

Yale University Library

Guidelines for E-Journal Packages Decisions and Approaches

Introduction:

Yale University Library is developing a set of guidelines for our use in the near-term as we analyze the offerings for e-journal packages from vendors and publishers. Each topic is a common issue that we face with package deal offerings. Listed with each topic are analysis and conclusions based on opinions that arose in discipline-based discussions of the points.

(1) Restrictive cancellation clauses. Some packages (particularly those that offer “non-subscribed” materials in the mix) restrict the amount of title cancellation that we may do during the term of the license. This is usually a percentage of permitted cancellation before penalties come into play.

Analysis: Yale Libraries overwhelmingly prefer NOT to sign licenses that prohibit cancellation altogether at the title level, especially in light of annual cost increases or where added subscriptions might offset the small percentage of cancellation. Yale prefers to accept such clauses ONLY if other positive issues exist. These must be clearly outlined to show benefit to Yale.

(2) Moving to e-only. Some packages offer the option to drop a print subscription and receive only electronic access to a title. There are often some price incentives attached to this move.

Analysis: Perpetual access and archiving have a strong influence on Yale’s perspective on this issue. Although there appears to be a keen desire to move towards e-only, it is only when the issues of perpetual access and archiving are resolved that the possibility becomes reality for all libraries at Yale. There is also the desire to alleviate some of the processing burdens caused by print resources, which would tend to bolster the argument for e-only. Yale prefers any offer of e-only to permit a title-by-title choice in moving to e-only.

(3) Interlibrary loan. Many packages (and journal licenses in general) restrict ILL to other institutions from the e-versions in a package in some fashion, whether by prohibiting it outright or placing stipulations on how it may be done.

Analysis: In the long-term, Yale desires to provide electronic ILL. Interlibrary loan is a long-standing tradition for libraries and ought not be ignored as we move towards an electronic environment. Electronic ILL is desirable in order to reduce labor costs even if print is maintained. The package on offer will be carefully analyzed for other elements, which combined with prohibition or restriction of ILL might cause Yale to reject the package.

(4) Permanent access / archives. Some packages mention the library's right to have ongoing access to the subscribed materials even after a subscription period ends. This may or may not have some minimal cost attached for that ongoing access. Some packages mention arrangements for archiving the content, whether via delivery of a legacy backfile to the library or arrangements the publisher has made to have an archive of their content preserved elsewhere.

Analysis: This is of high interest. Yale librarians feel this is of growing importance, especially when there is consideration for going to e-only format. Permanent access in original format is highly desirable even with minimal annual costs attached in order to maintain archival access. Local load of a data dump from provider is becoming less desirable because it requires that Yale design and maintain an interface for the data to be searched and used. All publishers should be looking at making available perpetual access to an archive of data that was available during term of subscription. Costs associated with this access should be negotiable. Packages that include perpetual access will be given high priority for consideration.

(5) Used-based pricing. Many of the pricing models offered to Yale are not sustainable, and most of them are based on some surrogate of use (does a higher FTE actually translate into more use?). We need to come up with alternatives to unsustainable pricing models, and judge our own comfort levels with these alternatives. Use-based pricing is one option.

Analysis: If usage can be proven demonstrably, Yale may consider this type of pricing model. However, this area is still too new to provide a blanket guideline. Yale needs to analyze carefully this type of model and would be willing to look at new offerings from vendors in this vein, especially if an example with Yale's usage and specific price is included with the model. Pricing should be based on historical usage of some sort, not an unknown fee for usage of the current year. Usage pricing will be looked on most favorably when there are caps (i.e.- price will be no more than "x" regardless of the amount of usage).

(6) Usage statistics. Many packages now offer usage statistics of higher or lower quality. Some of these usage statistics provide numbers at the journal title level, while others do not.

Analysis: This is an important topic and one Yale will be looking closely at for each package. Yale desires to make this issue a priority. Publishers should be aware of the increasing importance of this element in a proposal.

(7) Surcharge over print. Many packages are priced based on a percentage surcharge over the print cost of subscribed titles. This comes in a number of different flavors, but is rarely 0%.

Analysis: This guideline is very dependent on the product and subject matter. Yale's general perspective is to support lower end single digit percentages. If the surcharge is for non-subscribed content, careful evaluation of this content will be undertaken. In some cases, the surcharge over print pricing model is not sustainable due to high annual increases of content costs, or prohibition of title cancellation. Publishers should consider sustainable annual price increase caps no greater than 5% on content (or list) price offered. Options for paying less to get less are definitely of interest on a case-by-case basis.

(8) Non-subscribed resources inclusion. Many packages offer (optionally or as part of the package) the inclusion of materials that are not currently subscribed to in print. These non-subscribed titles sometimes cost extra or are simply a part of the package with no additional price tag.

Analysis: Yale has an internal diversity of opinions on this issue. The above analysis regarding surcharge applies to this issue. Vendors should offer options to include non-subscribed resources or not include them in a package offering. Title level usage statistics are important with non-subscribed inclusions, as any continuation of subscription under this model will need validation.

(9) E-only cost. Many packages offer a different price for dropping a print subscription and maintaining only the electronic version of a title. This is usually presented as a percentage of the list print price of the journal.

Analysis: Combined with other considerations and benefits, Yale Libraries will be willing to accept pricing at 92% of print. Availability of reliable and acceptable perpetual access might be an example of a condition where a higher percentage could be acceptable.

(10) Subscription agents. A number of packages downplay the importance of working with, or make it difficult to impossible to work through, a serial agent for acquiring the package (and occasionally for acquiring print once we subscribe to a package). Subscription agents can supply comparative information across different packages and other services, often with a service charge.

Analysis: This is an important point for publishers to note, and Yale prefers to have the option to use subscription agents for packages even if we might not always choose to exercise it.

Interactions between guidelines, final analysis:

Guidelines do not stand alone. Each guideline is affected by interaction between individual points. One obvious interaction is between cancellations and price caps. Also, archiving/perpetual access availability plays a strong role in any potential move to e-only. There are also interactions between cancellations and usage statistics or cancellations and multi-disciplinary packages. These interactions show how important the issue of cancellations is as it intersects with many of these principles. Overall, there is a certain amount of flexibility on these guidelines, particularly for discipline specific offerings, where the need to balance differences of opinions between disciplines does not come into play. Vendors and publishers would do well to note the general perspective on each guideline, as it may help to produce package offerings that are more likely to be acceptable without a great deal of negotiation.