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Editor
A Success Model for eBooks
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We then gave each subject area cluster an ISSN and offered them to librarians on annual subscription, using exactly the same business model as used by journals. We offered a print-online service as well as an online only service.

We added our journals, loose-leaf services, and statistical databases as well and thereby created a comprehensive and integrated offering of our complete range of publications via Ingenta.com and some other aggregated gateways. Following early feedback, we also built our own branded portal, SourceOECD, in November 2000. In November 2002 we added our French language books in a parallel French language portal. In 2004 we launched http://new.SourceOECD.org, which added full-text searching, faster access via mirror sites around the world, and persistent links to individual titles.

All books from January 1998 are available through SourceOECD, and a few key items from before 1998 have now been added. In addition, we have started to add PDFs of selected documents, some of which are book length but never published in book form. So now, at the end of 2004, there are more than 2000 books and documents available on the site.

The Result

We have found that librarians really like the simplicity of the subscription model for books and the fact that they can offer multi-user desktop access, even to remote users. They can offer the full range of OECD books online for much less than the cost of buying each printed book individually. They like the predictability of the annual subscription pricing which makes budgets easier to manage. They also realize that they can make journal-like (or greater) savings in administrative and other costs: no more checking in of individual books and processing of all those book invoices.

Results have been very encouraging. At the end of the first year (2001), we had 70 institutions subscribing to all 20 thematic clusters, most also taking print. More significantly, we noticed that the number of institutions taking a majority of our books actually grew for the first time in years — we were winning back our old core customers.

By the end of 2002 the figure had risen to 266, of which 22% chose online-only access. By the end of 2004 this figure had risen to 550, with an increasing proportion opting for online-only service. In addition, a growing number of institutions were subscribing to particular subject clusters. Our 201,000th eBook was downloaded in 2004 and we anticipate delivering our 300,000th in 2005.

As confidence in eBooks has risen (along with budgetary pressures) we are starting to see some libraries switch from online-print service to online only service.

The gradual build-up can be explained by several factors:

1. In 2000, the eBook market was immature and only now are readers starting to expect to find books online as opposed to journals.
2. Slow download speeds/limited bandwidth availability in 2000 made books slow to download; today institutions have increased their bandwidth and books are faster to download. Also, OECD has introduced chapter-by-chapter download options.
3. Librarians are now beginning to link from their OPACs to eBooks, which in SourceOECD have persistent links.
4. Discovery systems such as Ebsco Online, Ingenta, and SweetsWise are not well adapted to books metadata, although this is changing with IngentaConnect.
5. Full text searching was not available until 2004, but introduction of full-text searching has enhanced SourceOECD use.
6. The gradual introduction of chapter-by-chapter searching has increased the granularity of metadata and has increased the chances of users finding OECD materials in their searches.

The growth in the number of institutions taking a majority of our books and the strong interest from a range of new markets and library consortia show that we have probably found a suitable business model for specialist book publishing in an online era. In 2002, 24% of our book revenues were generated by SourceOECD subscriptions and by the end of 2004, the percentage will be nearly 50%.

The Future

As any publisher of books and journals will confirm, the margins associated with subscription publishing are much more flexible than for books. So, with our book publishing looking more and more like a subscription business, we are finding it easier to accommodate new titles that would have struggled to be published in a traditional way. For example, we can now publish short reports and other content types online only alongside our books; previously, these would have been lost in the sea of grey literature. Print on demand, to be introduced in 2005, will increase our flexibility still further.

One weakness in the system has been getting user data. Ingenta adopted the COUNTER standard very early, but it is a standard developed to track journal usage, not book or database usage. COUNTER is working on a system for books, but until standards are in place, the usage data for eBooks is not likely to be comparable. Ingenta is working on improvements for SourceOECD's usage data.

Another weakness in the SourceOECD system has been the search mechanism. In 2004, this was enhanced with the introduction of full-text searching in SourceOECD, and searching has also been enhanced as more and more books are being broken up into chapters, each of which has its own metadata. We are working with Ingenta on further enhancements to the search mechanism, including elimination of duplicate results.

In addition, we are working on ways to make discovery and access easier through Google, EconLit, and REPEC. Having persistent links

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>