Tower Cakes for Ranking Subscription Resources

An evidence-based decision-making tool that helps ensure quality collections by allowing librarians to determine which subscriptions are the most cost-efficient.

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NUTRITION INFORMATION

This recipe presents a method to evaluate subscription-based resources based on objective data and subjective input. Yield: an evidence-based decision-making tool that helps ensure quality collections by allowing librarians to determine which subscriptions are the most cost-efficient.

DIETARY STANDARDS

ACRL *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* (2011) Principle 5, Indicators 5.1, 5.2, 5.3

COOKING TIME

4–5 hours per sheet

COOKING TECHNIQUE

Evaluate similar resources together (e.g., journal subscriptions, A&I databases, ebooks, etc.) controlling for variations in usage or cost. The use of percentile rank (.90, .81, .05, etc.) is more informative than simple rank (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.) because it describes a range against which benchmarks may be applied. Summarize data by percentile rank for each criterion and combined for an overall score.

INGREDIENTS

- Microsoft Excel
- Usage data (COUNTER-compliant, if possible)
- Cost data for each subscription
- Ratings or rankings by librarians or other stakeholders

PREPARATION

Usage, cost, and cost-per-use data are all used (rather than only cost-per-use) in order to adjust for extremes. A resource may have high usage and low cost-per-use, but still be so costly as to be utterly unaffordable to the library. This is often the case with "Big Deals" or large packages.

Worksheet 1: Usage Data

A. Gather data for the last three years
B. Select the best measure of usage for that resource (e.g., "Abstracts viewed" for A&I databases; F/T Downloads for ejournals; etc.)
C. Record the total for each of the three years
D. Calculate the three-year average
E. Calculate the percent change from last three years (Optional: provides insight into trends in usage)

Worksheet 2: Cost Data

- Repeat steps A–E
- Use three-year average costs

Worksheet 3: Cost-Per-Use

- Repeat steps A–E
- Use three-year averages

Worksheet 4: Ratings

- Gather ratings by librarians or other stakeholders (optional, but recommended)
- Use a rating scale of 5–7 options or a sliding scale
- If rating scale is fewer than 5, use the mode or the median, NOT the average
- If rating scale is fewer than 4, use the mode only

THE ASSESSMENT

- Combine data into spreadsheets by similar content type
- Generate percentile ranks for each of the four criteria: usage, cost, CPU, and ratings. Use the Excel "PERCENTRANK.INC" function
  NOTE: For usage and possibly ratings, higher is better; whereas, for cost and CPU (and possibly ratings), lower is better. Choose ONE direction on which decisions

are based (e.g., higher) and then reverse the percentile rank of the measure that is the opposite (e.g., CPU and cost) by subtracting the rank from 1 (e.g., if column D is for the [CPU Rank], column E is "=1-[CPU Rank]").

- Average the percentile ranks for each criterion for an overall score. Weight certain rank-scores to emphasize their importance (optional)
- Use conditional formatting based on benchmarks (optional). Benchmarks for success can be set to reflect goals appropriate to your situation

ALLERGY WARNINGS

- Decide how to handle resources for which usage statistics and/or cost data are not available (e.g. use "0").
- There is no one right answer
- Reverse-rank the criteria to indicate when lower is better
- Look for outliers; these might skew the results

CHEF'S NOTE

The results clearly show the worst- and best-performing resources that require less consideration, while also providing the evidence needed to evaluate the more mediocre resources more carefully. The scores can be used to

- create annual reports
- make decisions for budget shortfalls
- identify marginal resources
- evaluate journal or ebook packages.

Power users, such as Collection Development and Assessment Librarians or people skilled in using Excel formulas and formatted tables, are the recommended audience for this recipe.

Title	Liaison Ratings Composite Percentile Rank Reversed	Inflation Score Percentile Rank Reversed	CPU Percentile Rank Reversed Percentile	Composite Score
Reference 55	0.88	0.74	0.84	0.82
Database 59	0.52	0.72	0.93	0.72
Reference 56	0.88	0.37	0.89	0.71
Database 45	0.9	0.41	0.74	0.68
E-Journal 16	0.47	0.57	1.00	0.68
Reference 52	0.88	0.23	0.80	0.64
Reference 13	0.33	0.71	0.85	0.63
Reference 40	0.79	0.7	0.27	0.59
Reference 50	0.79	0.9	0.00	0.56

FIGURE 1. SAMPLE COMPOSITE RATINGS TABLE