Thinking Outside the Box: Connecting Users with Collection Building and Management: A Case Study in a Research Library

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Abstract
Libraries are continually focused on how to provide better service to users. This is even more critical for a research library whose users have specific information needs based on the research focus. Instead of passive reference service, libraries should think outside the box to proactively engage users from upstream, i.e. collection building and management. The purpose of this article is to share experience of how a small-sized research library makes collection building as a joint effort of faculty and librarians, as well as connects users to facilitate collection access and information sharing.
As a research library, ISEAS Library mainly serves around 100 researchers from the establishment as well as visiting scholars. Unlike medium and large-sized libraries, it's not cost-effective for the Library to implement Approval Plans and Patron-Driven Acquisitions. The acquisition of materials is based on Title-by-Title Selection. In the first section, this article will report the successful implementation of Monthly Book Selection Programme and Yearly Serials Selection Programme, which make ISEAS researchers highly engaged in collection building.
In the second section, it will discuss ISEAS Library's initiative --Info Alert. ISEAS Library has been providing various Info Alerts to research groups and external users, regarding current news, collections updates, materials on ad-hoc topics, etc. in order to raise users' awareness on the Library collection as well as maximising the usage. ISEAS Researchers play a pivotal role in customising and initiating Info Alert. With the joint effort, ISEAS Info Alert is getting welcomed in the Institute and beyond.

Keywords: collection building, collection management, user engagement, info alert

Introduction

The mission of research library continues to be characterised as maintaining a permanent collection and providing necessary access to support research. Even though the service environment of libraries has changed radically as a result of technology, library support for research has always revolved around collection development, information discovery and some elements of information management (Auckland, 2012). The shift from print to electronic materials made the library and its partial services as well as efforts in collection building and management virtually invisible to its users, or even forgotten.

Many libraries studies on the innovation of information service via technology, social media (McKinley, 2016), etc., but this alone is incomplete. Instead of studying on the innovation of reference service, it is more crucial for research libraries to connect users from upstream, i.e. collection building and management.

To engage users with library activities is well documented in the literature. However, the model of practice varies from institution to institution. While some have moved on to provide subject specialist support to faculty, some continue to use functionalist models.

Since 2013, ISEAS Library has started to explore appropriate models to engage users in Library collection management process. This paper will share experience of how a small-sized research library makes collection building as a joint effort of faculty and librarians, as well as connects users to facilitate collection access and information sharing.

About ISEAS Library

ISEAS Library, attached to ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, is a research library as well as the information centre for the research on Southeast Asian Studies. The Library houses a unique collection of Southeast Asian materials on the area of economics, politics, international relations, social and cultural studies, built up over the past four decades.

The key collection of printed materials consists of approximately 300,000 volumes of publications, 40,000 volumes of journals, some 1,000 maps and 1,200 microform titles of regional newspapers, journals, theses, rare and antiquarian books and press clippings. While the majority of Library's print collections consists of English titles (45%), it also carries a vast collection in different languages mainly from the regions of Southeast Asia, among them Indonesian (39%), Vietnamese (4%), Bahasa Melayu (3%) and Thai (3%).

The Library serves around 120 ISEAS researchers as well as all members of the public who are interested in the study of the Southeast Asian region. Prior to 2013, only individuals affiliated with ISEAS were able to use the library, users from other institutions may be granted the membership with a letter of introduction issued by the institutions.

To promote active usage of rich collection and encourage research on Southeast Asia, ISEAS Library reviewed its access policy in 2013 and 2014 respectively. In 2013, ISEAS Library accepted all members of the public who are interested in the study of the Southeast Asian region. Individuals who are not affiliated with the Institute may be granted personal loan privileges upon provision of a refundable deposit. From January 2014, the Library has further relaxed its access policy by allowing Singaporean and Singapore Permanent Residents pursuing degree studies in local institutions to use the resources without the need to pay a refundable deposit.

