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The OLA Quarterly and Migration Anxiety

Diane Sotak

University of Portland

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The OLA Quarterly and Migration Anxiety

by **Diane Sotak**
*Reference and Instruction
Librarian, University of Portland*

“Most of my professional reading has shifted to online sources, so this fits in with my reading patterns!”

—OLA MEMBERSHIP
SURVEY RESPONSE

“If it was only available online, I suspect I would quit reading the Quarterly.”

—OLA MEMBERSHIP
SURVEY RESPONSE

Do birds experience migration anxiety? If they do, the pull to move in one direction eventually overwhelms any qualms. I have had my own qualms during OLA Quarterly’s (OLAQ) transition to online-only. The idea was first raised by the OLA Board due to budgetary concerns related to the lack of conference revenue in 2010. As the Publications Committee Chair, I set about trying to analyze the pros and cons with input from committee members and OLA’s 2008-09 President, Mary Ginnane.

Pros

Economically, the elimination of printing and mailing significantly dropped the cost of each issue, saving an average of \$2,500 per issue (x4 = \$10,000 each year). And our regular advertisers were not put off by the idea of an online-only version since their ads would still be seen in the PDF format. Environmentally-speaking, in 2007 we started paying a bit more for paper with 30 percent recycled post-consumer fiber and now would move closer to a green nirvana of paperlessness.

But what were other library associations like ours doing? I ferreted out state associations that had similar print publications. Many only produce newsletters akin to our OLA Hotline. For the ones that produce an OLAQ-like publication, most were still providing print and online versions, but a couple had moved to online-only (Arizona and North Dakota).

And what about access points through cataloging? The catalogers we consulted said that the shift from print to online publication had become common in the serials realm, and sure enough, the electronic version was cataloged soon after the first official online-only issue was published (see the WorldCat Local record:

http://up.worldcat.org/oclc/50762001&referer=brief_results).

Cons

I did a cursory search of the library and information science, psychology, and sociology literature to see what research findings had to say. Most research seemed focused on format preferences by gender. For the curious, women prefer reading print (Ziming & Xiaobin, 2008). Not much research has been done yet to understand reader motivations for one format over another. However, a recent study of digital and print newspaper use looked at substitutability, which is “... defined as the tendency of people to switch from one product to another that fulfils the same purpose” (Flavián & Gurrea, 2009). They found that readers preferred the physical format for leisure, but the digital version was substitutable for knowledge of current news, for searching out specific information, and for the daily habit of looking at a newspaper.

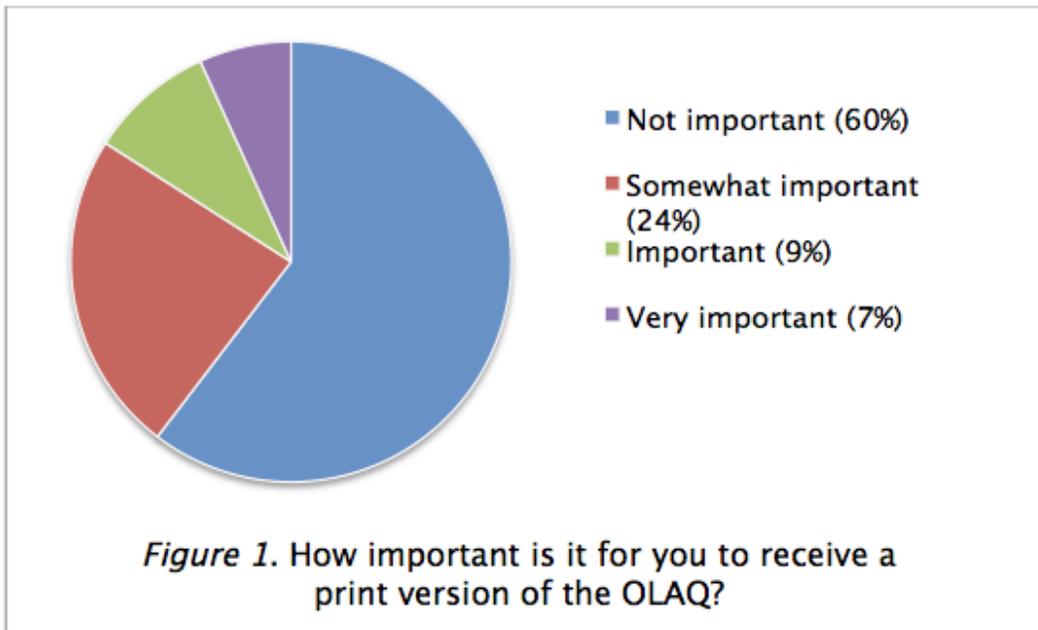
I recently found myself pondering substitutability while unexpectedly dining alone at a North Portland fish and chips place. I congratulated myself for having the foresight to pick up the *Willamette Week* on my way into the restaurant—the sweet relief of reading material to keep me company. But what about reading it online? I did have a smart phone, so could have accessed the *Willamette Week* Online, but the thought of rubbing my greasy chip fingers on the touch screen was not appealing and the battery was on the edge of running out. In that situation, the physical format was the winner and the digital version on the mobile device was not a worthy substitute.



