

E-book Collections

SPEC KITS

Supporting Effective Library Management for Over Thirty-five Years

Committed to assisting research and academic libraries in the continuous improvement of management systems, ARL has worked since 1970 to gather and disseminate the best practices for library needs. As part of its commitment, ARL maintains an active publications program best known for its SPEC Kits. Through the Collaborative Research/Writing Program, librarians work with ARL staff to design SPEC surveys and write publications. Originally established as an information source for ARL member libraries, the SPEC Kit series has grown to serve the needs of the library community worldwide.

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Published six times per year, SPEC Kits contain the most valuable, up-to-date information on the latest issues of concern to libraries and librarians today. They are the result of a systematic survey of ARL member libraries on a particular topic related to current practice in the field. Each SPEC Kit contains an executive summary of the survey results; survey questions with tallies and selected comments; the best representative documents from survey participants, such as policies, procedures, handbooks, guidelines, Web sites, records, brochures, and statements; and a selected reading list—both print and online sources—containing the most current literature available on the topic for further study.

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E-book Collections

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SURVEY RESULTS

A note about the survey:

The beauty of the SPEC survey format is that the questions provide solid quantifiable data while the comments sections make those data real. Many of the concerns that libraries have about the e-book industry turn up again and again in comments in the various sections of the survey. These issues, named and nuanced in the comments, are at the heart of developing changes in the library world.

The term e-book itself shows up in the survey responses and documents in a variety of forms indicating a lack of standardization: e-book, e-Book, E-Book, E-book, ebook, eBook, Ebook, electronic book. The more accepted the term, the more stable the format of the term. For the purposes of this survey, the term e-book was defined as an electronic text publication, excluding journal publications and textbooks, made available for any device (handheld or desk-bound) which includes a screen.*

This SPEC Kit does not address the e-textbook movement on college campuses and only marginally touches on library-digitized works.

*Modified from the definition proposed by Chris Armstrong, Louise Edwards, and Ray Lonsdale in "Virtually There? E-books in UK Academic Libraries," *Program—Electronic Library and Information Systems* 36, no. 4 (2002): 216–27.
E-version: <http://eprints.rclis.org/5987/> p 2.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

“Still a relatively new format. Still mixing individual purchases with collections. Still trying to sort out appropriate mix of print vs electronic. Stay tuned.”

The above quote from one of the survey responses sums up the state of academic library e-book collections. The survey captures strong enthusiasm for e-books tempered by frustration with publisher policies, staff resistance to a changing model, and confusion over multiple interfaces and platform access. Some libraries have purchased e-books in packages and on an individual title basis while others are not yet engaged in title-by-title selection. Even those libraries which are furthest along acknowledge that the situation is evolving, is subject to forces outside the institution, and will continue to necessitate internal change at the institution. The treatment of e-books in many ways reflects the changing library landscape and points to a new business model of acquisition and service which, to succeed, must come to terms with the needs of libraries, vendors, and clients.

The survey was distributed to the 123 ARL member libraries in March 2009. Seventy-five libraries completed the survey by the deadline of May 8 for a 61% response rate.

According to survey responses, most institutions entered the e-book arena as part of a consortium that purchased an e-book package. The earliest forays occurred in the 1990s with a package purchase like netLibrary. The majority of libraries (56 out of 65) started e-book collections between 1999 and 2004 with individual titles lagging a little behind (46 out of 62 libraries began acquiring single titles in that same time

period). Early adopters acknowledge that the reasons for the original entry into the e-book field differ from current drivers. While the 24/7 access remains a constant, early entry was also driven by the opportunity to pilot new and innovative technology and the access provided by consortial agreements.

Purchasing at the collection level allowed libraries to acquire a mass of titles with a common interface, reducing some of the transition pains to the new format. Since most of the early collections contained born-print titles, they offered direct comparisons to their paper counterparts. The downside of collections is that libraries find they are often saddled with titles they would not have selected in print; also, each collection might have a different interface, adding to user frustration. Having found that usage of online titles tends to be higher than the same titles in print, libraries are now eager to obtain new online content. Certain subject areas have proved good candidates to e-book transition for their reliance on current content or books read in segments. These include reference items, medicine, law, health sciences, engineering, computer science, and many business areas. The medical profession was an early adopter of e-books which were downloaded to PDAs for easy and frequent access.

