eBooks: Issues within Academic Libraries as Demand Grows

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Introduction

Anyone working in the acquisitions area of an academic library is intimately aware of the increased demand for eBooks and the issues and arguments surrounding adoption. Nan (2012) indicated licensed e-collections and eBooks are one of the top four ranked priorities among 1,925 academic member libraries surveyed by the OCLC in 2012 (p. 159). There seems to be a tug-of-war regarding how to adopt eBooks and whether all new acquisitions, or the vast majority, should be in eBook format rather than print format. Consideration of the user base and preference must be given, but budgets and access issues are equally important. There are pros and cons to digital and print format of any reading material and a unanimous position regarding eBooks is improbable. eBooks are undeniably in higher demand now than just a few years ago, but questions and issues remain regarding copyright, access, and usage. This paper will discuss the biggest issues I've noted with eBooks, and note some of the methods being utilized for adoption and patron access.

eBooks: What are they? How are they used?

In basic terms, eBooks are "electronic texts that are analogs of print books in terms of content and presentation" and are either purchased alone or in conjunction with print equivalent (Slater, 2010, p. 305). The type of, and sometimes format of, eBooks purchased for use in an academic library is often quite different than the eBook purchases by other public libraries. For example, while many eBooks available in public libraries can be found in print or eBook format at retail bookstore, eBooks purchased by academic libraries are often reference books, "scholarly monographs, etextbooks, and even long documents available solely as web pages" ("2012 Survey of Ebook," 2012, p. 4). As a result, the licensing, copyright, and even distribution can

vary greatly as well. Academic libraries are not new to the eBook arena, with many having establishing collections of eBooks since 2007 – before the dawn of the prevalence of the e-reader and the introduction of the tablet (ex: iPad). According to the "2012 Survey of Ebook Usage in U.S. Academic Libraries" (2012) administered by the *Library Journal*, the statistics showing the number of academic libraries adopting eBooks has since plateaued at 95%, with the number of eBooks offered increasing substantially each year from 2010 to 2012 (p. 5). For example, the average number of eBooks offered by graduate/professional libraries in 2010 was 37,500; in 2011 was 97,500; and in 2012 was 138,800 ("2012 Survey of Ebook," 2012, p. 5). Of these, it was reported that "the largest categories of ebooks carried by academic libraries are general non-circulating reference materials and scholarly monographs" with etextbooks "in the fifth position (30%)…well behind reference books (92%), scholarly monographs (91%), classic literature (44%) and even general nonfiction (32%)" ("2012 Survey of Ebook," 2012, p. 7). There could be many reasons for the lag in etextbook adoption, including cost, access, and availability, but it was suggested "that academic acquisitions librarians may be taking a wait and see attitude, waiting to gauge the trajectory and rate of etext adoption by their faculty first" ("2012 Survey of Ebook," 2012, p. 7).

As academic libraries increase their acquisition of eBooks they will find themselves "at a critical juncture between the automation systems of the past and a new genre of emerging technologies" (Breeding, 2012, p. 10). Specifically, finding tools to manage eBook collections effectively, efficiently, and easily has been a growing concern (Breeding, 2012, p. 10). In reviewing the available literature, it was obvious most academic libraries are struggling to find seamless models to provide services involving these materials as there are still many limits in what eBook titles can be acquired, as well as how patrons can access them (Breeding, 2013, p.

33). Many libraries noted issues with adding the eBooks to their catalogs and making them visible to patrons (Breeding, 2013, p. 33; Slater, 2010, p. 314; Brook & Salter, 2012, p. 16). In addition to this, at present most libraries are also struggling to find ways to offer these books through interlibrary loan which will be discussed in depth later on in this paper. While the digitization of scholarly journals has presented and remedied similar challenges, working with book publishers has proved to be a bit more difficult. Yet, academic libraries are often at the mercy of the scholarly publishing landscape as they often control the opportunities and limitations of the materials available (Breeding, 2012, p. 10) – and often have more funds to donate to the legalities involving copyright and licensing.

