librarian for Music, Art and
Communications
Buswell Memorial Library
Wheaton College**

keith.eiten@wheaton.edu
630-752-5092



INTRODUCTION

- ▶ Not an exercise in persuasion for or against starting a shelf-ready outsourced program
- ▶ All choices have consequences and outcomes
- ▶ Some choices may have both pros and cons to deal with



PROS

- ▶ Understaffed libraries, either temporarily or chronically:
 - Shelf-ready cataloging and processing can be the difference between getting any materials processed or not

PROS

- ▶ Understaffed libraries, either temporarily or chronically:
 - E-books eliminate processing, but not the need for cataloging and description

A reminder to administrators: e-books are no different from physical books in their need for quality cataloging and description.

PROS

- ▶ Shelf-ready can free up staff time for other important tasks
 - Database cleanup
 - Correcting errors in legacy descriptive cataloging and obsolete MARC coding

PROS

- ▶ Shelf-ready can free up staff time for other important tasks
 - Database cleanup
 - Updating of headings (AAP's), changes to headings mandated by RDA

PROS

- ▶ Shelf-ready can free up staff time for other important tasks
 - Database cleanup
 - New projects, such as OCLC Worldshare Collection Manager

This service has been available for some time now, under differing names. It notifies a library when an OCLC master record to which a library's holdings are attached has been updated.

PROS

- ▶ Shelf-ready can free up staff time for other important tasks
 - Deal with “hidden collections”
 - Gift collections awaiting description and access

PROS

- ▶ Shelf-ready can free up staff time for other important tasks
 - Deal with “hidden collections”
 - Upgrading manuscript or archival collections with minimal or no subject description.

PROS

- ▶ Shelf-ready can free up staff time for other important tasks
 - Upgrading of legacy catalog records that need enhancement
 - OCLC's record merging projects
 - OCLC Worldshare Collection Manager doesn't provide retrospective improvement, only those going forward

OCLC's aggressive merging of master records that are apparent duplicates is an issue for I-Share libraries, because of the complexity of updating bibliographic records in the I-Share Universal Catalog.

PROS

- ▶ Shelf-ready can free up staff time for other important tasks
 - Upgrading OCLC master records to reflect enhanced cataloging in the local catalog
 - Added/enriched contents notes
 - Summaries
 - Subject and author headings

PROS

- ▶ Shelf-ready can free up staff time for other important tasks
 - Upgrading OCLC master records to reflect enhanced cataloging in the local catalog
 - OCLC's Expert Community allows catalogers to make extensive changes on non-PCC master records

PROS

- ▶ Shelf-ready can free up staff time for other important tasks
 - Upgrading OCLC master records to reflect enhanced cataloging in the local catalog
 - Essential to those libraries that use WorldCat Local as a primary discovery layer

PROS

- ▶ Shelf-ready can free up staff time for other important tasks
 - Catalogers who have faculty appointments can gain time for other professional activities:
 - Teaching
 - Collection development projects
 - Liaison outreach to teaching faculty
 - Research

PROS

- ▶ Most processing tasks and some cataloging tasks are relatively low-skill
 - Shelf-ready can help reduce the amount of low-skill work that library staff will need to perform and to supervise
 - Remember labor costs

“Double DLC” copy cataloging is the primary example of a lowish-medium-skill cataloging that could just as well be done by a vendor.

CONS

- ▶ Additional costs will be incurred.
 - Either new budgetary resources must be advocated for, or the funds must come from somewhere in the library's budget
 - From materials budgets?
 - From other areas.

Shelf-ready services have costs: some are yearly fixed costs, and some are per-item.
Beware of “robbing Peter to pay Paul.”

CONS

- ▶ Additional costs will be incurred.
 - 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.

An example of budgetary flexibility that may be needed: the additional costs may need to come from other budgetary lines: student labor, processing materials, etc.

CONS

- ▶ Starting a shelf-ready program can be a time-consuming process
 - Need to carefully evaluate current cataloging practices and workflows
 - May need to reconsider if practices are worth continuing, if would be difficult for a vendor to duplicate

Department heads should anticipate resistance from cataloging staff. It is easy for local practices to perpetuate, sometimes with no apparent justification for them.

CONS

- ▶ Starting a shelf-ready program can be a time-consuming process
 - Many hours to be 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.

CONS

- ▶ Starting a shelf-ready program can be a time-consuming process
 - Need to change workflows once the shelf-ready program is running
 - Need to determine how much spot checking of the vendor's work you will want to perform

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 by the vendor. Some method of sampling or spot checking of the vendor's work must be established. Also, not all materials your library acquires will have shelf-ready services available. Your library's workflows will likely multiply, at least into "main" and "exception" categories.

CONS

- ▶ Starting a shelf-ready program can be a time-consuming process
 - Moving from piecework to batch processes is a major conceptual shift

CONS

- ▶ Starting a shelf-ready program can be a time-consuming process
 - Ironically, very small libraries (one-person tech. serv. depts.) may not be able to start a shelf-ready project, because they cannot spare the expertise required to set up and monitor the project.

CONS

- ▶ Three “strategic” issues:
 - Eliminates a route for mentoring or recruiting students into librarianship
 - Low-skill jobs like book processing and shelving are often done by students
 - Entry-level jobs are often the entry point for people into librarianship

CONS

- ▶ Three “strategic” issues:
 - Cataloging is a high-skill job, requiring training and a broad education to be done well.
 - By hiring an outsourcer are we reducing work opportunities for ourselves, newer librarians, and future librarians?

Career opportunities are already being limited by state budget trends and other, larger trends in our economic/business/political culture. Do we want too add self-limitation?

CONS

- ▶ Three “strategic” issues:
 - Is employing an outsourcer is a “slippery slope,” or “allowing the camel’s nose into the tent”?
 - 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.

CONS

▶ An ethical issue:

- By hiring an outsourcer, are we supporting a type of sweatshop?
 - Work that has in the past been done by a students for minimum wage for 8–10 hours per week
 - Now done by (? someone?) for unknown wages and with unknown levels of benefits.
 - “Think globally and act locally”

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.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

- ▶ Libraries have already been engaged kinds of outsourcing for some time:
 - Purchasing journal indexes because we don't have the resources to analytically catalog our journals

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

- ▶ Libraries have already been engaged kinds of outsourcing for some time
 - In the time when we had card catalogs, purchasing card sets from LC was a kind of outsourcing

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

- ▶ Libraries have already been engaged kinds of outsourcing for some time:
 - Shared cataloging on OCLC takes advantage of the work of thousands of other librarians

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

- ▶ Are we artisans? Or ...



There is a tension in library work, especially in cataloging, between an “artisan” concept, in which we pay some level of attention to each resource coming before us, and ...

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

- ▶ Are we manufacturers?



And between a more industrial kind of process, which outsourcing probably is. How do we resolve this tension between our need for quality work with a more impersonal process?