Streaming Video PDA: Brace Yourself, Usage Is Coming

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Streaming Video PDA: Brace Yourself, Usage Is Coming

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Abstract

Low usage statistics for library resources are a big concern for the librarians at the State University of New York (SUNY) Buffalo State, so we were unprepared for the popularity of a new streaming video patron-driven acquisitions (PDA) program. Though it was slow to take off, when it did, usage increased suddenly and dramatically. After depleting the initial budget for the resource, we allocated more funds and then quickly depleted those additional funds. At that point, we changed to a mediated model to help control the costs, but that greatly increased work for our Acquisitions Department and raised collection development questions we had not considered when we began the PDA program. To continue to offer a streaming video PDA program, we reviewed various models and controls before deciding on an approach that we hoped would give users good options, curtail costs, and minimize workloads.

This paper will provide a quick summary of our program's explosive growth, what we did to control costs, the unforeseen consequences, and how we tried to enhance the experience for everyone. We conclude with the current state of streaming video PDA at our library. This paper will provide practical information for small to mid-sized academic libraries that have recently begun or are contemplating streaming video PDA.

Introduction

Database salespeople frequently assure librarians that their database will be heavily used by students and faculty. When that promise isn't realized, vendors will offer a variety of promotional items that typically do not increase usage for our campus, the State University of New York (SUNY) Buffalo State. So when a salesman from Kanopy, Inc. approached us with promises of the popularity of its film database, we took it in stride. We agreed to a month-long free trial because our reference librarians heard good things about Kanopy and a faculty member had requested two films for courses that were only available to stream through Kanopy.

Buffalo State is the largest comprehensive four-year college in the SUNY system and grants both

bachelor's and master's degrees. Full-time equivalent student enrollment in the fall of 2017 was 9,516. Of those students, 86% are under 25 years old, which could be a factor in the popularity of streaming video.

Prior to adding Kanopy, our library had access to a number of streaming video sources. We subscribed to three databases: Academic Video Online (AVON) from Alexander Street Press, Discovery Education Streaming, and Films on Demand. We also take firm orders from faculty at the beginning of every semester for films from Digital Campus (also known as SWANK). But Kanopy was our first experience with a streaming video patron-driven acquisitions (PDA) model.

Our Streaming Video PDA Experience

We conducted a month-long free trial with Kanopy in October 2016. Based on the results of the trial we generously "guestimated" that we would probably purchase 75 title licenses per year once our users had become familiar with the service. At that time and price point, the 75 one-year licenses would nicely match the financial amount that we had allocated for this experiment. We also decided to use Kanopy's open PDA model in which Kanopy's entire database was available to our users.

In November 2016, we launched Kanopy, the streaming video PDA service, with promotions on our library website and social media outlets and in our campus's daily faculty newsletter. At the end of the fall and spring semesters and the academic year (mid-August), we evaluated usage. In a little over nine months, patron-driven usage had triggered 34 film license purchases. During that time, the number of "plays" per day remained consistent and never exceeded 25. In this context of analytics, Kanopy defines plays as the number of times someone has physically pressed the play button on a film. There is no time threshold. This is not the same meaning that Kanopy applies to PDA plays in which a purchase is triggered after a film has been viewed four times for more than 30 seconds each time. Although we were a little disappointed that this usage (measured by analytics plays and the number of films licensed) was

Figure 1. Plays per month by academic year.

not higher, we believed usage would increase over the next academic year.

And increase it did! In September 2017 alone, we licensed 27 films and by the end of the semester in mid-December, 75 license purchases had been triggered. So we had met our annual goal in terms of the number of licenses purchased in just four months. As a result, we had exceeded the amount that we had originally planned to spend because the price per film license had increased by \$15 during the summer of 2017. Figure 1 shows that the number of plays per month increased significantly beginning in September 2017, approximately the start of our second year with Kanopy. We were stunned at the popularity of this database but also concerned at the financial expenditure. We managed to find additional funding to continue the project into the spring semester.