While some studies still show a user preference for print materials (Brook & Salter, 2012, p. 21; Slater, 2010, p. 314; Downey, Zhang, Urbano & Klingler, 2014, p. 10; Smyth & Carlin, 2012, p. 195), the literature reviewed points out that there is an overall movement toward the digital realm and print acquisitions will continue to decline. This definitely supports my belief that eBooks are here to stay and should be a priority for academic library acquisitions. Breeding (2012) stated that "E-books may achieve majority status in academic libraries, and any new monographic acquired in print form will be exceptionally rare" and that while "legacy collections of print monographs" will be maintained, "the majority of these collections will be relegated to remote storage facilities, available upon request" (p. 10). Brook & Salter (2012) point out that even though some respondents to surveys indicate they prefer print materials, the same surveys also show the use of eBooks are on the rise overall (p. 21). As a result, acquisitions will struggle to justify the expansion of print collections and stop the diversion of funds from print to eBooks.

Purchasing eBooks is not as easy as downloading an app and purchasing a title as users may be accustomed to through their personal eReaders, apps on tablets or smartphones, and/or personal computers/laptops. Academic libraries must be aware of several purchasing options including perpetual, short-term purchase, purchase on demand (user driven purchase), print on demand, consortial purchase, subscription, limited licensing, and more ("2012 Survey of Ebook," 2012, p.7; Wicht, 2011, pp. 207-209). None of these models appears to be perfect by any means, and they all have their pros and cons. Few publishers allow unlimited usage/download of their material, with some even limiting access chapter-by-chapter. The majority also limit licensing so libraries are not able to share the content via interlibrary loan. Lastly, the print on demand feature seems to predominantly apply to works beyond copyright (published in the early 1930s) (Wicht, 2011, pp. 208-209).

Benefits and Drawbacks of eBooks

There are definitely arguments on both sides of eBook adoption and usage. However, it is my opinion the benefits outweigh the drawbacks and there will continue to be an increased demand from patrons for eBooks. Despite this assertion, I also believe the drawbacks must be discussed and academic librarians must continue to navigate the obstacles in an effort to obtain greater access for their patron population. Although vendors and publishers are continuously focused on mainstreaming eBooks overall, issues identified by Ahmad, Brogan, and Johnstone (2014) include user complaints about screen reading for long durations; "restrictions or limits on copying, printing, and downloading known as Digital Rights Management (DRM);" problems with various and multiple platforms; accessibility issues; continued user preference for printed books; and lack of sufficient number of titles with some platforms (pp. 35-36). For purposes of

this paper, I will discuss the two main issues of printed media versus eBooks, and issues with various platforms.

Printed media vs. eBooks

The literature reviewed varied on whether a substantial number of users still prefer printed media to eBooks, or vice versa. Some studies even showed respondents indicating they preferred printed media, but then having statistics of eBook versus printed media telling another story (Smyth & Carlin, 2012, p. 195). Usage statistics also must be analyzed in context as it is very easy to employ software to gather statistics on the number of times an eBook is accessed and downloaded, while counting the number of times a printed item is accessed is virtually impossible unless it is checked out each time. As a result, although I believe today eBooks should be given more attention in acquisitions than printed media, arguments for continued print collections should be heard. Specifically, equitable access for all is still ensured with print media and harder to meet with eBooks. Print books provide easier continual access (Slater, 2010, p. 314) and can be accessed by anyone without additional hardware or equipment.

In reviewing the literature and the surveys therein, many survey respondents noted a preference for using a print book for extended reading, but indicated eBooks provided better access to relevant content and fact finding via searching tools (Slater, 2010, p. 314). Interestingly, Smyth and Carlin (2012) cited another issue, one they described as a considerable stumbling block, when students in their survey where it was stated using eBooks "was counter-productive for study due to distractions in the form of other electronic media" (p. 197). Specifically, the other electronic media was noted to be "social networking sites, online gaming, email, communication interfaces such as Skype and Internet Messenger, streamed content, [and] RSS feeds" (Smyth & Carlin, 2012, 197). Distractions such as these can be even more likely if a

student becomes frustrated or overwhelmed in accessing an eBook – or if it takes too long to download. Unfortunately, the platforms offering eBook collections have yet to be perfected.

