Collaborative storage of print serials in New Zealand

Helen Renwick

The University Library, The University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

Abstract

Purpose – This paper seeks to record a collaborative project in the management of legacy collections.

Design/methodology/approach – The eight New Zealand university libraries have a history of collaboration and sought a shared storage solution. It was agreed that a single copy of low-use print serials would, in most cases, be sufficient for the country’s research communities. The libraries have chosen to outsource storage to a commercial provider with facilities throughout the country.

Findings – The paper describes the background to the New Zealand situation, the process of reaching this decision and the challenges of implementation across a group of libraries, including the rationalisation of the eight collections to retain a single shared copy.

Originality/value – The case is relevant to library consortia undertaking collection management projects.

Keywords Library storage, Legacy collections, Collaboration, Collection management, New Zealand, University libraries

Paper type Case study

Context

New Zealand is a small, remote country in the Pacific with an area of 268,000 square kilometres and a population of 4.5m.

Until the middle of last century, there were four colleges in separate locations under the umbrella of the University of New Zealand, the oldest of them founded in 1869. In the 1960s, to accommodate the post second world war demographic bulge, there was a period of expansion. The colleges became autonomous universities, others were established and there was an extensive building programme that included libraries. Another marked growth spurt occurred in the 1990s when the government had an objective of raising the level of education and university enrolments increased. As a consequence, there was more funding available, some of it came to the libraries but it was generally for collections and not for their accommodation.

There are now eight universities, five in the North Island and three in the South, the newest having developed from an institute of technology in 2000. All the universities offer programmes from undergraduate to doctoral level and all have some specialist disciplines. Their student numbers range from 32,600 to 2,600 equivalent full time students.

The university librarians work together as the Council of New Zealand University Librarians (CONZUL), which is a committee of Universities New Zealand (UNZ). UNZ comprises the vice chancellors or chief executives of the universities.
The country has a small but active publishing industry but most academic library materials are imported, predominantly from North America, Europe and UK.

The New Zealand library community as a whole has a history of strong collaboration. There is a national union catalogue that was initiated in 1941 and automated in 1983, which has enabled the national interlibrary loan programme. Almost all the country’s libraries participate in interloan and there is a tradition of sharing resources.

The university libraries were facing the common challenge of legacy print collections that exceeded the available accommodation. They wanted to manage their collections well and also to release space for new services. With little prospect in the current economic environment of getting significant new library building space on site, options for the libraries were to reduce their collections or find off-site storage space.

It is against this background – a geographically distinct country with a small population and a tradition of co-operation among libraries – that the CONZUL storage project took shape.

History of the project
At its meeting in mid-2000, the Standing Committee on Libraries, which was the precursor of CONZUL, established a working group to undertake a feasibility study on the concept of a national store for low-use print collections. At the time, the Standing Committee included the National Library of New Zealand which also needed storage.

The national store was envisaged to be a remote warehouse type of storage facility to house “low-use copies of library books and journals where retention within New Zealand is still judged to be worthwhile”. The outcomes of the feasibility study were to be a comparison of potential solutions and a business case for the preferred approach.

With membership representing the National Library and the universities, the working group produced a preliminary paper in the following year. It had reached the view that the collections in a national store should be low-use printed books and journals, which would be held in single copies for shared use to maximise efficiency. Heritage materials were expected to be excluded on the grounds that libraries would wish to retain such collections locally.

The paper included a rationale for a store and described the nature of the materials to be held, the sort of building necessary to house the collection, shelving arrangements, ingest processes, governance and funding, key stakeholders, critical success factors and even suggested options for location. The working group asked the Standing Committee to identify its preferences and to provide information on current storage costs so that a business case could be developed. Despite progressing to this stage, the project then stalled for three years.

In 2004, the working group was reconstituted and soon became persuaded that the Harvard model of high density stacks was the most efficient way to manage storage space. The group reiterated the view that one copy of low-use material would suffice for New Zealand, that the focus should be on print and that the facility should be in a university city, preferably where land was cheaper or might be made available by one of the members. The need to retain print journals where electronic versions were available was queried but the idea of relinquishing them was too radical.