Connecting Users with Collection Building

In academic libraries, selection of materials by the teaching and research faculty of the university is a common practice. The connection between library and faculty is normally through subject librarian or selection committee. In addition to selection by faculty members and librarians, other acquisition models are also widely adopted by large libraries and public libraries to assist selectors, such as patron-driven acquisition (Walters, 2012) which allows patrons to select and purchase books for library collection without further intermediation, and approval plan (Eaglen, 2000) which is an agreement between library and vendor for the vendor to supply books to library, subject to certain restrictions imposed by the library, such as subject, format or price.

As a small-sized research library, ISEAS Library may not be suitable to implement these acquisition models due to the constraints of manpower, budget, procurement regulation, etc. In its operational review in 2013, ISEAS Library decided to adopt the government-wide procurement policy to invite publishers and distributors to provide quotations on books and serials acquisitions, so as to achieve a higher level of transparency and accountability in the process. The revised SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) also put an end to its two-decade old practice of "Blanket Order" arrangement which took up almost 15% of the acquisition budget. This "Blanket Order" arrangement was quite similar with the "Approval Plan" mode of acquisition, except that in the case of the latter, libraries could return "unwanted" materials. The "Blanket Order" approach had led to a considerable amount of duplicate and irrelevant titles being accessioned into the collection (estimated 20%) which not only occupied precious library storage space and consumed our resources having to devote to managing these titles.

In the past, the selection of materials was solely done by librarians. Despite librarians are trained and study in the development of collections, users' growing information needs have required selection of materials to be increasingly deferred to library patrons. Since 2013, ISEAS Library has started to explore an appropriate model to make acquisition as joint effort between library and its patrons.

After near 1 year exploration and continuous improvement, the Library successfully implemented 2 programmes-- Monthly Book Selection and Yearly Serials Selection Programmes to establish close collaboration between the library and scholars as well as enhance mutually beneficial services.

Monthly Book Selection Programme

Under this programme, the Library selects and compiles recommended list of titles for purchase every month and send to all ISEAS researchers via email for feedback before making final decisions for ordering. The monthly title selection contains mainly books with small portion of other form of materials such as audio-visual, posters, statistics, etc. It intends to obtain researchers' consensus on all types of materials that the Library purchased.

Monthly Book Selection Programme is coordinated by Library Acquisitions Department. The book acquisition process can be subdivided into 6 activities, which are shown in Figure 1.