Any hope we had that the semester break would curtail use was dashed in January 2018. During just two weeks, another 15 license purchases were triggered, putting us very close to a total spend of \$15,000, or 1.5 times our original allotted budget. At this rate, we knew we could not sustain the open PDA model, but we did not want to suddenly end our users' access to unlicensed films. So we compromised and worked with Kanopy to change to their mediated, or request, model.

To prepare faculty and students for the change, we used the usual avenues of notification including the library website, social media, and faculty newsletters. With the mediated model, all films that we had

previously licensed were still available to our users for the duration of the license. Unlicensed films in the Kanopy database were not viewable or "pre-viewable" by our users. If someone clicked on an unlicensed film, a window would appear that told them that their library had not yet licensed that film and encouraged them to complete a form to request that title. If the user submitted the form, it would be forwarded to the library's acquisitions librarian as an e-mail message.

The Mediated Model

During the first week in mediated mode the acquisitions librarian received an overwhelming number of e-mail messages from both faculty and students requesting a variety of titles. To streamline the approval process, we decided to accept all faculty requests. Student requests were also accepted if the film was a class assignment. Determining if the requested film was required for a course sometimes involved much back-and-forth communication with students through e-mail, but other cases were obvious when a large number of students requested the same title. Despite the added work, the mediated model let us check if we had access to the title from another source. If so, we notified the user and sent them access information. Based on that, many professors checked our additional streaming video resources before going to Kanopy.

We used the mediated model from February through mid-August 2017. During that time, we purchased only seven film licenses from Kanopy and all of those were in February. (See Figure 2.) While the

Figure 2. Number of titles licensed per month by academic year.

number of new licenses dropped dramatically, usage remained strong, based on the number of plays per day. An evaluation of our mediated model experience showed that of the seven requested film license purchases, only two of the films would have triggered a purchase under the PDA model. In addition, only four of those seven titles were viewed five or more times. We wondered if users were intimidated by the need to submit a request form or simply did not want to be bothered. Perhaps the added steps encouraged people to explore our other options or to use the films we had already licensed. We noted that the use of Digital Campus films declined as Kanopy usage increased. Ultimately, we decided to end the mediated model based on the steep decline in film requests and the added workload for acquisitions.

But we could not return to the open PDA model because it was not financially sustainable. So once again, we compromised and created a hybrid model based on the PDA model but limited to the 10 most popular suppliers of the films we had licensed, including the Criterion Collection from Janus Films, Kino Lorber Edu, PBS, and California Newsreel. This model allows users to preview and play any film in this group while titles outside require users to submit the Kanopy request form. Four months into the hybrid model, the number of triggered purchases is down by about 25% compared to the same months of the previous year using the open PDA model. Usage, as measured by the number of plays per day, is down slightly and we have received no mediated requests yet. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Comparison of the number of licenses triggered during open PDA vs. hybrid PDA.

	Licenses Triggered	
	Open PDA	Hybrid PDA
August	4	3
September	23	16
October	17	16
November	20	15
Totals	64	50

Lessons Learned

Two years into the Kanopy service has taught us some lessons about a streaming video PDA service. We learned not to rely solely on invoices to gauge costs because of the delay between the time when a license purchase is triggered and when the charge appears on an invoice. Fortunately, Kanopy recently began issuing invoices monthly instead of quarterly, which is a helpful improvement. But we strongly recommend that libraries monitor the streaming service's online analytics at least weekly, particularly statistics about triggered purchases, to stay informed about costs.

We were surprised to find that students apparently were not using Kanopy for leisure viewing because usage statistics showed very low use on weekends. Thursday (during the first year) and Monday (during the second year) afternoons were the peak viewing times. Our mobile device use was comparatively high

(12.5%), according to Kanopy, possibly because so many of our students are under 25 years old.

We attribute the sudden and considerable rise in Kanopy triggers during September 2017, one year into the service, to word-of-mouth advertising and the increasing familiarity with Kanopy content and ease of use of the open PDA model.

The Future

We will evaluate usage and costs at the end of the current semester and again at the end of the academic year to determine if the hybrid PDA model works for our campus. If costs again increase beyond our means, we will limit the film choices in the hybrid model to fewer film suppliers or, ultimately, to titles that are only available to stream through Kanopy.