

Introduction to ERALL

by

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I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the formation and the success of the Electronic Resources Academic Library Link (ERALL) consortium. Initiated by City University of Hong Kong in 2006, this consortium was formed by the eight UGC-funded university libraries in purchasing E-books collaboratively. I would also like to acknowledge the support from the University Grants Committee (UGC) and the eight libraries in making this collaborative collection development project possible.

We are currently experiencing an era of technological advances; the Internet has already become an indispensable part of modern life. E-books are at the same time taking up an increasingly important role in the process of teaching and learning. Availability on the web to provide 24/7 remote access from any Internet connected device is a well-known merit of E-books. Other value-added features such as full-text searchability and the availability of personalization tools help users make the best use of valuable electronic content.

E-books are also an ideal format for collaborative collection development within a consortial environment. The sharing of E-books among libraries is seamless as E-books do not need to be physically delivered through interlibrary loans or any intermediary requesting mechanisms. E-books are at once everywhere and nowhere, no library “physically” owns them but access to them is equally available to readers of all the member libraries. This makes resource sharing through a mega “virtual” library collection possible.

With ERALL, the eight university libraries have collaboratively acquired nearly 20,000 volumes of E-books in the past two years. In addition, shared access means that a single copy of an E-book can be used by all member libraries. This reduces the necessity to acquire duplicate copies. This provides opportunities for collaborative collection development and de-duplication to eliminate collection overlap among the eight university libraries. This will mean substantial savings because funding from UGC can then be used to acquire the maximum number of unique titles to benefit all users in the UGC community as a whole.

ERALL evinces a deeper collaborative consortium model, or better still, an additional and sustainable business model for materials acquisition in the library sector. During the process, ERALL brings about different restructuring effects: restructuring libraries’ market relations with the publishers whereby libraries are empowered; restructuring libraries’ autonomous acquisition approach to become a coordinated one that cares about

collective collection development and de-duplication; and restructuring the way books are delivered to the readers - from physical circulation to web access. Last but not the least; it also restructures the way resources are shared among libraries - from physical transport to shared access through the internet.

The energizer that sets off these restructuring effects is collaboration. I believe that concerted efforts always bring good results. I am certain that the results not only benefit all libraries in the consortium, but also all our faculty, researchers, staff and students in the eight universities as a whole.

For decades, the academic English-language print collection of university libraries in Hong Kong has been regarded as one of the most comprehensive collections in the world. To stay in parallel with rapidly changing technological trends, libraries in Hong Kong shall continue to strive to establish an outstanding E-book collection to facilitate new teaching and learning behaviors. It is also in line with the media shift from print to electronic in maximizing space and delivering content. I believe that ERALL can serve as a significant foundation for the future development of E-book collections in Hong Kong. Apart from collection development, ERALL can also take up the role of maintaining E-book's quality, and assuring a desirable balance between academic print books and E-books. I look forward to witnessing the continuation and expansion of ERALL, and fruitful research outputs derived from the use of electronic resources. In the foreseeable future, we should also see that the English-language E-book collections of our university libraries in Hong Kong will be regarded as one of the best in the world.