Issues with access via multiple platforms

Slater (2010) made a very interesting observation in writing "the form and format of e-books that librarians have come to know is still not set. The e-book provider determines the exact method of delivery and access" (p. 306). Frustration probably doesn't begin to describe how librarians feel when navigating acquisitions, dissemination, and maintenance of eBooks. In an age where users want to access materials off-site and at their own convenience, the allure of eBooks will not likely diminish and thus librarians must grow increasingly proficient in acquiring, maintaining, and educating users on accessing the eBook materials. Accessibility is discussed frequently and often the first benefit listed for eBooks is their 24/7 accessibility (Brook & Salter, 2012, p. 16). 24/7 access was listed as the top influencing factor in a 2012 survey by *Library Journal*, selected by 72% of respondents ("2012 Survey of Ebook," 2012, p. 5). While ease of access is still a reason given by patrons for choosing to use an eBook versus print (Slater, 2010, p. 314), the access is often cumbersome and confusing. Breeding (2012) noted "in a continued trend, librarians seek solutions that immediately improve the experiences of their users, especially via discovery products" (p. 10).

Specifically, there must be continued efforts to find better methods of delivery. As Johnson and Buckley (2014) indicate, "The downloading of ebooks could definitely be better" (p. 11). As they explain during a very realistic scenario, users often go to download an eBook only to be presented with a laundry list of responsibilities and limitations" including prompts to create an account (in addition to the library account), download third-party software, and finally to realize the database in particular may only offer chapter downloads (Johnson & Buckley,

2014, p. 11). This same user may seek additional eBooks only to find they are all in separate databases and all requiring individual, unlinked accounts. In reviewing the eBook platforms in the San Jose State University King Library catalog, I counted 26 separate collections listed (San Jose State University, 2014). As a user of an academic library and the eBooks offered therein, I can attest to this issue. It can be cumbersome and frustrating to go through so many steps just to acquire a book when conducting research or to complete an assignment. Even more frustrating is some eBooks are available for weeks at a time, others just for hours or a few days. If using a book for extensive research or to reference throughout a semester for a course, having to re-download the book each time can add to the frustration. To aid in this, academic libraries must find, and fight for, ways to not only make the eBook visible, but also to provide identifying information to the user with regard to downloadability, access, and any limitations therein (Johnson & Buckley, 2014, p. 11). As kinks in databases and cataloguing are worked out, academic librarians can help bridge the gap in service by truly knowing what they have and staying abreast of any changes (Johnson & Buckley, 2014, p. 12). Johnson and Buckley (2014) suggest librarians get to know the product by downloading and using the eBooks themselves, preferably on different devices and with different platforms (p. 12). This will allow them to provide better service to the patron and connect them to the resource more efficiently, as well as help them identify any issues requiring a fix. Lastly, knowing and using the eBooks will allow the librarians to work to create online guides that can be accessed at any time by patrons. Ideally these would be more tailored than a canned version by a publisher or software provider, complete with screenshots and library-specific instructions. Ideally, more vendors and publishers will follow models such as that introduced by 3M, where users are able access eBooks using

their already established library account information (Johnson & Buckley, 2014, p. 13). This seems to be common sense, however, it is not common practice at this time.

Acquisition and Access Considerations

      Patron Drive Acquisitions.

      As indicated earlier in the paper, there are various methods of acquiring eBook materials for library collections. One of the more popular recent methods, which is proving to be more budget-friendly for some campuses, is the Patron Driven Acquisitions (PDA) model. This model is based on "automated purchasing of eBooks based on patron use" said to be a seamless way to augment "traditional library approval purchases" (Downey, Zhang, Urbano & Klingler, 2014, p. 10). In the "2012 Survey of Ebook Usage in U.S. Academic Libraries" (2012), 75% of libraries surveyed had adopted a PDA model and reported it helped their libraries to address and precisely meet student and faculty needs ("2012 Survey of Ebook," 2012, p.7). They also cited it allowed for better budget management and they considered the costs to be reasonable ("2012 Survey of Ebook," 2012, p.7). With regard to their own campus library, the Kent State University Library, Downey et all. (2014) reportedly "spent $44,926 on purchases for triggered eBooks out of the PDA discovery pool," which was a fraction of $1,192,300 "cost of purchasing print books in the equivalent sample," a two-and-a-half year period (p. 30).

