

eBooks for Libraries and Patrons: Two Years of Experience

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A little over two years ago, netLibrary defined its primary mission to encompass a singular focus on developing and offering library-centric solutions for organizing, hosting, and serving digital learning content in ways that integrated with the mission and methods of libraries. Today, netLibrary provides thousands of academic, public, government, corporate, special and school libraries with access to digital versions of monograph content they deem of particular value to their patrons.

Print monographs have long been valued for the quality, originality, and diversity of content they offer. In print form, they have proven easy and enjoyable to use, and have long been regarded as one of the cornerstones of library services. With the emergence of the digital age, technology has facilitated the ability to increase the value of monographs by ensuring the delivery of desired information to patrons faster and more efficiently. Technology brought the ability to access and search across literally thousands of publications in seconds. Searching tools facilitate access to specific points of learning more directly than ever thought possible. And, for perhaps the first time, remote patrons can realize the benefits of monographs available through their library from anywhere around the globe.

The convergence of the digital age with the long-standing traditions of libraries has, however, created some interesting challenges. Companies, such as netLibrary, who are seeking to balance the benefits of technology with the long-standing value proposition of libraries, as well as the print world, find themselves addressing several constituencies. Publishers represent the needed sources for content of all types. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the patrons, students, educators, and employees to whom publishers target their content. The pivotal role, however, in bridging the gap between content provider and patron are the libraries and educators, especially regarded for their skills in selecting content of highest quality and value, and for their ability to lead patrons to the right content quickly and effectively. Because the inherent

goals of the providers of content can be diametrically opposed to those wanting and using that content, companies such as netLibrary, who seek to integrate digital age technologies into those long standing dynamics, have learned some interesting lessons along the way.

When netLibrary first introduced eBooks the challenges facing libraries and publishers were quite different. Libraries were concerned about issues such as: Will patrons accept this new concept? Which titles should I own in both print and electronic form? Does „content rental” make sense in the monograph world? What will be involved in educating patrons and encouraging their use of eBooks? Is there sufficient depth and breadth of content available to warrant the investment in this new technology? Shouldn't web-based technologies make unlimited access the norm? How will electronic books impact current workflow and existing monograph processing procedures? How do we evaluate the new vendors offering electronic book content and decide which is the right one for our specific needs?

Publishers faced an equally long list of concerns. How do we know libraries will be interested in the eBook concept? Will they accept eBooks as more than „experimental”? How can I try this new opportunity without incurring unreasonable costs to convert print content to electronic formats? Why does every vendor require a different electronic format? I cannot afford to work with all eBook companies –which is most likely to succeed? How and when do we make eBooks a normal part of our daily work flow and traditional processes? Given the dynamics of the Internet and web-based technologies, how can I be sure that royalties to authors, contributors, illustrators, reviewers, and all those involved in the monograph production process are fairly compensated?

The convergence of these two disparate interests, both focused on the same end goal of bringing content and patrons together, created some significant challenges for netLibrary. First and foremost, content was at the heart of the concern on both sides. Libraries wanted up-to-date content. Publishers were reluctant to risk their most prominent front-list titles to an unproven concept. A review of market data suggested that if the eBook concept were to be successful, it would be the academic library environment that would give it birth. Consequently, netLibrary first focused on building a content repository most useful to academic libraries, some of it current, and some representing titles that had long stood the test of time. Because publishers were willing to test the eBook concept with backlist content that still held value for academic libraries and undergraduate use, the netLibrary eBook catalog was born. Within a year, netLibrary's focus expanded to include public, special and school libraries. For 2002 and 2003, efforts are increasing to reach libraries

internationally where interest in electronic resources that can reach across countries is high.

Today, netLibrary's collection development strategy strives to select, organize, and provide access to content that serves all library communities with robust collections of increasingly front-list content. We actively measure our progress against depth and breadth standards for quality collection development as defined by our in-house team of librarians. Balanced against all of the above are library requirements as reflected in specific subject requests by libraries using netLibrary eBooks.

The top ten subject areas found in our catalog represent content that is consistently in high demand and breaks down as follows: Economics and Business 22%; Literature 15%; American History 12%, Medicine, Health, Wellness 10%; Religion 8%; Technology and Engineering 8%; History 7%; Sociology 6%; Education 6%; and Philosophy 6%. Some variation in the subjects most often preferred does exist by type of library, and the netLibrary catalog is sufficiently robust to support varying needs.

netLibrary currently offers academic institutions collections in eight major subject areas, comprising 99 sub-categories. Public library collections represent six major subject areas and 68 sub-categories. Special Library collections reflect five major subject areas and 56 sub-categories; and our growing efforts to support School Libraries today includes two major subject areas representing 15 sub-categories.

