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eBooks at Western Michigan University: A Case Study

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eBooks at Western Michigan University: A Case Study

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Background

Western Michigan University (WMU) enrolls nearly 28,000 students and is ranked by the **Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching** in the category of Doctoral/Research Universities-Extensive. **Western** offers one hundred fifty-one undergraduate programs, seventy at the Master's level, two specialist programs, and thirty Doctoral degrees. In addition to the main campus, **Western** operates eight regional centers serving many remote users with no physical library for their immediate use; making the collection development of electronic resources critically important.

The University Libraries of **Western Michigan University** make available to students, faculty and staff over 150,000 electronic books, contained in a variety of eBook collections. Links to these collections are provided through the libraries' Website with the majority of titles being cataloged and available through the **OPAC**. Most of these titles were selected as part of entire collections or sub-collections with the remainder selected title by title.

Some of the eBook collections and services offered by University Libraries include:

- 1) The **American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) E-History Books Collection** containing significant and frequently cited history books published from the early 20th Century through the present day;
- 2) The **ebrary** "Academic Complete" collection offering access to over 19,000 eBooks from over 180 academic, trade and professional publishers;
- 3) **Early English Books Online (EEBO)** a growing database standing now at over 100,000 digitized facsimiles of books published in England between 1475 and 1661;

4) **gutenberg-e**, a small collection of digital monographs in the field of history;

5) **Project Gutenberg**, a collection of public domain e-texts;

6) **National Academies Press**, a collection offering over 3,000 freely available e-texts and a smaller sub-collection of titles available for purchase in PDF format; and

7) **netLibrary**, a collection of thousands of titles from multiple publishers, covering many disciplines.

These collections will be examined from several different angles:

- 1) Acquisition and access, 2) Cataloging, 3) eBook Applications, 4) Usage, 5) User Satisfaction, and 6) Disappointments and Successes.

Acquisition and Access

The **ACLS E-History Books Collection**¹ is a subscription database with a site license currently offering over 900 titles, which can be browsed or searched. **ebrary**² offers a subscription model with the subscribing institution leasing access to the collection for a period of time (in our case three years) providing a site license for unrestricted access. eBooks from **ebrary** require the patron to download their proprietary reader and also allow the patron to personalize a bookshelf featuring bookmarks, annotations and highlights. Additionally, **ebrary** makes available publisher branded databases from **Byron Hoyt**, **Datamonitor**, **Dun & Bradstreet**, **Harris Infosource**, and the **Society of Manufacturing Engineers**. **Early English Books**

Online³ is a purchased collection allowing unrestricted access for authorized users that can be searched or browsed. **gutenberg-e**⁴ is a subscription database with a site license. Titles available on **gutenberg-e** are linked from their home page. **Project Gutenberg**⁵ offers free access to almost 14,000 titles that may be searched

or browsed. What we make available to our patrons from **National Academies Press**⁶ are freely available titles (approximately 3,000), but about one-third of their portfolio (approximately 900) is available for a fee in PDF format. **netLibrary**⁷ sells individual eBooks and larger collections. University Li-

braries has acquired over 19,000 titles largely through the consortial purchase of mutually agreed upon collections of eBooks but also by individually selecting titles, primarily for electronic reserves. **netLibrary** allows patrons to search the collection and read online without a personalized account, but to "borrow" patrons must create that account. **netLibrary** restricts access to a single user for a given title, so when an item is "checked out" only that particular individual may view it. The purchase of multiple copies is needed to circumvent this restriction.

All of these publisher Websites are linked through the Libraries' home page. Most of the individual titles are cataloged with the 856 links passing through a proxy server.

Cataloging

Cataloging records have been provided for most major eBook collections adding value to the collections by providing an additional access point in the online catalog. Records for each eBook collection require unique loaders to be written for the Library's ILS. The involvement of a systems librarian, programmer, and cataloging librarian are necessary to prepare the records. ILS constraints on the number of records that could be loaded at one time imposed an additional delay in loading the records into the online catalog.

Perhaps the most difficult problem yet to be resolved is the quality of the cataloging records. This problem is not vendor specific. The quality of the records provided by all eBook vendors has been questioned by many cataloging librarians. The lack of quality and authority control creates a strong resistance to adding eBook records to the catalog. Though some collections such as **netLibrary** eBooks allow for adjustments prior to record production, most eBook collections do not provide this option and require more manipulation at the local level. Revision of cataloging records on a local ba-

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eBooks and E-content: from page 51

Google's efforts will definitely be a good thing for libraries and content providers alike, but both libraries and content providers would do well to continue to ensure that any user, whether they come from **Google**, the **OPAC** or anywhere else, will be able to find what they need. Your average Web user can search for "Aleutian Range" and come up with almost 4,500 results on **Google**, including a definition from *The American Heritage® Dictionary*. An **xreferplus** user will come up with the *American Heritage Dictionary®* definition, and can then easily link directly to entries from geography dictionaries, a browseable map from the

HarperCollins Atlas, images, encyclopedia entries, and more.

