Data That Counts, Charleston Conference 2015

Lorraine Estelle
Project COUNTER

Jo Lambert
JISC, jo.lambert@jisc.ac.uk

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Lorraine Estelle, Director, Project COUNTER

Jo Lambert, JISC Service Manager, JISC

Abstract

Since the first Code of Practice was published in 2003, the COUNTER (Counting Online Usage of Networked Electronic Resources) standard has facilitated the recording and reporting of online usage statistics in a consistent and comparable way. The standard, now in its fourth iteration, has developed over time in response to the changing e-resource environment and to evolving user requirements. Engagement with relevant initiatives and input from vendors is critical to COUNTER's ongoing evolution. Amongst these, COUNTER has worked with NISO on SUSHI (Standardized Usage Harvesting Initiative) to develop a protocol to facilitate the automated harvesting and consolidation of usage statistics from different vendors.

Both COUNTER and SUSHI form the basis of tools to facilitate the gathering and analysis of usage data, and they help support provision of efficient and cost-effective services. One such tool is the Jisc funded JUSP (Journal Usage Statistics Portal), which provides a single point of access to data, enabling libraries to quickly and easily compare usage across a range of publishers and years. Accurate and comparable, usage statistics support analysis and evaluation of e-resources and help to demonstrate their value and impact. JUSP is an important tool that aims to support libraries in this context. This session will outline how COUNTER supports development of tools and services with global reach and impact. It will highlight challenges and opportunities that exist with regard to metrics in terms of developing, gathering, and analyzing data, and will offer some shareable models of good practice.

Introduction

Librarians from across the world use COUNTER usage statistics to inform their decision-making, but as useful as the reports are, their collection can be time-consuming and tedious. However, the combination of the COUNTER Code-of Practice with the National Information Standards Organization (NISO)'s Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative (SUSHI) protocol is a game changer. The two standards, if correctly implemented can create an infrastructure on which library consortia and other third parties can build national and regional services. The Journals Usage Statistic Portal (JUSP) and Institutional Repository Usage Statistics (IRUS) in the UK are examples of two such trusted services that are saving librarians and institutional repository managers in the UK much time by removing duplicated manual effort.

The Journals Usage Statistic Portal (JUSP)

Increasing pressure on library budgets means that demonstrating a return on investment for costly e-resources is critical. JUSP is a tool that aims to make this process quicker, easier, and more effective. Jisc, an organization that provides digital solutions for UK education and research, funds JUSP to deliver a service that is free at the point of use for academic libraries. Avoiding the need to visit multiple publisher websites to gather usage statistics, JUSP enables libraries to quickly and easily compare usage across a range of publishers and years through providing a single point of access. Standardised data conforming to the COUNTER standard is gathered on behalf of libraries using the machine-to-machine SUSHI protocol, thereby offering great efficiencies.

The service provides accurate and comparable usage data to support evaluation of e-resources. Apart from viewing and downloading standard usage reports, libraries can access a range of added- value reports to help analyse usage, consider trends over time, and establish value for money to help in purchasing decisions. The service also includes data from gateways and hosts, which help to provide a truer picture of usage when

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viewed in conjunction with data direct from publishers.

Currently used by libraries in the UK and Sweden, the service provides access to usage data from around 80 publishers and intermediaries, although this number is constantly growing. COUNTER reports currently gathered are the journal reports JR1, JR1a, JR1 GOA, and from February 2016 the service will include book reports BR1, BR2, and BR3.

Use of JUSP

> Usage statistics are used to inform important decisions and we really want to be sure we can rely on the accuracy of the data; with JUSP we know we can. We will often present this information to academics and it will be scrutinised so it's important for us to be sure that the data is reliable.
>
> —Birkbeck, University of London (speaking of JUSP)

Libraries value JUSP's role in terms of providing accurate, reliable, and standardised content. A series of machine and human validation checks by the JUSP team ensure that errors are significantly reduced. However, the addition of numerous people using the service means that data is constantly scrutinised and problems picked up by just one individual can lead to benefits for everyone. There are instances where a publisher might need to restate data so JUSP can reharvest data on behalf of everyone, potentially avoiding massive duplication of effort.

Quick and convenient access to data via JUSP saves libraries time, enabling them to spend less time on data gathering and more time on data analysis in support of decision-making processes. Reports can be generated at the click of a button, enabling people to respond to requests quickly and easily. Data can be viewed within the JUSP web interface or it can be exported for use within the library's own systems for further analysis of usage, for example by the addition of cost or fund data.

Data can be used for marketing or promotional purposes to consider how usage patterns can be used to promote the library's e-resource collections. As JUSP contains data for more than 90% of UK libraries, this aggregated data enables a comparison of usage with that of others in a similar group, size, or geographical region. These usage profiling reports enable libraries to check whether their own usage is higher or lower than average, to seek reasons for this, and where usage appears higher to use this in library promotion.

