Developing collection assessment strategies in the current information landscape is an exciting and daunting task. Data like usage statistics, impact metrics, and big datasets are available with the click of a button and pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of library collections. Information professionals have never been in a better position to understand the needs of the communities they serve.

With that being said, librarians also understand the challenges of conducting collection assessments in the digital age. Once a vendor’s dataset arrives in house, librarians test, clean, format, and consolidate data before analysis activities can even begin. The work is labor intensive and collection development units lose productivity as a result.

I spent a decade building and assessing electronic collections for universities in the United States and Canada. In my collection assessment work, the largest challenge I faced was the absence of tools that captured current usage trends alongside impact metrics. Because of lost productivity, time constraints, and knowledge gaps that existed due to insufficient data, I focused on ‘current use’ trends because they were the most reliable way to generate support for budget
requests. However, I always felt that I was doing a disservice to my users by not capturing their research output or how the collection supported initial investigations. Luckily, a new tool entitled the Elsevier Product Insight for Customers (E-PIC) fills this assessment gap.

**Elsevier Product Insight for Customers (E-PIC)**

Recently, I was asked to review E-PIC, a complimentary analytics dashboard available to librarians whose institutions subscribe to Elsevier products and tools. It truly is the first tool I have encountered that provides collection usage trends and impact metrics side by side. Using data from ScienceDirect and Scopus, E-PIC offers a unique view of an institution’s engagement with Elsevier’s research content and tools. These insights help inform evidence-based decision making and enhance messaging to library stakeholders.

E-PIC allows information professionals to understand and communicate the current and future value of the collection, while maximizing the productivity of collection development units so that more time can be spent working with researchers and students.

To learn more about the ways that E-PIC metrics can be applied to collection and assessment work, I decided to reach out to other librarians and discuss their experiences. Since the tool is excellent at placing institutional research within the context of the global research community, I contacted information professionals working around the globe.

Stacy Murtagh, Collections and Research Support Assistant at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, and Manish Mankad, Librarian at Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology, discussed various ways they incorporate E-PIC metrics into their collection and assessment work. They use data in a variety of ways to monitor usage statistics, curate reading lists, purchase materials for course work, promote collections through marketing initiatives, and present assessment findings to administrators.
Staying Ahead of the Curve

To build successful collections, librarians must understand the present needs of the research community, but also anticipate future information needs. This can involve a learning curve, especially when librarians work with collections that are outside of their areas of expertise.

When discussing how E-PIC provides a different experience than other assessment tools, Stacy focused on research themes that emerge in the datasets. “E-PIC highlights trends in research and current key themes. As I have a background in humanities and arts with limited science background, E-PIC helps me to better understand the science community and research landscape at present,” she said.

The graphs and charts available on the dashboard were effective tools that captured how users navigate library collections and incorporate sources into scholarly activities.

“Unlike other portals, where stats are presented in text, and unfortunately huge spreadsheets with a limited number of visualizations, E-PIC places images in primary focus, helping me to paint a picture of resource usage. I am a visual learner, and E-PIC undoubtedly enables for quicker comprehension of the figures,” said Stacy.
Manish expanded on the value of data visualizations to his collection work. “In the past we have downloaded the usage data from the Elsevier site and tried doing the data visualization in-house. Although we did achieve the objective, there were many areas such as turnaways, that we often missed out on. Preparing the dashboard was another challenge. E-PIC is visually appealing and has an ease of use. The screen itself is clutter-free. The export feature helps us further mine the data as per our local needs.”

When asked if E-PIC uncovered new insights about his user community, Manish explained that metrics involving media coverage and global collaborations added a new dimension to his understanding of research output. While these metrics do not have a direct link to the collection itself, they do indicate the quality of research and publications coming out of the institution. Manish said that this information provides meaningful context when submitting progress reports to statutory bodies and rating agencies.
Day-to-Day Collection Management

Stacy reminded me that staying ahead of information needs is not simply related to building the collection itself. Staying current also means managing systems that meet day-to-day discovery needs, particularly when users are located off-campus.

“I like the way E-PIC outlines remote access usage and I believe this will become of even more importance as institutions expand into the distance learning sector. The figures for off campus downloads are available from other providers, but E-PIC places it on the landing page,” said Stacy.

![Devices people are using in your institution](https://libraryconnect.elsevier.com/print/)

Specifically, a metric called Actual Clicks Leading to Views of Recommended Publications allowed Stacy to consider how external services interact with internal collections.

While researchers are often on the forefront of any academic librarian’s mind, Manish reminded me that the library plays an important role in acquiring materials that support teaching and
learning initiatives on campus.

“Another use of E-PIC metrics is for new courses or electives. The usage statistics for these specific titles reinforces our conviction in our material choice,” he said. “The improved usage coupled with the higher number of faculty publications leaves a positive note for the library collection.”

Library Resource Management

In many ways, collection development can feel reactive in nature. Librarians shift budget allocations to purchase materials for existing demands and information needs. I was interested to find out if E-PIC metrics allow librarians to monitor evolving research trends and invest funds in up-and-coming subject areas before they are required.

“Yes. Looking at the subject areas where the downloads or turnaways are significant, we can think of fresh budget allocations. Conversely, reduce the allocation in the next year if certain areas or collections do not show any upward trigger of usage,” Manish said.

E-PIC metrics also provide impartial evidence to support decisions about purchasing or terminating subscriptions. “Research staff and teaching staff may not like to know that a journal
they would like access to is no longer available through the library, and that they may have to submit a request for an interlibrary loan, but if we have the data to back up purchasing a new publication, or stopping subscribing to a particular title, then we can justify our decision making,” Stacy said.

One thing that assessment work taught me is that resource management is not limited to budgets. Staff time is a significant asset that is often unaccounted for. Quickly troubleshooting problems reduces waste that brings down the productivity of entire collection departments. E-PIC metrics support efficiencies and the fast resolution of system glitches.

“We altered our IP and E-PIC helped to outline where there were outstanding access issues with some publications and packages. For instance, the numbers just didn’t add up, leading us to look at access, our IP range and information held by publishers a little more thoroughly. E-PIC allows for a quick diagnosis to see if the collection is well or not,” Stacy said.

Empowering Librarians with E-PIC Metrics

Discussions about metrics often focus on demonstrating value to administrators and supporting user communities. However, truly effective collection management tools should also empower librarians. The ability to craft impact stories that capture the contribution of the library to the community is at the heart of assessment work. By pulling together data sources that capture the current and future impact of collections, E-PIC achieves this goal.
“I really do like that the figures are so easy to comprehend. Some of the visualizations were included in an e-resources report for the review panel with faculty heads. These are staff who are not part of the library department, and I feel that the simple and concise nature of the visualizations allows them to be understood by non-information specialists,” said Stacy.

![Graph showing usage data](image)

Manish explained that E-PIC metrics allow his department to confirm that they are investing in research materials that provide value. The collections are not simply based on the quantity of items, but on the quality.

“Fundamentally, [E-PIC] refines our views about the various aspects of our collection, leverages the usage data to help us fine tune our budget allocations, and the citations data helps us identify the good quality research areas,” he said.

As other librarians experiment with E-PIC metrics, it will be interesting to observe how analyzing “current use” and “future use” side by side impact collection management strategies. From my discussions with fellow librarians, it is evident that E-PIC addresses universal challenges associated with collection assessment activities. Perhaps this is the tool that will provide universal solutions as well.
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Comments