Those libraries reporting success with individually selected e-book titles cope with additional sets of problems; lag time between print and electronic publication (with electronic the lagging format), restrictive digital rights management, loss of access by ILL, and limited printing top the list of concerns. However, responses indicate a preference for title-by-title selection as a more efficient use of funds.

Libraries are frustrated with the lack of standard practice among providers of e-books. At the same time, some librarians appear to be having more difficulty in adopting e-books than they had with e-journals. Several references were made to the electronic journal model. For example, "Currently, we are very frustrated in much of our e-book buying ... We work very hard to replicate the e-journal environment: unlimited users, ability to ILL, ability to download and print entire chapters if not more, and ownership models without access fees." The American Chemical Society's recent decision to downsize their print format signals clearly that e-journals are the norm; e-books are far from that level of acceptance and seem destined to repeat some of the growth pains libraries coped with in adopting e-journals. Many libraries are unprepared for the challenges in adopting, integrating, and maintaining e-books. An e-book strategy will stretch and change libraries' intrinsic thinking about collections.

Collection Development Policies

The majority of respondents (82%) indicated there is no specific mention of e-books in their Collection Development policies. For many, this is because a Collection Development policy is content driven. The comments for this selection, though, indicate that libraries are either considering altering their policy or adding layers of procedures to deal with selecting, negotiating, and acquiring e-books since they act neither entirely like print books nor entirely like e-journals.

Some policies do recognize the changing e-book field. The University of Alberta's guidelines state, "The electronic books environment is too unstable and unpredictable for us to apply an all encompassing policy." The Electronic Resources collection development policy of the Library of Congress states, "Given the rapid evolution of electronic resources, the Library will review the following guidelines annually to ensure that the Library's current and future research needs are met." (See pages 79 and 83 of the Representative Documents section for these policies.)

Several libraries without specific e-book policies indicated that they are in the process of developing those. In addition to a draft e-book policy, McMaster University has an appendix to its main Collection

Development policy to deal with electronic resources in general. Titled Selection Factors for Electronic Products, this appendix addresses access and licensing, product quality, technological characteristics, and service support from the vendor, all issues that need to be addressed for e-books.

A few libraries utilized task forces to develop policies, procedures, and in effect a new business model for e-book selection, acquisition, and use with representation from several library departments. Most notable are those at the University of California, San Diego, Harvard University, and the University at Buffalo, SUNY. Buffalo has an E-Books Task Force and an e-Reference Packages Task Force. Both of these committees offer reports, training materials, and recommendations.

The UCSD task force developed a "Product Evaluation Criteria" check-list for determining e-book vendor suitability. The series of questions and preferences include "Do you allow ILL?" "Is a proprietary reader or piece of software required to view your eBooks?" "If you offer MARC records, are they OCLC records?" and "Can users print portions of the eBook?" with library preferences ranging from none to deal-breaker. Rajiv Nariani of York University has compiled a comparison table of content aggregators and publishers. (See "Web Links to Additional Representative Documents" for both documents.) Other libraries may have similar documents developed as internal guidelines for appropriate departments. Some libraries referenced the use of wikis or other intranet sites accessible to library staff to provide ongoing guidance, policy, and procedure updates.

Selection

On the question "Who selects e-books?" 70 of 72 respondents reported that any selector who selects books can also choose individual e-book titles and 40 (of 73) reported that any selector who selects books can also choose e-book collections. The comments flesh out these responses in a way that indicates a somewhat less straightforward line of responsibility here. Collections of e-books, with their higher associated cost and sometimes ongoing commitments for new content, appear to be treated more as electronic resources in the decision-making process.

Unlike print monographs, the e-book selection process is closely tied to vendor options. Adding to the content decision process (e.g., is this title a good fit for our collection), many factors can impact the ultimate e-book purchase decision (e.g., the ability to put chapters on course reserve, DRM restrictions, cost of title, cost of hosting). With the lack of a standard purchase agreement for e-books, each vendor contract must be reviewed carefully. As one respondent put it, “Any selector can select an e-book, but if the [vendor] model is inappropriate the purchase will not happen.”

In addition to anytime, anywhere access, e-books offer libraries an opportunity to experiment with patron-initiated selection in a relatively controlled environment. In one scenario, patrons choose the e-books by selecting links that have been loaded into the catalog. After a pre-determined number of uses, the items are automatically purchased and retained in the catalog. The links for items not “touched” are then deleted. Many libraries value the immediate delivery aspect of this arrangement while finding that their usage statistics for these materials tend to be higher than usage of those selected by traditional means.