IRUS-UK

Institutional repositories (IRs) are key to promoting visibility of research outputs. Given that organisations are keen to demonstrate the value and impact of IRs, IRUS-UK plays an important role.

IRUS-UK is a statistics aggregation service for repositories in the UK, enabling them to share and compare usage statistics using the COUNTER standard. The service collects and then processes usage data from repositories, and consolidates those data into COUNTER-compliant statistics by following the rules of the COUNTER Code of Practice. The service enables repositories to provide consistent, comparable, and trustworthy usage data whilst benchmarking usage of their repository across the UK.

93 UK repositories were using IRUS in December 2015, a number that is constantly growing in support of widespread benchmarking opportunities. The service offers time-saving benefits, supports quality assurance processes, and helps to improve data quality.

By providing a nationwide view of UK institutional repository use, IRUS is helping to demonstrate the importance and value of IRs.

Use of IRUS-UK

> What helps is that it's independent and COUNTER-compliant . . . the fact that it is independent and standards compliant is really important.
>
> —The Open University (speaking of IRUS-UK)

Repository statistics can be inconsistent, and without adherence to an agreed standard it's not possible to compare usage across a range of repositories and software. Reliable, consistent, and comparable measurement is a key feature of IRUS-UK, which is seen as providing an independent and impartial service based on the COUNTER standard.

The service supports institutions in understanding the usage of their IR, enabling a check of total activity, items, and authors attracting significant attention or particular item types with higher numbers of downloads. Key statistics or headline figures can be used in various ways to promote awareness and interest.

Use of IRUS statistics can support advocacy, encouraging researchers to use the repository as they can directly see the impact in terms of usage. It serves as a convenient resource to point researchers toward and can support them with their professional review or by enabling them to track the impact of any dissemination activity in relation to their research.

With data in the portal going back to 2012 for some institutions, IRUS is a really valuable source of data about trends over time. People can check whether repository usage is increasing and how it is changing from one year to the next.

IRUS is being used extensively for benchmarking, both internally and externally. Being able to benchmark the performance of a repository with other institutions of a similar size, for example, provides a wider context and enables useful comparisons to be made. It can highlight trends within an organisation, or the performance of different item types within a repository.

Challenges and Opportunities

Aggregating data at scale means that adherence to standards and use of machine processes is crucial, but there are challenges in terms of delivering shared services in this space.

JUSP is developing an e-books usage statistics service but current activity indicates a mixed picture with regard to COUNTER-compliance, and in some cases vendors are not yet providing machine services to support data harvesting. A concerted effort by all parties is required to make some progress in this area.

Problems arise when vendors or universities make changes to their products or repositories without considering the impact this might have. It's always necessary to consider the wider context. Services such as JUSP and IRUS can highlight the bigger picture and demonstrate how small changes can make a significant difference.

Both JUSP and IRUS use machines to remove many of the onerous, repetitive processes such as downloading and aggregating data. Avoiding this duplication of effort enables greater efficiencies as staff can spend less time on data wrangling and more time analyzing data and making decisions on the basis of that data.

Services such as JUSP offer greater efficiencies for publishers. The Jisc team can interact with publishers over known problems in relation to COUNTER reports for instance and be a single point of contact rather than individual universities contacting a publisher each reporting the same problem.

These services are used by a significant number of UK universities, over 90% in the case of JUSP. This means that the development team can represent the views of the community, and this collective voice can really help to influence change. JUSP insists on COUNTER compliance, but at the same time the team work closely with publishers to help them address any anomalies with the data or their service. The team has regularly helped to test new SUSHI services or reports and particularly during the transition to Release 4 of the COUNTER Code of Practice for e-Resources.

These services provide a means to connect communities of librarians, publishers, ERM vendors, or standards organisations and to share good practices. They offer a practical implementation of a standard, highlighting where there might be issues with the standard or its interpretation or implementation, and it can suggest corrective action.

Conclusion

The information environment has changed considerably since COUNTER implemented Release 4 of the Code of Practice, and work is now underway to develop the next release. The work on Release 5 will be focused on increased utility and efficiency for all of the stakeholders. There will be a move away from a proliferation of different reports and the Excel format. COUNTER will seek to develop fewer reports, designed for SUSHI collection, and in a format that will allow users to filter for the information that they need. Ideally, the new Code of Practice, will enable the development of services such as JUSP and IRUS in many other countries and regions, improving efficiency and enabling librarians, library consortia, and institutional repository managers to concentrate their time on using the data to inform strategy, rather than the manual collection of reports.

Find out more

JUSP: http://jusp.mimas.ac.uk

IRUS-UK: http://www.irus.mimas.ac.uk

COUNTER: http://www.projectcounter.org

NISO: http://www.niso.org/about/

SUSHI: http://www.niso.org/workrooms/sushi