      The PDA models also point to a higher usage rate than materials acquired by conventional methods. In fact, many PDA models will not purchase an item until a pre-set number of access requests are made. By doing this it essentially justifies the purchase as the item will clearly be used. According to Downey et al. (2014), a study by the University of Iowa study compared the use of PDA acquired eBooks with print circulation and found the "total circulation of print titles [compared] with the user sessions for the same eBook titles demonstrated a tenfold

increase in use for the electronic equivalents" (Downey et al., 2014, p. 11). The results were

interpreted as users "showing a preference for electronic format" (Downey et al., 2014, p. 11).

They went on to explain that when compared to eBooks, the print books had a substantially

higher percentage of one-time uses, or no uses at all (Downey et al., 2014, p. 30). For this

particular study, it was noted that "37.5% of the print books were not circulated, and 12.7% only

received one-time use compared to a 0.2% no-use rate and a 0.4% one-time use rate for

[eBooks]," while at the same time, "print books had a much smaller portion of two to nine uses

than [eBooks] (39.9% versus 90%)" (Downey et al., 2014, p. 30). More frequent use categories

fared better as "print books had a higher percentage of 10 to 30 uses," however they still reported

less usage in comparison to eBooks which all had more than 30 uses (Downey et al., 2014, p.

30).

Interlibrary loan.

It can be stated with confidence that interlibrary loan (ILL) has grown in popularity along

with the increase in electronic publication. However, while there has been success in negotiating

copyright and licensing to offer items such as journal publications through ILL, eBooks sharing

has not had the same level of success. As Breeding (2013) indicates, previously "the guidelines

associated with the fair use of printed books and journals were generally accepted by both

publishers and libraries in regard to interlibrary loan lending," however, as the materials became

more widely available through electronic subscriptions, there was a "shift to governance by the

terms of the licenses offered by the publishers, which may or may not allow interlibrary loan

lending" (p. 33). In regard to the PDA models discussed above, PDA may work at an institution

level, but the eBooks adopted "are not circulated via interlibrary loan, which undermines

consortial resource sharing and cooperative collection development" (Downey et al., 2014, p.

31). Academic libraries have not given up and are still negotiating at every opportunity to make materials more widely available, specifically through ILL.

As Wicht (2011) writes, "ILL departments in academic libraries are operating in a time of major change that presents new opportunities to expand and redefine services in ways that best serve evolving patron needs (p. 210). It is without question that eBooks will enable ILL departments to provide faster turnaround times for requests, and even lower costs associated with shipping and processing times (Wicht, 2011, p. 210). Having access to eBooks through ILL would also meet the demand of users today who expect to have material available at their fingertips. Previously ILL departments were unable to provide this level of service due to relying on delivery methods for physical items, and it can be surmised they lost some "business" as a result (Wicht, 2011, p. 205). However, at present publishers and vendors commonly include prohibitions in their licensing agreements blocking the use of eBooks to fulfill ILL requests (Wicht, 2011, p. 205). Unfortunately, due to fear of piracy and their bottom line being affected, few vendors and publishers are agreeing to ILL concessions. And for those who do allow ILL, many ILL staff may hesitate in offering the item as there still is "no simple way to discern what might be covered, permitted, restricted, or forbidden," so rather than risk violating a licensing agreement they err on the side of not sharing the item (Frederiksen, Cummings, J., Cummings, L. & Carroll, 2011, p. 127). As eBook collections continue to grow, and some believe will become the main collection for many libraries, Frederiksen et al. (2011) share "there is also a growing perception that this lack of understanding may impact a library's future ability to support research, teaching, and learning" (p. 127). They suggest librarians continue to work with vendors and publishers to negotiate licenses that support and include fair use, as well as provide a broader access to electronic materials overall (Frederiksen et al., 2011, p. 127). At the same time,

academic libraries should seek input from every level of the library, from managers to

department staff, in order to "develop a code of best practices for using [eBooks] in an

interlibrary loan environment, one that both clearly explains licensing limitations and asserts the

principles of fair use" (Frederiksen et al., 2011, pp. 127-128).