Deselection does not figure as much of an issue at this time, largely because e-books are relatively young and require no shelf space. Some collections offer a set percentage of front-line titles, automatically dropping the older, less used titles to make room for the new. This process helps to alleviate the issue of old editions cluttering the results and possibly confusing or misleading the patron.

With regard to acquisition methods, 63 respondents (86%) bought collections/bundles direct from publishers. Sixty-two (85%) made title-by-title purchases from an aggregator while 62 bought title-by-title from a publisher. On the other end of the spectrum, only 29 libraries buy e-books through approval plans.

More libraries prefer to own content than to lease it, with the exceptions being titles that are frequently updated or with rapidly changing subject matter. One concern surfacing in this section of the survey is that e-book collections might turn into serial purchases with budget ramifications in future years. Libraries also prefer to link to content hosted elsewhere rather than to build and maintain the infrastructure to mount it locally. The greatest concern expressed in

this section is perpetual access to the content bought, followed by licensing issues.

In the section asking specifically what issues would present a deal breaker in buying e-books, the most common answer was, again, no long term access or preservation measures, followed by restrictive licensing or DRM issues. Sub-par MARC records, proprietary software, excessive cost/high hosting fees, individual user registration, restrictions on printing, and ILL were also listed.

Budget

According to data on e-book holdings from the 2007–2008 ARL supplementary statistics survey, the average e-book collection at the 110 reporting libraries contains 294,000 e-books. At the 94 libraries that track separate statistics, the average e-book expenditures (\$321,458) per library for 2007–2008 represent approximately 11% of monograph expenditures (\$3,047,171). This percentage shows the relatively cautious approach to e-books in the past ten years.

Only 12% of our survey respondents (8 of 67) indicated that the library has a separate budget line dedicated to e-book purchases and all but one of those indicates using re-allocated funds rather than new monies for e-books. Most e-books hosted off-site carry a continuing hosting fee in addition to the cost of the item, creating a further impact on budgets and budget planning. Where print monograph purchases were a one-time disbursement of funds, Acquisitions departments must now also track the continuation of the hosting fees from year to year.

Discovery and Educational Activities

Most of the responding libraries include e-books in their catalogs and also provide Web pages dedicated to finding e-books. Many have enabled search filtering by e-book in their OPACs. In addition, more than half of the libraries provide cross linking from licensed resources.

To promote e-books to patrons, 48% of the respondents have featured e-books in their newsletters. Others have news announcements, new title lists, or blogs that highlight new e-book acquisitions. Comments indicate that e-book education is part of bibliographer outreach activities and regular reference

interviews. Others comment that e-books tend to be found regardless of library efforts.

The survey indicates there is considerable activity in training library staff to use and promote e-books. Sixty-six percent of those responding engage in activities to educate library workers. Much of this took the form of in-house training sessions, either by librarians or by vendors. Internal newsletters, discussions at staff meetings, and brown bag lunches are other methods used to raise staff awareness. One Head of Acquisitions arranged for visits by each major e-book publisher and vendor as an “e-book college” for selectors.

For a look at specific selector concerns, see “Ebooks Experience Assessment Questionnaire Results” conducted by the University of Alberta Libraries on page 156 of the Representative Documents section. One of the reasons listed for not selecting e-books is that “the process of purchasing ebooks is not sufficiently straightforward or convenient.”

E-Book Reader Devices

The survey asked what types of equipment can be used to read the e-books in the library’s collections. A wide range of responses was given, including desktop, laptop, or tablet computers, PDAs, mobile phones, and MP3 players. Only 10 libraries reported they are lending mobile e-book readers, though. The North Carolina State University library, for example, has a well-established program with 12 Kindles and two Sony Readers available for loan. Other libraries have just a few devices available for loan, and some have recently purchased a device that is not yet in circulation pending policy and marketing plans. Most libraries, however, do not offer device loans and are not considering them.

When available, the devices often fall in with other equipment loans at the library such as a laptop lending program. The devices are pre-loaded by the library, generally with popular titles. Some libraries allow patrons to request a specific title; the library purchases the title, loads it on the reader, and makes that particular device available to the patron.

See the Representative Documents section under E-book Reader Loan Policies for links to device policies and the Selected Resources section under

Additional Library E-book Sites to see what titles are being loaded on the e-book devices.