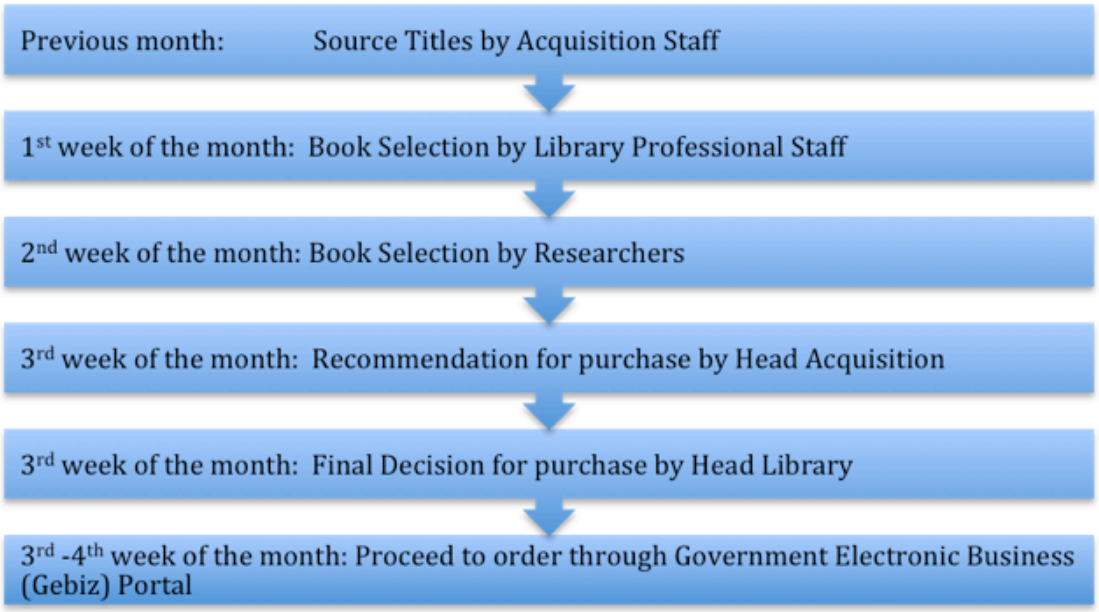

Figure. 1. Activity Flow of Book Selection Process

Source Titles by Acquisition Staff. In a first step, staff in Acquisition Department including Acquisition Librarian and Library Assistant are responsible to identify titles from various resources, i.e. publishers' alert, catalogue, users' recommendation, etc. Selected books are listed in Excel Spreadsheet with detailed metadata including publisher, publication date, synopsis and estimated price. Where possible and available, a hyperlink has been incorporated in each title for redirection to the website of publisher/distributor, or webpage of book review/news, so as to provide more comprehensive information for the title selected. The list of titles will be futher sorted geographically based on Country/Region/Special Topics to cater to researchers from different country study programme.

Book Selection by Library Professional Staff. The second activity involves all library professional staff including Head Library, usually commences at the 1st week of the month. After list titles checked against library online catalogue and finalised by Library Assistant, titles are assigned to all processional staff based on country/topic. Professional Staff examine title's added value to the collection and provide comments that whether to purchase it or not.

Book Selection by Researchers. Researchers are informed by email that the list of titles under consideration. After being informed, researchers provide inputs whether or not they recommend library to order particular title. They are able to select titles under their research areas by filtering relevant country/topics in Excel Spreadsheet. The selection inputs from researchers could be either provided via email or hardcopy of the relevant pages with their feedback to the library counter.

Recommendation from Head Acquisition. When library receives researchers' feedback, Library Assistant in Acquisition Department collates information and adds in respective column of the list. Head Acquisition recommends titles to be purchased for Head Library approval. In some cases, titles that are not suggested by researchers take additional time to review with regard to library collection relevance.

Final Decision by Head Library based on Feedback. This activity requires final approval from Head Library for all recommended titles. Final Decision which could differ from recommendations, is reviewed from inputs of Library Professional Staff, researchers and Head Acquisition.

Proceed with Ordering through Government Electronic Business (GeBIZ) Portal. Finally, Library proceeds to call ITQ (Invitation to Quote) through GeBIZ Portal and places order according to quote and delivery timeframe. GeBIZ is the Singapore Government's one-stop e-procurement portal. All the public sector's invitations for quotations and tenders are posted on GeBIZ. Suppliers can search for government procurement opportunities, download tender documents, and submit their bids online. Since most of orders could be directly supplied by local vendors through GeBIZ, this discussion is restricted to the acquisition process for orders through GeBIZ only to get an idea of the working process. However, a small part of titles that could not be sourced locally, are procured from foreign vendors through email.

Yearly Serials Selection Programme

Compared with book selection, selection of serial titles is more straight forward as the subscription cycle is usually once a year. Hence, subscription of journals, magazines and newspapers are reviewed in every August with consultation with researchers to facilitate the renewal or subscription started from September onwards. The serials selection processes are shown in Figure 2.

Because of high cost of serial titles, the evaluation of usage is necessary for renewal decision. In spite of several possibilities existed for gathering usage data, such as circulation records, in-house shelving data and user signed usage, possible loss of data from patrons not recording use made it impossible to rely solely upon usage data. Consequently, for journal and magazine titles received low usage, i.e. three or fewer uses during past 12 months, following criteria could be considered when doing evaluation: user feedback on current subscription, subject coverage of serial titles as well as availability in other sources, such as subscribed databases or online free access.

Acquisition Department is responsible to collate information from library system, library users and reference librarian for evaluation of current subscriptions. After that, subscription list with library's recommendation is circulated to researchers for

feedback. When Library receives different views or objections for particular titles, Acquisition Librarian reviews recommendations and does necessary adjustment for Head Library's final approval. Researchers are notified about the library's decision before the selection process closes by ordering.

