Title

Starting from Scratch on Perpetual Access

Abstract

When library staff resources are limited, administering post-cancellation access to electronic journal content can often be neglected when other demands of managing electronic resources take priority. Difficulties handling perpetual access include determining access rights from publishers' license terms, verifying to what paid content the library is entitled, and retaining access when a journal is transferred to a new publisher. Libraries can utilize their existing electronic resources management tools to develop staff workflows for perpetual access entitlements. This paper is based on a presentation given at the Mississippi State University Libraries eResources and Emerging Technologies Summit on August 3, 2012.

Keywords

Perpetual access, post-cancellation access, serials, e-journals, workflow

Footnote

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Running Title

Perpetual Access

The transition from print serials to electronic has complicated the process of retaining access to journal content once a library cancels its subscription. Perpetual access to a journal (also referred to as post-cancellation access) is the right for a library, after cancelation, to access content online for the issues published while the license agreement was in effect. Any additional content the library may have been granted access to during the active subscription, such as backfiles, is not typically included in perpetual access terms. A library must dedicated staff time to ensure perpetual online access unlike the passive retention of print volumes.

While the inclusion of perpetual access rights in license agreements has become more standard, it is not universal. The library must consider whether these rights are a mandatory prerequisite for subscribing or negotiate alterations to the license agreement if the publisher has not offered them. In addition to time spent negotiating license, there is the practical necessity of managing the day-to-day aspects of perpetual access content. Depending on a library's transition from print to online serials, and the degree to which a library would have had to cancel subscriptions, perpetual access management may not have yet been addressed. Including perpetual access into staff workflow can easily take a lower priority to the other challenges of managing electronic resources. This paper is aimed at libraries with limited experience managing the practical aspects of perpetual access and outlines the process for developing such a workflow based on the experience of Hunter Library at Western Carolina University.

Challenges of developing a workflow

In 2011 Hunter Library experienced a 25% reduction to the collection budget and undertook a comprehensive collection review to identify resources to cancel. While reviewing process documentation for technical services, the library discovered verifying and establishing perpetual access was not a part of the journal cancellation checklist. The outcome of the collection review and the impending cancellations precipitated the need for the library to address the absence of a policy. In this

case, the crisis became advantageous for the development of a comprehensive procedure to address the various issues surrounding perpetual access. Additionally, the large number of titles and publishers provided the library with the necessary variety to draft a policy able to accommodate all possible circumstances.

Hunter Library approached creating the workflow by addressing the following:

Does the publisher/license grant perpetual access?

To which years are we entitled access?

Which years can we currently access?

How much time should staff spend on resolving discrepancies?

The library compiled the list of cancelled titles and, for each, investigated whether the publisher grants perpetual access. Even when a content provider had a general policy set towards offering perpetual access, exceptions were possible at the title level. In nearly all cases, the subscription agent was able to provide accurate information for the titles. For the remaining titles, the library checked directly with the publisher or referred to the text of the license agreement. With that list, the library set about tabulating the order history and gathering copies of invoices. Depending on a library's invoice retention policy, it may be difficult to provide proof to publishers for all content for which the library paid. At Hunter Library, invoices had been retained for only four years and it was not always possible to determine definitively when online access began, especially for print and online combination subscriptions. Policies concerning whether the included online access constituted a paid online subscription varied from publisher to publisher and several of the library's claims for post-cancellation access were denied because the subscription was identified as a "print subscription" despite including online access.

Next, the library verified whether the publisher had accurately enabled perpetual access once the subscription expired. Depending on the grace period extended by the publisher, it could be weeks or

even months before the current subscription access was revoked. Until the journal entered this lapsed period, it was not possible to investigate whether there were any discrepancies between the access granted by the publisher and the order history of the library. For some publishers perpetual access was not automatically enabled and had to be requested by the library. The library worked with both the publisher and its subscription agent to rectify these discrepancies. Retaining records of the order history or copies of invoices hastened this process. An additional complication arose when a journal package cancelled by the library was simultaneously acquired by another publisher. Fortunately the new publisher honored the terms of the previous publisher's license agreement; however, the transition was time consuming and took nearly six months to resolve.

The library had to decide how much staff time to dedicate to setting up perpetual access. After some discussion, the library chose to treat the process analogously to the claiming of print serials. The library had paid for the content and the publisher was obligated to make it available; however, there became a point of diminishing returns where the number of hours spent gaining access to an additional one or two years of content was not worthwhile, especially when the content was available elsewhere in another form. At Western Carolina University, the library chose to do due diligence for every title, but when problems arose which required exceptional staff time to resolve, each case would be considered individually. Without a demonstrated or compelling need for access to that content, the staff would put aside work on the title.