A consultant was engaged to design a modelling tool to calculate the size and optimal location of the required facility, the most efficient arrangement of the stock and the associated costs. The modelling tool allowed for variables such as aisle width, shelf dimensions and the number of levels within the building.
At the end of 2004, most members of CONZUL expressed commitment to continuing
with the project; the majority wished to participate, while two advised that they did not
currently have the same storage needs but expressed their support in principle.

Five large public libraries expressed interest in participating in a national storage
facility and a representative joined the working group, which then turned its attention
to developing a business case and seeking funding. It again considered the location for
a facility, whether to lease or own a building, membership of an associated consortium,
governance and management, ownership of the collection and access to it, and whether
single or multiple copies of print materials would be held. The working group also
considered how things might work, such as accessioning and processing, sorting stock
by size, stowing volumes in acid-free trays and altering bibliographic records on Te
Puna, the national union catalogue[1], and it estimated staffing and operational costs.
The concept of a shared store and how it might operate was well developed.

Then late in 2005, the working group became concerned about the validity of the
data that had been provided in relation to collections intended for storage. Two things
prompted the concern: the identification of a further 10,000 linear metres of stock that
had not previously been notified and the reconsideration by one library of the quantity
that it intended to deposit. Using the given data, the modelling tool predicted that a
New Zealand store would need to be twice the size of the CARM Centre[2] in Australia
and that there would be stock to fill it immediately. This scenario was clearly
unrealistic and indicated that the data would have to be revised.

While the working group was considering how to address this problem, the Tertiary
Education Commission (TEC), the government agency responsible for funding for
tertiary education, invited applications for collaborative projects. The eight universities
submitted one for a National Research Store, with a covering letter of support from the
National Library. Funding was requested “to secure a site and construct or refurbish a
building to accommodate a national research store … the project aims to preserve the
research collections by rationalising storage accommodation and providing a proper
environment for their protection. They will then be secured for the use of all New
Zealand researchers.” The application was declined and, although CONZUL still hoped
to achieve a national shared store, the working group again went into abeyance.

Four years later, UNZ suggested that CONZUL submit a fresh application and in
2009 funding was successfully secured for a project named Collaborative Storage of
Library Print Collections. Since the funding was provided to the university libraries
(i.e. it was for use within the tertiary sector), no other parties were involved. The vision
of a national store with wider membership was not abandoned however, since
CONZUL intended that an adopted solution should be scaleable.

**Project development**
The project funded by TEC was to investigate collaborative storage options. It had the
following overall objectives:

- To rationalise the retention of low-use print research collections.
- To release library building space.
- To moderate the costs of further library buildings.
- To preserve print research collections.
- To provide effective access to stored research collections.
- To leverage off developments in the UK, USA and Australia.
The University of Auckland Library was designated the lead institution for the project and the author was seconded as its consultant, to review international initiatives and to recommend options for the New Zealand situation.

During the first stage, the university libraries undertook various collection projects to add or enhance bibliographic records on the national union catalogue. The aim was to improve the collection data, which had been a stumbling block earlier.

CONZUL again confirmed that its preference was to share the storage of a jointly-owned collection. While the books and journals would be shared, the storage facility might be owned or leased by one of the university libraries on behalf of the group. The host library would operate the store and costs would be shared. At this stage, the storage solution was still imagined to be a purpose-built or adapted building with appropriate floor loadings and a controlled environment for the preservation of print materials.

Collections were reassessed and the libraries estimated that they needed to store approximately 19 kilometres of serials and 17 kilometres of books over the next ten years. The stored material would comprise only single shared copies. Reports from the national union catalogue showed that, for both formats, around 40 per cent of the titles were duplicated so rationalising the collections would reduce storage requirements overall.

The University of Auckland, driven by the pending expiry of the lease on its library warehouse, commissioned a high level review of storage issues and options in relation to its own requirements. The review was carried out by building consultants and shared with the other universities.