In delivering electronic content, eBooks have come a long way, but there's more work to be done. E-content users want an experience that is more than book-bound, database-bound or publisher-bound. There is a great need for comprehensive, well-organized online collections that deliver not just flat content or thousands of search results, but meaningful connections across resources that mirror the ways in which people discover and learn.

Ellen McCullough (ellen.mccullough@xrefer.com) is marketing director at xrefer, provider of online reference services to libraries worldwide.

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BORN IN AND LIVED: Cleveland, Ohio then Tahlequah, Oklahoma and currently live in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

EARLY LIFE: Sheltered in the suburbs.

FAMILY: My Mother is a recently retired public librarian.

EDUCATION: BA, **Muskingum College**; MAEd, **Baldwin-Wallace College**; and MLS, **Kent State University**.

FIRST JOB: Summer camp counselor.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER: **John Carroll University** (Reference Librarian); **North-eastern State University** (Education Resources Coordinator); and **Western Michigan University** (Education Librarian and now Acquisitions and Serials Librarian).

IN MY SPARE TIME: I enjoy wine tasting (reds, in particular) and single malt scotch.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by **Ken Kesey** and *Native Son* by **Richard Wright**.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: I'm still working on that one.

FIVE-YEAR GOAL: Promotion to full professor.

WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I see an even greater emphasis on all things delivered electronically, but I can't foresee doing away entirely with the print volumes any time soon.

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sis creates additional financial costs and significant delays in loading the records in the online catalog. Quality control and adherence to cataloging standards needs to be addressed by eBook vendors.

eBook Applications

As more and more institutions both public and private offer online courses through distance education, access to eBooks becomes a standard means of providing a "library." The value of an eBook collection grows in proportion to the content provided. For **Western Michigan University** participation in eBook acquisitions began with a distinctly academic focus. A group purchase among Michigan academic libraries focused on subjects identified as important by the group. Since the first purchase, the group has added annually to the collection. In addition, a statewide public collection was acquired by the **Library of Michigan**, the state library, adding titles not included in the academic collections.

Almost all of the Michigan academic libraries participating in the group purchases offer some form of distance education. The initial collections purchased were from **netLibrary** and allowed one user access at a time. A circulation period was set at 6 hours for all books. To accommodate **Western's** needs for titles re-

quested for e-reserves, institutional copies were purchased as well. The e-reserve titles either duplicated the academic collections or were unique titles. E-reserve books from **netLibrary** were given a 2-hour circulation status. Titles from **ebrary** and other eBook collections do not require circulation periods since the eBooks can be accessed by multiple users, an advantage for specific class reserves.

Both distance education needs and those of electronic reserves are well served by eBooks. eBooks can also be helpful in fulfilling reference queries. They allow the user to search an entire text quickly for information regardless of its location within the book. Computer books, which usage statistics indicate are heavily used, readily lend themselves to the user needing information on a particular process, rather than being read from cover-to-cover. In addition to the eBook collections noted above, specific reference titles from publishers such as **Dekker**, **Elsevier**, **Wiley**, and **McGraw-Hill** have been acquired to meet these user needs. Rather than acquiring entire collections, the selection of specific titles returns the subject selector to traditional collection development.

Usage

Not all of these collections provide usage data and several of those examined here do not provide them at all. In this particular instance, usage statistics are available on the **ACLS Col-**

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lection, **gutenberg-e**, **EEBO**, **ebrary** and **netLibrary** with statistics on **EEBO** becoming available in June 2004. No standard exists for recording eBooks statistics so it is difficult comparing across collections.

Statistics provided by **ACLS** show our institutional use to be about half of the average across the collected 319 subscribing sites. In the past year, **WMU** generated 169 simple searches against the all site average of 297.69 and 172 total searches against an all site average of 365.61. Certainly an under-whelming performance when juxtaposed against the average. Our statistics from **gutenberg-e** demonstrate little use. Activity over the last year shows 43 unique visitors performing 46 active sessions, viewing 75 pages.

