Technology Left Behind: DeepDyving into Journal Article Rental

Cris Ferguson
Furman University, cferguson13@murraystate.edu

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Technology Left Behind — DeepDyvying into Journal Article Rental

Column Editor: Cris Ferguson (Electronic Resources/Serials Librarian, James B. Duke Library, Furman University, 3300 Poinsett Highway, Greenville, SC 29613; Phone: 864-294-2713) <cris.ferguson@furman.edu>

On October 27, 2009, DeepDyve announced the launch of its journal article rental services, offering access to scholarly journal articles for $0.99 per article. Likened to iTunes and Netflix, the California-based DeepDyve bills itself as the “largest online rental service for scientific, technical and medical research.” While DeepDyve is still in beta, there is a robust library of journal articles already available. As of December 3, 2009, over 32 million articles are available for rent from thousands of journals.

Content

DeepDyve is really two tools in one, both an A&I database, indexing content from a wide variety of publishers, and a journal article rental service, enabling users to obtain access to the articles found via the index. The DeepDyve search interface allows users to enter entire paragraphs or even longer segments of text, up to 25,000 characters, searching the deep Web, including resources such as government databases, patents, open access journals, scientific publishers and more. (Ojala)

Thus far, DeepDyve has focused its efforts on providing access to content in the fields of medical and life sciences. According to the Website, there are plans afoot to expand into other subject areas. The site boasts content from a long list of publishers, including Wiley/Blackwell, Taylor and Francis, IEEE, and a wide variety of society publishers. Noticeably absent from DeepDyve’s list of participating publishers are some prominent names, such as Elsevier, the Institute of Physics, the American Chemical Society, and Springer.

The full text of some of the content that DeepDyve indexes is freely available. Examples include articles from Medline or open access journals. Premium articles, those typically accessible via journal subscription, are available for rental through DeepDyve for the $0.99 fee.

It is important to understand that DeepDyve does not offer ownership of any content. Articles are strictly made available as a rental for a 24 hour period of time, and are viewed on the DeepDyve site, via DeepDyve’s proprietary Flash-based viewing system. (Ojala) The articles cannot be printed, downloaded, copied, pasted, or even screen-captured.

Some content in DeepDyve is labeled as Preview Only. These are articles for which DeepDyve does not have an agreement with the publisher to rent the article. For those users that are interested in obtaining Preview Only content or in long-term, permanent access to a Premium article, DeepDyve provides “Download A Article from Pub-lisher” links, which direct the user to the publisher’s site where he or she is able to purchase the article for download or printing.

Pricing Plans

Under DeepDyve’s Basic plan, articles cost $0.99 with no ongoing commitment. Users create a free account, and then customize their profiles, entering words and phrases that indicate topics and areas of interest. DeepDyve uses this information to update the user’s personal DeepDyve homepage on a daily basis with articles that match the designated research interests. Users have the ability to bookmark favorite articles for easy referral, and DeepDyve maintains a complete history of every article that each user has rented and viewed. Users can also create alerts from their search results; the DeepDyve system will run the user’s query automatically and notify the user via email or RSS feed when new articles become available. Use of DeepDyve’s alerting and bookmarking features is free.

In addition to the Basic plan outlined above, DeepDyve also offers two different monthly plans. At a price of $9.99 per month, the Silver plan allows users to rent up to 20 articles per month, viewable for up to 7 days. The Gold plan, which runs $19.99 per month, permits users to rent an unlimited number of articles, viewable for an unlimited amount of time. Currently, DeepDyve is offering 14-day free trials of the Gold plan.

Payment for both individual articles and the monthly plans is handled via PayPal. DeepDyve does not accept credit card information on its Website, and, while the company is working to establish other payment options, at this time PayPal is the only accepted method of payment.

DeepDyvying in the Library

While not specifically marketed to libraries, DeepDyve’s A&I index and article rental service present an interesting opportunity for libraries. DeepDyve does not currently offer an institutional or library subscription. However, there do not appear to be any restrictions prohibiting libraries from taking advantage of DeepDyve’s existing services and pricing plans.

