

Downsizing the Reference Collection in the Engineering Library, The University of Melbourne.

The role of a reference collection is to provide a distilled, concentrated library, well selected with the most up to date resources.

In early 2006 the decision was made that the Engineering Library collection would be ultimately relocated to another building on campus, The Eastern Resource Centre.

This relocated collection was to be allocated less space than the existing collections so an examination of the book stock was required. We were given a lead time of till the end of that current academic year before this move was to take place.

It was decided that the Reference Collection would be one of the last to be assessed.

In the recent past there has a real push to ensure only current editions of titles were housed within the reference collection.

The role of the reference collection is to act as a quick reference source and not to be a research library.

In keeping with the philosophy of maintaining an up to date collection, and following the general guideline that material older than 10 years old is out of date in the Science/ Technology field a publication date post 2000 was used as one of the collection limiters we used for downsizing.

Materials removed from this collection were assessed for their inclusion in the general collection, be sent to CARM or to be discarded.

With the increasing purchase of E Books for our library collections any hard copy items that existed in an E-format were considered for relocation, initially into the general collections.

This had a major impact on the number of our 'Handbook' type materials held in Reference.

One of the limiters on this ideal is the practice of publishers in the Engineering field to only make superseded editions available as E books while issuing the current edition only as a paper based items.

Encyclopaedias have proved a challenge. Some titles have been purchased electronically but the usage pattern of having multiple volumes open a spread out on a desk in front of you meant that users continued to use the paper based tools for selection and downloaded the text after the initial consultation.

Because there is no circulation data available for the reference collection and 'the best predictor of future use of a book is its past use' we attempted to capture the use of the reference collection.

We attempted to capture some quantitative data by placing red stickers on the back cover of materials prior to their reshelving at the end of the day.

Users of our library were actively discouraged from reshelving the materials they had used.

We are aware that this would not capture multiple users of the same materials on any one day but it did give us some hard data to start with.

Because of its physical setup, study tables surrounded by easy access shelves to the reference collection, the materials in the collection generally had a high level of use.

Items that were not used at all during the academic year were targeted for relocation to other areas.

There were 2 adjunct areas to the reference collection that impacted on this study:

1/ Decommissioning of paper based Australian Standards collection.

A subscription updates service for this collection ceased in July 2004.

The full service is available as an online resource.

All paper based standards were discarded apart from a few core items that were included into the general collections. Their continuing use is being monitored.

2/ Abstract and indexing tools such as Engineering index, Electrical and Electronics Abstracts and Metals abstracts.

The vast majority of these paper based indexes have been replaced by online equivalents or better.

These items were sent to CARM as historical items!

The end result was a core collection (discounting abstracts and standards) that was reduced from 2100 items to 668 essential and targeted items.