Survey Says

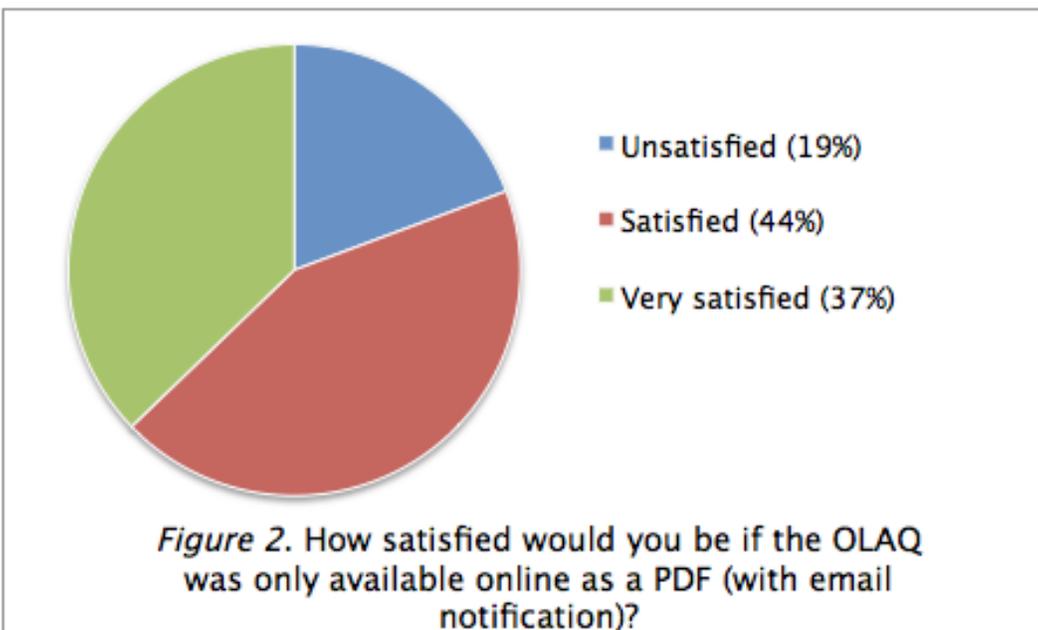
An important voice in the online-only decision was the membership. The Publications Committee asked for your feedback in July and August 2009 using a MemberClicks online survey. Along with the survey link, we provided the Summer 2009 OLAQ as online-only, so that survey respondents could provide feedback while having the direct experience of that format option.

Twenty two percent of the membership responded (see Figures 1 and 2 for results).



"Please just have it online—save paper, save money!"

—OLA MEMBERSHIP SURVEY RESPONSE



"I would end up printing it out every time ... because I like to take it with me to lunch, etc., and possibly make notes in the margins."

—OLA MEMBERSHIP SURVEY RESPONSE



“I prefer print for its portability and readability (convenience), but understand the economic reality and would manage w/ a digital copy only.”

—OLA MEMBERSHIP
SURVEY RESPONSE

“Since my eyes don’t like reading online, I will probably print out articles I really want to read. I’ll become my own publisher—so to speak.”

—OLA MEMBERSHIP
SURVEY RESPONSE

The tone of survey comments fell into three categories: enthusiastic embrace, resigned acceptance, and flat out no. The majority of respondents were in the first two categories. Some members noted they were willing to accept the change, but felt that cost savings should be passed onto the membership in the form of reduced fees or increased funds for scholarships to attend conferences.

Comments also revealed that members were concerned about how the online format would be archived. Past OLAQs have been on the OLA Web site for a few years, but now the full run is available in PDF format. PDF, or portable document format, is an accepted archival standard. In fact, some of the earlier print issues had to be located and scanned with help from our designer, Julie Weiss, and staff of the Oregon State Library, where the OLA Archives are housed. Now anyone can read Jim Schepcke’s 1995 article on the “Oregon Information Highway Project,” which appeared in the first issue. Or maybe the 1997 “Sex in the Library: Internet Access Issues in Oregon” will peak interest. Skimming the issue titles in the OLAQ Archive <http://tinyurl.com/OLAQArchive> provides insight into how our professional environment and issues have evolved over the last 15 years.

Readability online was another comments theme with suggestions to format the online version in HTML, provide it as a blog, reformat the PDF so it has one column of text, and linking the PDF’s table of contents for easier navigation. The last two suggestions have been incorporated into the PDF and hopefully that is improving the readability online.

Recreating the publication in HTML or blog format will have to be discussed further. It is important to maintain the integrity and quality of the OLAQ, which is more like a journal than a newsletter. Newsletter publications lend themselves well to other formats, which we’ve seen with the OLA Hotline morphing from a HTML and e-mail newsletter to a blog format, and now also provided in PDF format. There are time and software costs, in addition to finding people with the appropriate skills, to reliably provide lengthier publications in web-based formats.

Finally, a few members suggested offering a print option for those that preferred it, perhaps charging an extra fee. However, an investigation of pricing for printer and mailer revealed that small runs are exceedingly expensive. And for those that prefer to read at lunch, on breaks, or in bed, PDFs are easy to print on demand.



The Outcome

All of the above, including survey results with the comments, were presented at the August 2009 OLA Board meeting. After some discussion, the Board voted to approve the migration to online-only. Personally, while it made sense to me on a practical level, I still felt twinges of sadness and unease. However, I know that OLA will remain committed to providing substantive, theme-based OLA Quarterly issues, independent of format. Also, since the archive is freely available on the OLA Web site, it is an open access publication. The OLAQs are also provided to Ebsco Publishing and HW Wilson for inclusion in their respective library literature databases. This means the thoughtful and creative pieces written by many of our members are discoverable and easily shared beyond Oregon. 

References

- Flavián, C., & Gurrea, R. (2009). Digital versus traditional newspapers. *International Journal of Market Research*, 51(5), 635-657.
- Ziming, L., & Xiaobin, H. (2008). Gender differences in the online reading environment. *Journal of Documentation*, 64(4), 616-626.

"I find that I'm referring people to the online archive for articles and issues and am so glad that's possible. Online only is great!"

—OLA MEMBERSHIP
SURVEY RESPONSE

I really am torn -- I hate to be tied to a computer all the time, but I hardly ever go back and re-read any issues.

—OLA MEMBERSHIP
SURVEY RESPONSE