Early English Books Online offers a time dated statistical template with the following categories: Web sessions, searches, citation views, TOC views, image views, PDF downloads, full-text views, searches with no hits, and turn-aways. The five months of data available (6/04-10/04) revealed 127 total Web sessions, with 172 searches, and 1102 image views.

ebrary offers a password restricted report generator. Summary and detail reports by calendar date and day of the week can be drawn up for sessions, searches, views, pages printed, and pages copied. Statistics from the past year at **WMU**, demonstrate dramatically increased user activity gauged by an increase in total sessions from 26 to 568, total number of documents viewed from 24 to 503, and total number of pages viewed from 537 to 12,037. During this period of increase, MARC records were loaded into the **OPAC** on a monthly basis. Other possible factors reflecting increased use might include using the same eBook reader for all titles and unlimited access to the full **ebrary** "Academic Complete" collection. The most popular subject categories gauged by total number of user sessions were: 1) computers, 2) business and economics, 3) history, 4) technology, 5) social science, 6) science, and 7) education.

netLibrary also offers a password restricted collection development and usage report generator. Collection development reports may be drawn for owned and not owned eBooks, owned eBooks for SFX, all eBooks, and new eBooks. SFX is our Open URL server system. Usage reports can be drawn for popular eBooks, activity by title and subject, dusty eBooks, turn-aways, and dictionary access. The past year saw 2,110 total accesses with the most popular subjects being: 1) computers (472), 2) social sciences (311), 3) business, economics and management (281), 4) literature (187), 5) religion (121), and 6) history (90). The most popular **netLibrary** title of the past year, *Economic Growth* by **Robert J. Barro**, was accessed 39 times, while three of the top ten titles were computer books published by **Sam's Publishing** and two by **O'Reilly**. During this same timeframe, no users were turned away and a total of 3,888 eBooks were never accessed.

against the grain

people profile

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BORN & LIVED: Archbold, Ohio; Columbus, Ohio; Chicago, Cincinnati, Yuma and Tucson, Arizona, and Kalamazoo, Michigan.

EDUCATION: B. Mus., **Capital University** and **MLS University of Arizona**.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Read and hike in nature preserves.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Mysteries.

PET PEEVES: Cell phones in restaurants and other wristwatch alarms sounding in inappropriate places (church, concerts, etc.).

WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I believe eBooks will continue to thrive, new and better readers will become available and more affordable, downloads of eBooks will become readily available, and the majority of standard reference books, encyclopedias and dictionaries will be online.

Disappointments and Successes

User satisfaction seems to be highly dependent on why an eBook rather than a print book is selected. In-depth studies of user wants and needs for eBooks are yet to be done. Observations, assumptions, and occasional comments reflect a variety of views ranging from "I'd rather have a real book in hand" to "I could get the book right away and the library was closed" to "All I needed was a definition." Where user satisfaction becomes frustration and anger is reflected in the multitude of formats and designs. The plug-ins, readers, and system designs create dissonance for the user. A user in a library where **OPACS** are managed by the library may suddenly come across an eBook that won't display. **Western** has experienced this situation when the vendor failed to notify the library that a particular publisher used a different plug-in for viewing its books. Disgruntled users are not likely to return to eBooks.

Another frustration for users and librarians is browser support. In an institution such as **Western**, where the library and many of its users have **Mac**s, support for the **iMac** browser **Safari** is unavailable. More than one browser has now been installed on all **OPACS** enabling users to view eBooks; creating problems for management and user education as well. With the proliferation of browsers, eBook vendors need to address the issues that arise with eBook readers, plug-ins, operating systems, and other digital operations.

Screen designs for eBook use vary widely and can be confusing to user and librarian alike. Attention needs to be focused initially on where use directions such as page turns, tools for highlighting, and sign off are located. A problem in one of the designs is the location of "Close item" or "Logoff." When an item is not closed and a user wants to go back to the book, the user is locked out of the one user book until the time limit is expended. While standardization of screen designs is not a serious problem, stan-

dardization of eBook elements could increase their value and use significantly.

The eBook, relatively new in the publishing field, requires further development to address the disappointments frustrating both libraries and end users. Libraries are looking at the variety of models offered for the acquisitions of eBooks. No perfect acquisitions model is available. From subscriptions to the one book/one user model, libraries are experimenting to determine which model works best for specific collections, end uses, and budgets. Print book vendors need to offer eBooks in addition to print, giving selectors an either/or choice. At issue as well, is rights management and technology for interlibrary lending. The needs for quality cataloging, standardization, and better design stand out with all eBook products.

Many aspects of our work with eBooks have to be considered successful. Clearly, the addition of literally tens of thousands of quality titles to our collection is a major success. Purchasing electronic versions of books eliminates theft and mutilation problems. eBooks have ready application and acceptance as material for electronic reserves and are easily accessed by remote users. Will eBooks continue to be selected for **WMU's** collections? The answer is a definite yes! eBooks meet the needs of many users, provide e-reserves and references updated long before new print editions become available. The work towards standardization and possibilities of new acquisitions models promises continuing development in the world of eBooks.

Endnotes

1. <http://www.historyebook.org>
2. <http://site.ebrary.com>
3. <http://eebochadwyck.com/home>
4. <http://www.gutenberg-e.org/index.html>
5. <http://promo.net/pg/>
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