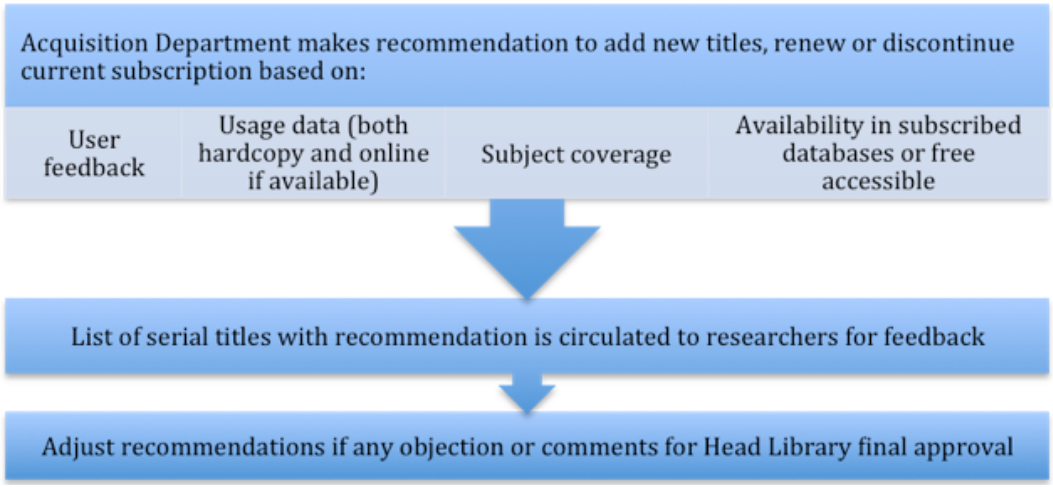

Figure. 2. Activity Flow of Serials Selection Process

Positive Outcomes of Two Selection Programmes

The implementation of both selection programmes revealed positive outcomes.

Firstly, the selection programmes provide opportunity for everyone to contribute in library collection building. As far as we know, making library acquisition collaborated with library patron has become a common practice in academic libraries. Although librarians spent considerable time reflecting on building strong partnerships with faculty, the variation in librarian-faculty collaboration levels indicated that not all faculty were engaged in similar reflection (Douglas, 2016). To ensure that all ISEAS researchers get involved, we developed this solution that provides equity and opportunity for everyone. Since the programme started in late 2013, 24 ISEAS researchers (out of 120) have provided inputs in Book Selection List. Table 1 revealed that on average, in 2015, almost half of acquired books were endorsed by researchers in meeting their immediate research needs.

Secondly, it helps in reviewing vernacular language titles that library staff may not have the proficiency. The Library's collection policy is closely tied to the major research programmes of the Institute and covers subjects in the applied social science, such as economics, politics, international relations, military and strategic studies, social and cultural studies in the context of ASEAN and Southeast Asia. As a result, materials on these subjects in Southeast Asian Languages, or even European Languages are within the acquisition scope. However, library staff may not have the proficiency in all Southeast Asian languages. ISEAS Researchers who come from various countries, in particular Southeast Asian countries, are able to contribute their language speciality in selection of vernacular language titles.

Table 1 Selection Rate for Monthly Book Selection List

Month	Selected Titles	No of Titles Endorsed by Researchers	Rate
Jan-15	76	38	50.00%
Feb-15	72	23	31.94%
Mar-15	84	50	59.52%
Apr-15	89	34	38.20%
May-15	83	32	38.55%
Jun-15	80	29	36.25%
Jul-15	71	33	46.48%
Aug-15	79	31	39.24%
Sep-15	85	17	20.00%
Oct-15	72	35	48.61%
Nov-15	93	42	45.16%
Dec-15	110	51	46.36%

Thirdly, book purchases through GeBIZ Portal is more fair and transparent. In accordance with government procurement requirements, the Library compares the price and delivery for acquisition from multiple sources which meet the requirements and offer the best value. For normal book acquisition, the Library publishes approved titles openly on the GeBIZ Portal for quotation on a monthly basis. Quotations are evaluated and awarded based on published requirements, procedures and evaluation criteria. Furthermore, large volumes purchase through GeBIZ also minimises unnecessary communication with vendors.

Encourage Usage

In order to investigate how the implementation of Book Selection Programme can encourage usage, we retrieved usage data on books acquired in recent two years from library system. The study only measures the use of general books, while reference books and statistics titles were not included.