Several options were presented and all were able to be scaled for the group. The variables included building new or converting an existing building; owning or leasing; building on or off campus; outsourcing to a commercial company; and setting up a controlled environment.

Each option was evaluated for overall qualitative impact, risk rating for the collection and financial risk, and for financial impact – cost in nominal terms p.a., capital required in the first year, and NPV cost.

Commercial storage had always been seen as a benchmark against which other options would be compared. When the financial analysis was done, the most cost-effective storage option was shown to be outsourcing to a commercial supplier in facilities without environmental controls.

Different solutions for different collections

By this time, 2011, collaborative storage had been on and off CONZUL’s agenda for a decade. Collection growth meant that a storage solution was needed urgently. There had been no such distinction earlier but now CONZUL was prepared to consider separate solutions for books and for serials.

Books are increasingly published in electronic format and there are mass digitisation projects to migrate libraries’ print collections, yet there remains an expectation that many titles may never be digitised. Books are more likely than serials to retain their value as artefacts, to have enduring research potential and to require storage under conditions that will preserve them for as long as they are needed, perhaps indefinitely.

Serials are different in that the transition to digital format is further advanced. The electronic journal is well established, the major titles are available electronically, many no longer have print versions and reliable archiving arrangements are becoming more common.
The New Zealand university libraries had been quick to prefer e-journals and to cancel print subscriptions in the 1990s. Despite this, CONZUL considered that it would be prudent to retain a single copy of low-use print serials, even where there was a secure electronic equivalent, but did not see this as a long term requirement.

It was therefore considered that outsourcing storage of serials to a commercial supplier was a good solution. It would be convenient since the main providers had facilities in all the university cities and they offered good quality accommodation, better than some of the library warehouses were able to provide. A distributed solution would spread the risk of loss. It would also allow the libraries to move forward relatively promptly, since no major building project would be involved, and to rationalise their serials collections, which would relieve the urgent accommodation issue faced by a number of them.

CONZUL accordingly advised UNZ that the storage of serials, particularly those that are also available in electronic format, was a more tractable problem than the storage of books. Commercial storage in the medium term would be satisfactory for serials. This was a marked shift from the earlier vision of a purpose-built and university-owned facility but it was a good and pragmatic solution that addressed a need.

With UNZ's approval, proposals were invited from commercial providers. In due course a contract that provides for the storage of low-use serials for a period of ten years in the first instance was negotiated with Crown Records Management.

Implementation
There were some administrative issues that had to be resolved. CONZUL was not set up as a body that was authorised to be the contract partner so UNZ represents the university libraries in that role.

There was the question of ownership of the collection, which comprises single copies contributed by any of the members and held for their common use. For the purposes of the contract, UNZ has also accepted ownership of the collection, with the universities agreeing to cede it. The collection has been depreciated so it is no longer recorded as an asset.

Costs of storage are being shared among the members on the basis of a formula that UNZ uses for other joint initiatives. One third of the cost is shared equally and the remaining two-thirds are shared in proportion to the funding that each university receives from TEC. Costs of retrieval from the store are borne by the requesting library.

It was decided to name the distributed and shared collection the CONZUL Store.

Rationalising the collections
One of the project's aims was to rationalise the libraries' collections. With access to extensive collections of e-journals, CONZUL saw retention of a single print copy as sufficient. With a shared copy in the store, other holding libraries could choose to withdraw their duplicated copies.

The parameters for the shared collection are flexible. The serials should have enduring research value, be clean and in good condition, and there is a preference for bound volumes over loose issues. Substantial runs are preferred over shorter ones (agreed to be five volumes) and contribution to the shared store is voluntary. Once lodged in the store, ownership of the material is ceded to UNZ and there can be no permanent retrieval, since other libraries may have disposed of their holdings against those in the store.
The university libraries, together with National Library, had previous experience in sharing a collection of single copies of printed bibliographic indexes. Where there are now online alternatives, each library had agreed to retain certain titles and to make them available to others as needed. To reach this point, lists of titles and holdings were circulated and there was negotiation over retention. The library with the most extensive holding was generally designated to retain it and others withdrew their duplicate copies. The process of achieving this had been protracted, largely because the confirmation of accurate holdings was a problem. Fewer than 200 titles had been involved in that case, so it was clear that the same process was not feasible for a project involving around 68,500 titles in total, some 25,000 of which are duplicated.

