

Portico Holdings Comparison service: are we really insured?

'The mission of Portico is to preserve scholarly literature published in electronic form and to ensure that these materials remain accessible to future scholars, researchers, and students.'

Although you may never want to call on its services, Portico can provide insurance for libraries who want to know that their financial commitment is being protected.

The Portico Holdings Comparison service is a simple way to check your collection against the Portico archive and have some peace of mind that access to a definable portion of your collection has been insured.

The University of New South Wales Library has provided information on what happened when they used the comparison services in the beginning of 2008 and then again after some modifications in the beginning of 2009.



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The University of New South Wales, like many other libraries, has been moving its serials collection to online access rather than print for several years.

Initially the questions that had to be considered were:

- What titles were available?
- What would comprise our base spend?
- How would we provide access via our catalogue?
- Would we only provide online access?

When I started working at the University of New South Wales three years ago, one of my tasks was to review our licences to make sure we were really meeting our requirements. After reviewing a number of licences, one of the areas that I highlighted was the provision of archival access. It appeared that the major vendors such as Elsevier and Wiley had a provision of archival access but some of the smaller vendors did not.

During the next year, every time I spoke to vendors during their regular site visits or at conferences, the issue of archival access was discussed. At first there was some surprise about the need to ask about archival access but eventually vendors understood that there was a need for libraries to know that their financial commitment was being protected.

It was at this time also that a very healthy Australian dollar exchange rate enabled the University of New South Wales to purchase a significant number of back-files, therefore increasing online access back to Vol 1 No 1.

We felt comfortable that vendors understood the need for archival access and we were convinced that our assets were being protected. But that satisfaction was short-lived. We started to ask the question: what happened if the vendor was taken over or, even worse, ceased to exist. This was a real possibility as a number of smaller publishers were being bought by larger ones.

What could we do? How could we insure that we would be able to access our collection in the future? It was at this time that we started to hear about Portico. The stated mission of Portico *"is to preserve scholarly literature published in electronic form and to ensure that these materials remain accessible to future scholars, researchers, and students."*¹ Was Portico our solution? Would we be able to have some form of insurance that our access would be viable in 20, 30, 50 years?

The Library's Senior Management Group decided that insurance was important. We became a foundation member of Portico.

Now our discussions with vendors started with: are they participating in Portico? We saw this as a fundamental requirement. Again, initial responses

were poor as some had not heard of Portico and what it involved. But gradually more vendors knew what Portico was and confirmed that they had joined. We also started to receive notification from Portico itself each time a new publisher joined.

Initially we were not really sure how much of our collection would be protected. We could see on the Portico site which vendors were participating and what material they were contributing, but it was a daunting task for us to do the analysis.

In June 2007, Portico released information about their Holdings Comparison service and asked participating libraries to send an e-mail to learn more about this new service. The Portico Holdings Comparison service allows a library to compare the titles they hold with those in the Portico archive.

Portico replied soon after our e-mail with the following:

“The service is available to both participants and non-participants and there is no fee associated with the service.

Please note that our timeframe for completing a holdings request is three weeks of receiving the request. However, as I’m sure you know, the world of serials’ enumeration is as complicated in the electronic world as it is in the print so this timing may be extended due to the personal dialog required to accurately complete a library’s comparison.”

Portico posted a more detailed description of the Holdings Comparison service on their website.²

Our next step was to decide when we would look to take up the Portico Holdings Comparison service. We waited until just after our new subscriptions had been set up for the beginning of the university year. In March 2008, UNSW generated the file required by the Portico Holdings Comparison service.

Portico is able to process a list either as a text file with one ISSN per line or an Excel spreadsheet where one of the columns contains the ISSN.

We found that the process of generating the file Portico required was not difficult in any way. A list of titles, ISSNs and system numbers (for later reference if needed) were pulled out from Ex Libris/ALEPH, and converted into an Excel spreadsheet

Portico wanted an entire list of ISSNs of both our current and non-current titles and were able to handle e-ISSNs.

Some problems arose when trying to send the file via e-mail, which is currently the method by which Portico accept the data. Although the file was able to clear out of our mail server, it took several attempts to find the person whose mail client could accept the file size.

Certainly, it would be much better if Portico had an upload facility. Relying on e-mail is not suitable for such large files. There were some problems with maintaining Asian font titles in the spreadsheet, but as the comparison was based on ISSNs, the matching was fine.

What Portico sent back

Since we provided a spreadsheet, Portico returned a spreadsheet containing our original data and the Portico data. The file was returned in two parts (as it was too big for one file) which we then merged and formatted slightly.

The Portico Status is an indication whether or not the title is committed to the archive.