The endorsement and adoption of eBooks by libraries around the globe has significantly contributed to improvements in our catalog by helping to ensure publishers of the very real, existing demand for eBooks.

Today, top publishers around the globe provide us with a consistent flow of front-list content, and include leaders such as Aldine de Gruyter, Blackwell Science, Cambridge International Science, Cambridge University Press, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Kluwer Academic, Oxford University Press, Palgrave Macmillan, Taylor & Francis, among the more than 300 contributors to the netLibrary catalog.

Equally important to both library and publisher acceptance is evidence of patron acceptance and adoption of eBooks. To that end, netLibrary tracks a number of usage metrics. Over the past year, we have learned that the Average eBook Session Length is about 10-20 minutes; the Average Time in a net Library Book is approximately 5-15 minutes. We believe both of these statistics are consistent with what we know about how eBooks provide value. Spe-

cifically, eBooks serve as important research and reference tools and are less likely to be used for „leisure reading” – at least for the present. Robust search functionality increases the ability for a patron to find needed information faster and in a more direct manner; and the ability to browse through a book and/or search across literally thousands of titles in a matter of minutes provides a significant value both in terms of time saved and quality content identified.

Another way to explore usage is to view the average number of times a library’s titles are accessed. On average, the most active accounts, with the largest eBook collections typically see usage in the range of six or more accesses per title per year. As we analyzed usage data across various types of libraries over the past twelve months, a pattern of usage emerged that is generally consistent with the way eBooks were introduced. Consortia were among the first to purchase eBooks, and because they serve a wide audience of members, their usage per title is understandably at the high end (16.5 average accesses per title annually). Academic Libraries in the United States were the second market to adopt eBooks and growth in usage has been steady as the number of institutions and the number of eBooks they own increases (5.0 average accesses per title annually). Public and School libraries are demonstrating strong growth, but represent the two markets where we are focused on developing greater depth and breadth of content (3.7 and 4.4 average accesses per title annually).

netLibrary is often asked to talk about the various business models by which eBooks may be purchased and accessed. Today, the primary vehicle is the One Book-One User Model. Essentially, this approach denies access to a patron when a book is being used by someone else. This is the primary business model because to establish the product at the outset, it was clear that it would be important to reflect traditional print book methodologies and to ensure publishers and their authors of adequate copyright protection.

In recent months, interest in exploring and testing alternative access models has been high. Some of the types of tests undertaken are listed below. In all cases, joint library and publisher participation and approval is obtained in advance of launching the test, and both parties have proven most willing to partner in designing studies and in sharing the results.

Subscription Models

This approach facilitates access to content that is either typically updated on some regular cycle, or content that almost never needs to be updated (e.g., popular fiction). A subscription program renews access annually to a body of

content, providing the opportunity for reassessment and change to the collection on an annual basis. Patron access to that content can be set up to operate on a One Book-One User basis, or with Simultaneous or Unlimited Access, assuming appropriate compensation to the publishing supply chain has been factored into the model.

Multiple Simultaneous Access Models

This approach has been applied largely to content that is in high demand or where that demand peaks for limited periods of time (e.g., reserves). A collection of this type may include content that is owned by the library and/or content the library may wish to vary from time to time. The number of simultaneous users to be allowed is typically defined based on some combination of population served, the nature of the content, and budget considerations reflecting ability to compensate the publishing supply chain for increased access to individual monographs.

Unlimited Access Models

This approach places no restrictions on the number of users accessing the content at any point in time. Again, a portion of the collection may be permanently owned and part may be allowed to change from time to time. Pricing is determined in a manner similar to that described for Multiple Simultaneous Access Models.

As with any new product or service, a number of tests are required to determine the options that best serve all constituencies long term. netLibrary continues to implement and track the effectiveness of these new models in partnership with both libraries and publishers and will continue to update both communities on trends and results as they become available.

Going forward, we believe the future for eBooks is bright indeed. When netLibrary became part of the OCLC Online Computer Library Center cooperative in January of 2002, the potential for increasing the reach and applicability of eBooks around the globe grew significantly. Integration with OCLC's premier bibliographic database, WorldCat has already begun. The opportunities that first step provides for linking many forms of electronic media will ultimately lead to the day when libraries will be able to provide patrons with a robust search experience unlike anything they know today. Imagine, if you will, a day when a patron begins a search on „Einstein” and what follows is a list of search results that includes a web site, an eBook, a journal, a video clip of the master giving a lecture, a sound clip from speeches and lectures, and a host of visual aids. The growth and adoption of eBooks around the

globe is our first and primary focus for the near term, but it is also clear that eBooks are a natural fit with this encompassing OCLC vision as we jointly strive to continue to support the mission and methods of libraries in a digital age.