Out of 1,536 titles acquired in 2014 and 2015, 1,108 titles (72%) were consulted by library users through either loan or in-house usage within 27 months (2 years and 3 months). By further analysed titles acquired in 2015, out of 846 titles, 697 titles (82%) were consulted by library users through either loan or in-house usage within 15 months. It demonstrates most books bought through Monthly Book Selection Programme can meet the needs of the users.

Connecting User with the Collection via ISEAS Info Alert

In 2013, the Library initiated a special product-ISEAS Library Selects. It is an information alert service put together by the ISEAS Library, regarding current news, collections updates, materials on ad-hoc topics, etc. in order to raise users' awarenesses on the library collection as well as maximising the usage. Table 2 shows various types of Info Alerts provided by ISEAS Library.

Table 2 ISEAS Library Info Alert Types

Function	Info Alert Types
For information Sharing	Daily News Alert
	Weekly Articles Alert
	Other Info Alerts on Ad-hoc topics
Connect User with Collection	New Books Arrival Info Alert
	New Journals and Magazines Info Alert
	Gift, Deposits & Exchange Info Alert
	Conference Papers Deposited Info Alert
	Backlog Titles Info Alert
Customised Info Alert for ISEAS Researchers	Brown Bag Dialogue
	Special Monthly Journals Alert for RES (Regional Economic Studies) Members
	Special info alert on reading materials related to ISEAS in-house seminars

For information sharing purpose, Daily News Alert and Weekly Article Alert contain links to articles covering Southeast Asia and special topics relevant to the research interest/direction/agenda of ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute. The difference is the former covers timely news articles, while Weekly Article Alert includes longer and more analytical reports by other institutions that focus on the Southeast Asian countries. In the event of special topics, the Library also releases a Special Info Alert containing articles related to the event, such as Special Info Alert on 40th Anniversary of the End of Vietnam War and ASEAN Summit.

To better connecting library users to the collection, the Library releases Info Alerts on new arrival of books, journals, gift titles as well as conference papers. (Backlog Titles Info Alert was no longer released since all backlog titles cleared in 2014.) Since the nature of library collections has been changed radically as we have entered the digital age, ISEAS Library continues to evolve to provide access to as much content as possible. For instance, in the New Arrival of Journals and Magazines Info Alert, links to online journals are provided in addition to the link to journal records in library catalogue. Furthermore, the Library makes reading recommendations on relevant articles in the journals and databases to aid research through New Arrival of Journals and Magazine Info Alert. Head Library also contributes in the selection of journal articles, based on research interest/direction/agenda of the Institute.

Apart from Info Alerts focusing on current news and collection updates, ISEAS Library also customises Info Alerts for ISEAS researchers to facilitate information discovery. So far, there are 3 types of customised Info Alerts. In conjunction with ISEAS in-house seminars, the Library compiles selective reference materials in library collections relating to the subject including the news and articles that the

Library has featured in the past Daily News and Weekly Article Alerts to promote the usage. Another Info Alert on Brown Bag Dialogue, one of ISEAS events, informs researchers when the audio presentation of this dialogue has been accessioned and available for consultation for those who missed the session. Other than Library's effort, ISEAS researchers also play a pivotal role in customising and initiating Info Alert, which could be illustrated through Special Monthly Journals Alert for Regional Economic Studies (RES) Members. The RES coordinator worked with library to identify a journal reading list for RES researchers. Library staff search and select online articles from listed journals every month and send Info Alert to RES Group.

Over a two-year period, the platform has been improved to facilitate efficiency in accessing information. Where possible and available, link to the original source mentioned in the article is provided. For instance, a news article refers to the release of an survey, which could be accessed freely online. In this case, the URL of this survey would be provided in a statement below the news article. Similarly, URL to library catalogue would be also embedded in the statement if a book mentioned in the article is available in the library collection. Furthermore, a simple index for all the subject headers is built to enable users to access the selected subjects directly.

Impact of Info Alert

In addition to design Info Alerts to better meet information needs of users, it is equally important to note the impact of Info Alert, i.e how it is used by readers and whether the reader thinks it's useful.