There are three possible status levels:

Not Committed – this title has not been committed to the Portico archive at this time

UNSW ISSN Supplied	UNSW Aleph system No	UNSW Holding Title	Portico Status	Portico P-ISSN	Portico E-ISSN	Portico Title	Portico Publisher	Portico Post-Cancellation Access
0155-9982	814578	Accounting forum	Archived	0155-9982	N/A	Accounting Forum	Elsevier	Yes
0023-656X	803541	Labor history	Committed	0023-656X	1469-9702	Labor History	Taylor & Francis Group	Yes
0001-6241	820258	Acta musicologica	Not Committed					

Table 1. Returned Portico Holdings Comparison file

Committed – this title is committed to the archive but we have not yet begun ingesting and preserving it

Archived – this title is committed to the archive and we are actively ingesting and preserving its content

A Portico Publisher is a publisher that is providing content for this title to Portico and there is also an indication as to whether the publisher has designated Portico as a post-cancellation access mechanism.

Portico also provided the following summary information:

Total Supplied ISSN	55591
Total Unique Library ISSN	44741
Total Portico ISSN	7365
Malformed Library ISSN	14
Empty Library ISSN	0
Duplicate ISSN	10836
ISSN That Are Alternates	0
Num Library ISSN Archived	3235
Num Library ISSN Committed	2680
Total Library ISSN in Portico	5915

Table 2. Portico Holdings Comparison summary from March 2008

“Approximately 13% of your titles are covered by Portico.

The Portico Archive has about 80% of your titles either committed or ingested. Based on your Portico participation level, your preservation cost per title is about \$2.19 dollars.”

Although the explanation was interesting, it did not seem to quite make sense so we asked for some clarification from Portico and received the following response:

“The way the summary was stated it suggested that 80% of the university’s titles were included in the archive.

This is not the case – the description wording was not clear or correct.

What the summary should have stated is that 13% of the titles in your university’s collection (as provided in the ISSN list) is covered (either ingested or committed to preservation) in the Portico archive.

That 13% (or, those 5,915 ISSNs that are in the Portico archive) represents 80% of the total current Portico holdings.

The university has an incredibly large collection. Although the 13% is admittedly a small number, please do keep in mind that Portico is ingesting more than one million articles a month to continually a growing archive.”

Outcomes

Of the 57 participating publishers there were very few whose titles were not represented in our collection. It was also pleasing to see that there were a few Australian publishers included.

If we take the 13% at face value, the percentage of our collection which is also available via Portico is quite small and so the value is hard to identify. It will be important to see a growth in the percentage covered by Portico each year to justify the continuing support of Portico.

On the other hand, the percentage of the Portico archive which also matches our collection is good. It shows that our main publishers have identified that Portico is something they need to consider. It could also be seen to indicate that our regular discussion with publishers on the importance of Portico has been recognized.

It is not easy from the report to see who published the titles that have been identified as ‘Not Committed’ – have the larger publishers in fact provided Portico with their complete collection? For the coming year we decided to include publisher details in our file extracted from Ex Libris/Aleph, which would help in this analysis.

What was next

As 2009 came around we again generated the file and sent it off to Portico to run the comparison and included publisher details so that we could analyse the results more thoroughly. This time we did not have any problem e-mailing the file to Portico but have had a problem in receiving the file back.

The summary this time said:

“Approximately 22% of your titles are covered by Portico.

The Portico Archive has about 77% of your titles either committed or ingested. Based on your Portico participation level, your preservation cost per title is about \$2.03 dollars.”

Total Supplied ISSN	49692
Total Unique Library ISSN	28238
Total Portico ISSN	8291
Malformed Library ISSN	0
Empty Library ISSN	5726
Duplicate ISSN	15728
ISSN That Are Alternates	0
Num Library ISSN Archived	4593
Num Library ISSN Committed	1803
Total Library ISSN in Portico	6396

Table 3. Portico Holdings Comparison summary from January 2009

Portico also reminded us to *“keep in mind that in many cases, libraries might send every ISSN they hold (print and electronic) and many don’t have an electronic counterpart and therefore they will never be included in Portico. If no one digitized the content, it will never be in the archive. So, in some holdings comparisons, these ISSNs are included in the calculation and the percentage of overlap is skewed.*

Essentially, the holdings comparisons are developed to help libraries think clearly about the overlap percentage and what insurance coverage they’re getting for their investment in Portico. “

The Portico Holdings Comparison service has allowed us to see if the decision to insure collection access is sustainable. Although not all of our

collection is committed to Portico, we have seen over a period of just one year that more and more is now successfully archived. The analysis has also identified publishers which we would like to see join Portico in order to increase our benefit from the service. So, *are we really insured?* The answer is *‘not totally, but we are on our way’*.

References

1. About Portico:
<http://www.portico.org/about/> (Accessed 5 June 2009)
2. Portico Holding Comparison Service:
<http://www.portico.org/news/HoldingsCompService.html> (Accessed 5 June 2009)

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