E-Resources Tools

Hunter Library had three desired outcomes for perpetual access record keeping: to ensure perpetual access is set up properly when a journal is cancelled; to assist staff when troubleshooting access problems; and to verify ongoing online access to the title. It was crucial to integrate perpetual access into existing e-journal workflows to minimize both the time spent on the process as well as the chance

for staff to miss a step. Existing electronic resource management tools can be easily employed to track post-cancellation access titles. The information should be provided to the staff within those tools and avoid tracking perpetual access in an isolated location—such as a spreadsheet or printed list.

Western Carolina University subscribes primarily to EBSCO's e-journal and e-resource management products: EBSCO's *A-Z Listing Service*, *EBSCONET ERM Essentials*, and *EBSCONET Subscription Management*. *Subscription Management* proved to be a reliable source of license information and in 95% supplied correct terms of use for the journal title and stated whether perpetual access to paid content was granted. In the remaining cases, the library contacted the publisher directly to inquire when EBSCO could not supply the information or the information was insufficient to gain access.

E-journals with perpetual access continued to be displayed in the online A-to-Z list. The active coverage dates were updated to show the content to which the library has post-cancellation access. In addition, EBSCO's A-Z product allows staff to add customized notes to each journal title. The library created a special note to indicate perpetual access. When library staff updated the title to reflect the cancellation, the new coverage years were set and the perpetual access note was added. This note does not display to the public, however, it can be viewed in the staff mode and the note can be included during the creation of reports. By including a visual marker in the A-Z list, it provides context to the staff to immediate identify the title as one the library has cancelled when troubleshooting access problems. The note also provides a way for the library to create lists of all titles with perpetual access as needed, and avoids redundant data entry by not maintaining a separate list of such titles.

Electronic resource management systems (ERMS) can also be utilized for tracking titles where the library maintains access through perpetual access rights. For EBSCO's *ERM Essentials*, there is no native system function for perpetual access to journal apart from notes in the license fields about the publisher permitting such access. Hunter Library chose to create custom order records for each perpetual access

claim. These orders were set to never expire and were given custom order numbers and fund codes to flag them as perpetual access orders. The library annotated the records to show the complete researched order history, the current access notes, and any additional access fees that may continue to apply. Other ERMS may have additional reporting features which may be of benefit for libraries tracking ongoing perpetual access claims or creating reports.

Perpetual access hosting not granted by publisher

An ongoing issue for Hunter Library is how to handle situations where the publishers do not provide perpetual access or provide copies of the intellectual content in another form. Publishers may provide archival copies of content in a form which the library must curate: data in PDF or in another raw form, which is typically offered on CD-ROM or as a digital download. At present, Hunter Library lacks the means to address this issue and has handed the problem over to the digital projects department to include the management of archival copies as part of the library's long-term digital preservation plan.

Hunter Library participates in Portico and hoped to use the service to address cases where the library did not retain perpetual access to the journal after cancellation. Portico is a digital preservation project lead by ITHAKA. They are primarily engaged in retaining digitized contents from cooperative publishers to retain in the event of catastrophic loss of content. For certain publishers, Portico can be a way to retain post cancellation access. Unlike other events which trigger access to Portico's archive, requesting perpetual access for a journal title requires submitting copies of invoices to Portico who then sends a request to the publisher on behalf of the library. The publisher must signal its assent before Portico will enable access. Due to these requirements, only 8% of titles where the library did not retain perpetual access were able to be activated on Portico. Portico did not prove to be a productive way to deal with cancelled journal titles where the library did not have perpetual access rights.

The final outstanding issues Hunter Library faces moving forward involve monitoring the new workflow

and reviewing the usefulness of e-resource tools in tracking perpetual access. The process requires long-

term sustainability in order to be effective. During times where there are far fewer cancellations for staff

to process, it will be crucial to review training procedures to prevent post-cancellation access from being

overlooked or forgotten. Additionally, the time staff spends on these procedures needs to be

scrutinized. Unfamiliarity some staff had with certain tools—the ERMS in particular—made the initial

process of creating perpetual access records especially time consuming. Given more exposure to these

tools, the library expects the staff's processing speed to increase. If it becomes apparent one of these

tools creates an insurmountable time-sink, the benefit of it to perpetual access tracking will be

reviewed.