Usage Tracking

Eighty-three percent of the responding libraries (60 of 72) reported tracking or monitoring usage of e-books while 17% do neither. Most libraries rely on statistics provided by the e-book vendor/publisher; however these statistics vary in quality. (See the Representative Documents section for sample reports.) The frequently collected data is the number of downloads, but other controls include pages viewed, copied, and printed; number of successful searches; and number of searches turned away. One respondent commented that the e-book statistics “are a good indicator of use and allow for very revealing comparisons to printed book usage.” However, the lack of consistent presentation by vendors and publishers not using COUNTER statistics makes for a work-intensive project.

Benefits and Challenges

One of the most interesting sections of the survey contains the Benefits and Challenges responses shown by individual respondent (see survey questions 29 and 30). Sixty-eight respondents commented on e-book benefits. The responses are, for the most part, listed one per box in simple phrases. By far, the most listed benefit is anytime, anywhere access, sometimes broken down into two parts: 24/7 access and remote access. See Table 1 for a summary of the top benefits.

Sixty-seven respondents listed challenges. These comments range from single words to whole paragraphs, and the issues run the gamut from library growing pains to serious vendor problems to industry level issues. Taken together, they provide a snapshot of hopes and disappointments with the developing format. As indicated in Table 1, the challenges present more complex and diverse issues compared to the benefits but this should not be taken to indicate that the challenges outweigh the benefits.

At the library level, the main challenges are personnel and the changing workflow. One library rather tactfully lists not having internal consensus on e-books as a challenge. Other responses show more frustration in naming librarian resistance as a real problem in moving forward. Evolving workflow is

a problem libraries have faced many times and is helped along by the sharing of ideas and best practices at local and national meetings.

Vendor/publisher level frustrations center on cost, platform diversity, printing and downloading, accurate statistics, and standard licensing. One respondent makes a plea for a comprehensive list of format neutral titles in print.

E-books present challenges at the industry level in the timing of publication and in issues of preservation. It is counter-intuitive that the electronic format should lag behind the print format as it currently does. It almost seems as though publishers favor print purchases or that decisions on an electronic release are being made on the basis of print sales; however, in the current economy, libraries cannot afford to buy the same content twice. The survey indicates that e-book purchases would increase if the e-format was available at the same time as the print version.

In the print world, libraries provided preservation for books and journals. In the electronic world, librarians want assurance that the electronic format will continue to exist. The industry must come to grips with electronic as a viable independent format and

bring out electronic publications simultaneously with, if not sooner than, print. Libraries would prefer to see their vendors handle both print and electronic without having multiple contracts.

Going Forward

E-books have far from reached their potential, hampered by internal and external factors such as inadequate workflow processes, various rights restrictions, delays in publication, and high cost. Even so, the libraries surveyed overwhelmingly agree that they will be spending more on e-books in the near future. How quickly e-book expenditures grow will be tied closely to whether those issues are resolved. Several of the early collection purchases were for titles previously published in print. The current economic crisis has made libraries far less interested in duplicating content and, in fact, eager to get new, timely content online.

Libraries with the greatest enthusiasm for e-books are the ones with the most to say, including voicing their frustration. Well-developed policies can lead the way to a new internal working model combining selection with acquisition methods. Public service librarians also have an interest in vendor selection as

Table 1: Top Benefits and Challenges of E-books

Benefits	Challenges
Anytime, anywhere access Multiple simultaneous users Support for distance education Patron-driven acquisitions Instantaneous access upon purchase Better searching of text Space savings Eliminates theft Reduces weeding for physical space	Platform diversity Lack of cross-platform searching Cost: electronic more expensive Cost for long-term access Lack of standardized licensing Getting internal consensus on e-books Bibliographic control (good catalog records) Getting records into catalog in a timely fashion Ability to use in Course Management or E-Reserves Ability to ILL User education Advertising titles Lending outside campus Duplication Adapting workflow ("Keeping track of it all!") Need for a high-quality non-proprietary reader Electronic format availability lags behind print Model licensing & standardized content management

it affects the access of the material. The use of a task force provides a strong basis of policy and procedure creation which would lead to a change in practice. A task force could also provide a forum to hear e-book frustrations offered by representatives from library administration, collection development, acquisitions, services, and the library clientele. If e-book format figures in the strategic plan, library administrators should clarify the e-book plan and take steps to ensure staff acceptance. This change in workflow is being addressed at conferences, and library administrators could target their limited travel funds to specific purposes such as the exploration of solutions for workflow issues. The use of a wiki or an internal website accessible to all library staff may also aid dissemination of information and transition to new and cross-departmental work processes. It should be recognized that there is a learning curve demanded by the e-book selection and acquisition process.