eBook Licensing/Copyright Issues

Perhaps the best introduction to the issues with licensing and copyright of eBooks is this

quote from the "2012 Survey of Ebook Usage in U.S. Academic Libraries" (2012):

> "There has scarcely been a more contentious relationship between book publishers and
> libraries when it comes to ebooks. This battle is especially heated in the public library
> space, but fears of piracy have endangered the generally amicable relationship book
> publishers have long had with libraries—and in many cases are interfering with libraries'
> ability to serve their users" ("2012 Survey of Ebook," 2012, p. 4).

Bishop (2011) notes "the constitutional origins of copyright legislation in this country hewed a

balance between protection of creators/private individuals' economic rights and the rights of the

public's access to useful knowledge (often referred to as the "greater good')" (p. 11). In 1976 the

Copyright Revision Act tipped the balance "in favor of the individual and his/her economic

rights as creator, as publishers and corporations become increasingly alarmed at the greater

potential for violations of copyright by individuals" (Bishop, 2011, p. 11). Technology at that

time wasn't anywhere near what we have today, but even then publishers and creators feared the

advances would "[allow] for freer dissemination of, and copying of, intellectual property and

creative content" (Bishop, 2011, p. 11). This fear and further technological advancement led to

subsequent legislation at the end of the 20th century, which includes the Digital Millennium

Copyright Act (DMCA) of 1998 and the Technology, Education, and Copyright Harmonization

(TEACH) Act of 2002. These "have further codified the rights of creators—both to protect their

work and prosecute for violations—as the law tries to keep apace of the constant changes in

digital technology and social networking, which makes content more accessible to the public and, in the eyes of content creators and their representatives, more vulnerable to infringement" (Bishop, 2011, p. 11).

Copyright law and licensing agreements are a necessary evil academic librarians must deal with, and be proficient in. Clayton (2008) was candid in stating "while many librarians would like to ignore this impact, it is here and we must somehow deal with the realities of the impact of copyright law in many areas of the library" (p. 244). Copyright clearance can involve extensive negotiations between publishers, third-party copyright holders, and the libraries themselves (Bishop, 2011, p. 9). While librarians are likely to be immersed in this process, other campus entities are often also involved including campus bookstores, research foundations, information technology units, and general counsel (Bishop, 2011, p. 9). As a result, I would definitely recommend committees be created to not only alleviate potential individual burden but also to brainstorm and problem-solve any tricky copyright or licensing issues. Bishop (2011) suggested committees of these types could also help to create subject guides on copyright to be referenced by campus community members as needed (p. 10).

Academic librarians often find themselves caught between two or more opposing forces as they navigate how to provide materials to the masses while abiding by restrictive copyright and licensing agreements. Most academic institutions will sway to the conservative side by erring on strict adherence to copyright which is "in stark contrast with the 'sample and share' mentality of millennial-generation students" (Bishop, 2011, p. 12). Bishop (2011) describes this as "treading the line between the unaccustomed role of "information police" and the more comfortable role of information facilitators" and that while academic librarians seldom have a legal background and are "not lawyers," they have been forced to quickly learn and stay abreast

of the "ever-changing legalities of copyright law and its effect on library functions and services" (Bishop, 2011, p. 12).

Conclusion

An increase in usage and adoption of eBooks is inevitable and should be a major topic of consideration for all academic libraries and librarians. Despite the nostalgia and continued preference for some books in printed format, eBooks should continue to account for the bulk of an acquisitions budget. In saying this, there is also much work to be done to ensure seamless access for patrons. eBook platforms need to be more consistent and not require so any steps just to download/view a selected book. Licensing agreements also need to be a focus for further negotiation of increased access for not only patrons of the academic library itself, but through interlibrary loan as well. The technology will likely continue to grow and evolve, and with it so will eBook publishing and access. Academic libraries must remain current and proactive in everything associated with this media form.

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