Eventually it was decided to adopt a process of consecutive deposit so that only one library would be contributing its material at any time. As it did so, the depositing library would provide the others with a list of the titles and volumes that had been sent into the store. Other libraries could then compare the lodged material with the set that they intended to contribute in turn. They would make adjustments, noting which volumes they could withdraw and which they should lodge to complement the collection. The lists of titles and holdings that had been contributed to CONZUL Store would be uploaded to the UNZ extranet, which became the site for the members to share information about the project.

The University of Auckland was the first library to deposit material. It found that list preparation was an important and laborious component of the process. To select material for storage, the Library in the first instance took a report from its ILS that listed serials with both print and electronic holdings in a spreadsheet. Next, it identified “secure providers”; these are publishers or providers with whom the library has negotiated perpetual access to content. The titles were checked to identify the ones that were secure and the duplicated print volumes were noted. This category of serial – the print that is digitally duplicated on a secure platform – was considered by all the libraries to be a prime candidate for the CONZUL Store. It will be supplemented by other low-use print serials that no longer justify a place on the open shelves.

Barcodes were essential as they are used to track items in the store where they are held in cartons on racks. Item barcodes were extracted from the holdings statements in the bibliographic records and added to the spreadsheets. Packing staff selected the material from the shelves and entered the carton barcode alongside its contents, noting any irregularities such as missing or incomplete volumes, and adding volumes like supplements that might have been omitted from the list. When a batch had been shipped, the cataloguer refined the list and removed or resolved anything that had been noted as irregular, and a clean spreadsheet that linked volume and carton barcodes was uploaded to the storage provider’s database.

Further work was required to make the list suitable for circulation to the other libraries, since an itemised list is awkward to read. The item barcodes were therefore removed from the spreadsheet, the holdings were summarised and any gaps noted before the list was uploaded to the UNZ site where it can be accessed by other members.

Access to the stored collection
The depositing library will continue to record the material on its catalogue, as will other libraries that have held the title. Stored serials will also continue to be listed on the national union catalogue and available for interlibrary loan.
Articles from the stored serials will be scanned and e-mailed to requesters or copied and posted, although if an e-journal is available it will be the first resort. Researchers who need to refer to several volumes may use reading rooms at the storage facilities.

Summary
CONZUL is a consortium of the eight New Zealand university librarians who have collaborated to find a solution to a common storage problem.

They have chosen to store low-use print serials with a commercial provider for ten years in the first instance and to review the need to retain them after that period.

The collection will be distributed over several locations in the university cities and each library will deposit to a nearby facility.

Only a single copy will be stored, this being considered sufficient for the national research communities.

The copy and the costs of storing it will be shared by the libraries, so collections may be rationalised and duplicates withdrawn.

The initiative has the support of UNZ who have taken on the roles of owner of the collection and partner in the contract on behalf of CONZUL.

The legacy serials are preserved for the medium term at least and remain accessible to researchers.

There are two records of the titles in CONZUL Store, one on the UNZ extranet that lists what has been deposited and summarises title holdings, and the other on the storage provider’s database that itemises the volumes to facilitate retrievals.

The CONZUL Store was on the agenda for more than a decade before a storage solution was adopted and the project, at the time of writing, is in the early stages of implementation. All the university libraries are participating, although not all of them have the same pressing storage needs, and there is satisfaction in reaching this stage.

Notes
2. CAVAL Ltd, Bundoora, Victoria, Australia: see www.caval.edu.au/carm.html

About the author
Helen Renwick’s career has been in New Zealand university libraries. She is currently Associate University Librarian (Collections) and was the consultant for the project described in this paper. Helen Renwick can be contacted at: h.renwick@auckland.ac.nz

To purchase reprints of this article please e-mail: reprints@emeraldinsight.com
Or visit our web site for further details: www.emeraldinsight.com/reprints