External factors likewise represent challenges. Librarians can only do so much with internal issues until vendors establish a stable and consistent business model industry-wide. As Carolyn Morris states, "At this point in time, there is relatively little difference among print vendors.... This is not true with e-books. The stakes are higher, the issues more complex, and the differences among suppliers are immense. It would be unwise to minimize these differences merely to preserve workflows" (Part I, 87). As strongly indicated in the survey, library e-book purchases would increase under the following conditions:

- The e-book is published before the print edition.
 - The e-book costs less than the print edition.
 - Multiple users and remote access for authorized users is allowed.
 - Ability to print at least sections of the work is allowed.
 - Individual selection of titles can occur rather than the forced purchase of a vendor-determined collection.
 - The decision to purchase or subscribe is content driven.
 - Quality MARC records are available and can be easily loaded into the catalog.
- Remote storage rather than storage on a local server is offered; safeguards for access and backup for archival purposes are in place.
 - Model licensing and standardized content management occurs industry-wide.
 - One selection tool is available listing both print and electronic titles, regardless of publisher.

A combination of other factors can be added to this mix. Some of these are deal breakers; others remain part of a perfect plan.

Libraries will continue to form policies on what they find acceptable for an e-book purchase and will soon limit their purchases to vendors who will meet their conditions. Publishers or vendors who are difficult to deal with will be avoided. Sara Lloyd, of Pan Macmillan, states "Publishers...will need to increasingly accept huge cultural, social, economic, and educational changes and to respond to these in a positive and creative way. We will need to think much less about products and much more about content; we will need to think of "the book" as a core or base structure but perhaps one with more porous edges than it has before" (Lloyd 31). Now is an optimum time for libraries and vendors to work together to form a new and successful business model for the purchase of e-books, one that satisfies all stakeholders: library, publishers/vendors/aggregators, and users.

One success story along these lines is the development and implementation of the eBook Loan Service Project. The Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (CISTI) collaborated with aggregator MyiLibrary to provide e-book loans from the CISTI catalog to outside patrons for a specified period at a reasonable cost. Obstacles to the implementation included obtaining publisher licenses, fear of unauthorized access and subsequent loss of income, agreement on print allowances, and a new easy-to-use access and client platform. Partnering a non-profit institution with a for-profit enterprise, the goal of this new business model was to advance "the overall cause of making scholarly literature seamlessly available for libraries and users" (Woods 113).

Conclusion

Libraries are changing. The publishing industry is changing. Patrons are changing and expecting more and different things from their libraries. “The Global Reading Room: Libraries in the Digital Age” states “the role of libraries is becoming more important and more far-reaching than ever” and “though their mission remains unchanged, libraries are rethinking their collections, services, spaces, and opportunities for pooling resources.” The line between collection development and acquisitions is blurring. Librarians are communicating with patrons through instant messaging and twittering. Some libraries provide print-on-demand machines. Budgets are decreasing with the current economic crisis and libraries are looking at ways to maximize their collection development funds. And while the Library of Congress reports that their Copyright Office currently defines print as the “best edition format,” this is being revisited.

Libraries are facing both internal and external factors in developing and maintaining e-book collections. With change, however, comes denial and pockets of resistance. Librarians and library staff can lobby for new policies and procedures and increase

communication among departments. Library administrators can leverage internal change by encouraging new workflows and can significantly impact the building of a new business model with publishers and aggregators to manage external factors.

The last comment of the survey sums up the overall conclusion of this SPEC Kit:

Well, good luck with all of this. It seems libraries are all over place with e-books and some are very aggressively trying to acquire while others appear to be sticking their heads in the sand and pretending it doesn't exist. Libraries, librarians, and publishers should all be working harder in this place to help shape the model and the future of all of this. Honestly it makes my skin crawl when libraries suggest that e-books should be purchased and/or operate like print models. If we are just trying to recreate the print model here, then I'm not sure I understand the point. The reality is that nothing in academic libraries is going to be what it used to be, and so many libraries are clinging to that without realizing that the war has already been lost.