Table 3 shows the open rate ranking of ISEAS Info Alert. One of customised Info Alerts for RES Members is ranked first, even the subscriber group is small, while readers are also keen on the collection update Alerts which are ranked in the top few such as Conference Paper Deposited Info Alert and New Books Arrival Info Alert.

Table 3 ISEAS Library Info Alert Open Rate

No	Info Alert Type	Open Rate (Avg.) (2013-2015)	No of Issues Released (as of Dec 2015)	Recipients (as of Dec 2015)
1	Special Monthly Journal Alert for RES Members	24.33%	25	31
2	Conference Papers Deposited Info Alert	23.49%	10	272
3	New Books Arrival Info Alert	23.20%	49	237
4	Weekly Articles Alert	21.66%	131	316
5	New Arrival of Journal Alert	21.59%	99	275
6	Brown Bag Dialog	21.10%	4	109
7	Gift, Deposits & Exchange Info Alert	20.94%	24	234
8	Reading Materials related to ISEAS In-house Seminar	19.70%	22	308
9	Daily News Alert	19.53%	508	308
10	Special Issue of Daily News Alert	18.86%	134	308

In order to know how the open rate compares with other industry, this study refers to data provided by a 3rd party platform (Constant Contact, 2016) which ISEAS Library is using for sending Info Alerts. By comparison of similar industries, it can be seen from both Table 3 and Table 4 that the open rates of ISEAS Info Alert far exceed Higher Education Industry. While the open rates of some Info Alerts are slightly lower than Government Agency, they are still comparable with Non-profit Organisations.

Table 4 Average Industry Rate

No	Business Type	Open Rate
1	Religious Organization	28.00%
2	Health & Social Services (ex. hospital, elder care, adoption services)	24.64%
3	Education - Primary/Secondary (ex. elementary, middle, and high schools)	23.92%
4	Government Agency or Services	23.06%
5	Other - Non-profit	21.90%
6	Animal Services	21.43%
7	Child Care Services	21.28%
8	Legal Services	21.05%
9	Home & Building Services (ex. construction, HVAC, landscaping, design)	19.69%
10	Transportation	19.65%
11	Civic/Social Membership (ex. associations, chambers, clubs)	19.57%
12	Accommodations (ex. hotel, inn, B&B, campgrounds)	19.34%
13	Real Estate	18.35%
14	Education - Higher Education (ex. colleges, universities, trade schools)	18.14%
15	Health Professional (ex. physician, dentist, chiropractor)	17.96%

When it comes to user feedback on the Info Alerts, 2015 ISEAS Library User Satisfaction Survey revealed that more than 93% of the subscribers felt that the frequency, timeliness, subject coverage, quality of the selection, presentation layout and accessibility of the hyperlinks of the Daily News Alert and Weekly Articles Alert to be satisfactory. Moreover, the Library is pleased to note that several requests were received from ISEAS researchers to subscribe Info Alerts by using their personal email account when their affiliations with the Institute were ended. The following feedback demonstrates how the Info Alert helps and aids user's researches.

"*Thank you very much for your daily news journals. I have never seen such a comprehensive daily periodicals before either in business or academics. Truly appreciated.*" --Feedback on the Daily News and Weekly Journal Articles Alert, received from a respondent from the User Satisfaction Survey 2015.

"*As a former ISEAS visiting fellow I continue to use the library and the online services with gratitude. You are doing a great job, all of you*!" --Feedback on ISEAS Info Alerts, received from ISEAS Former Visiting Fellow.

"*Thank you so much for providing this service to RES. I have not been able to use this service much in the last two months due to other pressing matters. I should be able to use this again in the coming months. This is useful as it helps us to quickly glance and see what has been released and also access it directly from our computer*." --Feedback on the Special Monthly Journal Alert for RES Members, received from ISEAS Researcher.

Conclusion

User's needs and demands for research have propelled ISEAS Library to stay collaboration with them. The practice in collection building and management may reflect only one research library's experience, in particular small-sized research library. But the users involvement in collection building and lead in customising library service are becoming increasingly common in all types of library.To attract more users involvement will continue to be challenging and that's the direction that we are still working on.

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