At this time, if a library subscribes to a title through one of the publishers with which DeepDyve is partnering, the Download Article from Publisher link directs the user to the publisher’s Website, where he or she can access articles through the library’s subscription. As long as the user is coming from a publisher-recognized IP address, the user is given access to the full text and is not asked to purchase the article. I do not know if it is part of DeepDyve’s plans, but it is my hope that one of the next steps for the company is to OpenURL enable the site, allowing users to link from DeepDyve into those resources to which their library subscribes, whether it be electronically or in print.

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In the same way that some libraries have created institutional Netflix accounts, permitting patrons to check out items ordered via Netflix through the library, libraries could create a DeepDyve account...to allow their patrons to preview thousands of journal articles for just $0.99 per article. For the modest commitment of $19.99 a month, the cost of the Gold plan, libraries could have at their disposal a database of tens of thousands of articles with no restrictions on the number of articles that can be viewed or on the duration of each view.

There are certainly logistical issues to be addressed for libraries considering a DeepDyve subscription. For example, if a library maintains a single DeepDyve subscription for its institution, individual users would lose the ability to bookmark articles and create alerts. Each individual user could set up his or her own account for the purposes of searching and bookmarking materials, but then a procedure would have to be established whereby the patron communicated to the library which articles he or she wanted to rent.

Were this type of plan successfully implemented, it could have an impact on interlibrary loan, document delivery, electronic reserves, and many other areas of library operations. While DeepDyve is certainly not an equivalent to these services, it could offer both libraries and their patrons the opportunity to thoroughly preview an article before paying an ILL fee, document delivery fee, or much higher pay-per-view fee. Libraries have before them the opportunity to provide a unique service to their patrons. It remains to be seen how such a service will be implemented.

If your library has a DeepDyve subscription or is considering setting up a DeepDyve account of some kind, I would be very interested in hearing from you.

Reference

In February of 1990, I was still four years away from being confused by Foucault for the first time. In that same month, ATG reached a milestone by beginning its second volume. A strong undercurrent through Issue 1 is, perhaps not surprisingly, an anxiety about journals. This anxiety becomes manifest in a couple of ways but the result is a kind of Foucaultian discursive formation about the value of journals. This sounds simple enough, of course, but working through this issue without having been a part of the acquisitions milieu at the time left me without much context. Indeed, I soon found myself faced with a rather curious mystery.

Coverage of the 1990 Midwinter meeting was fairly brief, but important. I started my investigation, with the summary of the ACRL Journal Pricing Discussion Group — January 7, 1990,” which featured three speakers. The first speaker, who would play a much larger role in the aforementioned mystery than I could have realized, led off the panel discussion. His advice to librarians who are acquiring scientific journals is to “write to publishers and say you do not want...[conference] proceedings as part of the journal” as a way to reduce the cost without reducing the quality of the collection.

Eugene Garfield spoke next, recommending a “fair audit of all publishers, including all factors of journal publishing.” This proposed system would explicitly allow value judgments to be factored into an otherwise “too simplistic” comparison of cost-effectiveness. (Unstated is the role that a system of value judgments might play in the journal market beyond merely calculating cost-effectiveness. My continued investigation only confirmed that, indeed, such implications were not lost on anyone...). The third presenter, Robert Sherrill, in his discussion of non-profit publishers points out that from an association’s point of view that newer commercial publications are both narrower in focus and lower in quality. While Sherrill obviously represents just one point of view (his own) on another point of view (non-profit publishing), such an assertion clearly underscores some tension in the discursive field of scholarly-communication-qua-scientific-journal-publishing.

So the panel discussion reveals the following about the state of scientific journal publishing at the dawn of 1990:

1. Interest in reducing extraneous content to curb journal size as a measure to lower cost (and therefore increase value),

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Column Editor: Jesse Holden (Coordinator of Technical Services, Millersville University) <jesse.holden@millersville.edu>