

## Group Therapy – Database Trials

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### GRIFE:

Submitted by **John Forsyth** (Bibliographer [Business & Languages], University Libraries, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH)

Our library has until now had the practice of generally holding database trials within the library and limiting the participants to library faculty and staff. In particular, the possibility of a faculty member(s) becoming enamored of a database and interpreting the proffered trial as a guarantee of subscription on the library's part has been a deterrent to our offering open trials. We are considering the advantages of making database trials available to university faculty. We would very much like to know your experience with database trials. Especially useful would be your experience with open trials; what are the advantages and what are the disadvantages? Do you ever include students in open trials?

Another problem we have had with database trials is the great number of trials. Database trials pop up at all times of the year. Librarians and staff have difficulty accommodating them with the rest of their workloads. Has anyone had success limiting trials to one or two trial periods annually? Please let me know your library's experience, if relevant, to offering public trials of databases and handling the great number and unpredictability of them.

### RESPONSE:

Submitted by **Ellen Metter** (Humanities/Anthropology Bibliographer, Auraria Library, Denver, CO)

We haven't limited trial periods to one or two a year because of the situations that arise that seem to demand trials quickly, including: the interest of a faculty member or librarian; consortial purchasing; a time-limited 'deal'; the discovery of a database that fills an information gap or is more affordable and comparable to one we have; or the sudden appearance of funds that must be used ASAP. I do say no to some trials, putting lower priority databases on the back burner. There are times I try not to do trials because I know the faculty are too busy or not available. Trials are generally held mid/late September through November and February through April.

I actually like opening up the trials to one and all since positive comments from faculty strengthen my cause when I ask for funding from the group that holds the purse strings, the Electronic Resources Committee (ERC). Having an ERC is nice for a number of reasons but, in regard to your question, it's helpful to be able to hold up the ERC as the final deciding group when a faculty member has become enamored of a database and the decision has been made to not buy it. Since reasons for not buying a database are usually reasonable (including negative comments or lack of feedback), I find faculty are usually understanding.

I think the few times the faculty continued to agitate about not having a database were times when we really did need to acquire the database and their persistence resulted in helping us find funding – or get more creative. In the case of OED we scrounged the funds, and I'm glad we did. The database gets enormous use. (And the English faculty did not need to chain themselves to the library, as threatened.)

We have a trials page <http://library.auraria.edu/findit/dbasetrials.html>, though just having that page brings in little input. During trials I send an e-mail to the appropriate faculty members and ask them to try it. Also an e-mail announcement is sent to the library.

## **RESPONSE:**

Submitted by **Barbara Cox** (Coordinator of Library Selectors, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT)

Marriott Library at the University of Utah recently started a more formal system for database trials and evaluations. A request for a database must be adopted by a library employee who agrees to be its champion and to take explicit responsibility for it. By filling out a form completely, we hope selectors will have gathered enough information about the database that they can make a sound recommendation about its value. We feel that an important predictor of database use is promotion by the library and hope that having an official champion will mean that databases are more consistently presented to the committee and the campus.

The final evaluation is by the Database and Serials Evaluation Team (DASET) – a committee which evaluates all additions (and subtractions!) to our subscriptions.

We will now not start trials until information is gathered and there is a reasonable chance the database can be afforded. The champion begins the process by filling out a form which asks for basic information and identification of specific key user groups. The Electronic Formats Coordinator completes it with additional information she gets from the publisher (exact cost, statistics, and other technical issues) and sets up a trial. Trials are generally listed on our main database page so all have access. We have a Web form for collecting input from users and librarians. If, after the trial, the database still seems promising, the champion presents the facts formally to DASET which makes the purchase decision. All our new subscriptions are reviewed after two years to see if they have indeed attracted an audience.

## **RESPONSE:**

Submitted by **Gloria Selene Hinojosa** (Collection Development Librarian, Alkek Library, Texas State University-San Marcos) and Paivi Rentz (Electronic Resources Librarian, Alkek Library, Texas State University-San Marcos)

Texas State University has been offering trials/previews/demos of databases for quite a while. We send e-mails to our faculty liaisons and ask them to share access information within the department. Vendors have always agreed to our request to share the login via e-mail with faculty. Our biggest problem is getting faculty to actually look at the databases and give us some feedback. When we send announcements to all faculty members, we seldom get enough responses to get a real reading. If I approach my faculty liaisons individually because I feel the

database might be relevant to their or their colleagues' research or curriculum, I get a better response, though not necessarily a lot.

On one occasion, several faculty members really liked a searchable image database on trial. We had arranged a trial, though we knew we probably couldn't afford it, because we really wanted the faculty to know what was happening in that area of database searching. We got several e-mails of support. For the one person who insisted we should buy it, we referred him to the cost. We try to give faculty an idea of the cost when we announce trials, so they can understand what the funding issues may be relevant to the library allocation of the related discipline(s). We do use some of their library allocation money when appropriate (i.e. relevant to the one discipline) and make that case when asking them to contribute. Sometimes the database is so useful that several academic departments actually cooperate and will pitch in to help pay for it. Other times they have to take "no" for an answer, as do we. They are understanding as long as we can give them good information regarding why we can or cannot get something (and be prepared to prove it), such as there is too much duplication with what we already own, or the price is unaffordable, etc. You'd be surprised how often they are not aware of some of the other resources we already have, but that provides us the opportunity for an information sharing experience. We've never had any unpleasantness over having to do without.

We have had faculty suggest that *we* write a proposal to get money to purchase a database. Remember, we are often talking about an ongoing cost, though faculty don't always consider that issue. An exchange of information can make that clear. With one-time purchases, and keeping access fees in mind, sometimes we can work it out with one-time new program money that we get from the University. This is always with the knowledge and support of the department involved. Regardless, we feel we should ask for input from faculty, particularly because sometimes we do expect their library fund allocations to support those databases, at least in part. Famous last words, but so far we've never regretted it in the six years I have done it here. And still, in all that time, we don't really get a lot of feedback.

We do have a database team that makes recommendations, and they review the trial databases. In addition, we ask the subject librarians to pass along the information and logins directly to the department faculty liaisons, who in turn notify interested colleagues.