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eBooks in Health Sciences Circa 2008 -- What Have We Got For Our Journey Now?

Meg White

Rittenhouse Book Distributors, Inc., meg.white@rittenhouse.com

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Health Issues, Trends, and Research". The first issue was titled "Strategic Strides Toward a Better Future" and the second "Applicable Research in the 21st Century." The stated goal of the issues was to provide a resource for librarians with an interest in providing consumer health information services. The editor, **Tammy Mays**, selected authors from the medical, academic, governmental and public library arenas to share their research and experience. The second issue, especially, focuses on best practices. **Mary Gillaspys** article in issue three includes mention of increased quality of print materials, including the encyclopedia series from the **Gale Group**, the consumer version of the *Merck Manual*, **O'Reilly's** patient-centered guides, **Marlowe's** "first year" publications, and the *Mayo Clinic* group of books.¹⁰

The **Medical Library Association** has a very active section focused on consumer health issues, the **Consumer and Patient Health Information Section (CAPHIS)**. They provide access to online "core" lists prepared by libraries around the US and Canada (<http://caphis.mlanet.org/chis/collection.html>). **CAPHIS** also has a listing of 100 consumer health Web-sites that are vetted and organized by subject area (<http://caphis.mlanet.org/consumer/index.html>). A quarterly newsletter, *Consumer Connections*, covers topics of interest to a consumer health information operation (<http://caphis.mlanet.org/publications/newsletter.html>). 🌱

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Additional Resources

Personal communications to the author from **Mary Ann Urbashich** and **Patricia Yuen**, **Green-Field Library**, **Alzheimer's Association**.

eBooks in Health Sciences Circa 2008 — What Have We Got For Our Journey Now?

by **Meg White** (Director, Technology Services, Rittenhouse Book Distributors, Inc.;
Phone: 1-800-345-6425 ext. 601) <meg.white@rittenhouse.com>

This article will discuss the recent developments and current landscape for eBooks in health sciences and the relevant implications for education, clinical care and research in these fields.

After years of promise and some false starts, health sciences books in electronic format have finally begun to gain some traction as an information resource. Reviewing past *ATG* articles as far back as 2001,¹ readers can see some innovative librarians who began to imagine the potential of "virtual" libraries: available 24/7/365 and integrating a full complement of scholarly materials, journal articles, databases, full-text monographs and reference books. If only innovation could be achieved with the germination of an idea. The reality is much more complex and usually messier.

In 2008 we are fortunate to have the beginnings of a more longitudinal view of the evolution from print to digital. With enough experiments combined with hard data, trends are starting to emerge that can

help further eliminate barriers as well as inform next steps.

Overcoming Barriers

A 2002² survey of primarily academic health sciences librarians reported that 99% of respondents provided access to eBooks as part of their institution's resources. Given this overwhelming reported availability more than five years ago, why have eBooks continued to lag behind journals and databases as a source of information in health sciences? A further review of this same survey data two years later in 2004 identified the following barriers: availability, discovery, and functionality. Reviewing these barriers and subsequent developments can help to illustrate progress to date.

Availability

Perhaps the largest barrier to adoption, availability of titles, has been the most significant shift in the market in the last four years. Early experiments in eBooks followed in

much the same path as early experiments in electronic journals. Migration from print occurred in a sporadic fashion, gradually building to critical mass. Initial eBook platforms were publisher-centric and tended to cluster around specific disciplines or collections of books. Publishers imagined that electronic delivery would disrupt existing sales and distribution channels; creating a more direct relationship between the user (physician, student) and the publisher, thus disintermediating other stakeholders, such as re-sellers, distributors and libraries. The result was products that were small in scope and not integrated into the existing information fabric that serves the typical academic environment. Librarians reported being frustrated at the lack of access to full collections as well as multiple

continued on page 28

interfaces, lack of integration, and largely ambiguous purchase models.³

Two significant factors have contributed to alleviating the issue of availability: 1) innovations in production technology (which has led to lower costs) and 2) the rise of the aggregator. Since 2004, it has become incrementally less expensive to convert print production files to digital format, as well as implement format-neutral production workflows, that allow for output of content in multiple formats. Simultaneously, electronic aggregators have entered the market, and traditional print distributors have added “e” to their service offerings, creating competition and extending available content options. Publishers have begun to diversify their distribution strategies to include third parties, in addition to the support of their proprietary products. These two factors combined have grown the total number of available eBooks in health sciences to an estimated 100,000+ in 2008, with some publishers digitizing well into their back lists.

Discoverability

ATG reported in 2005 that a major barrier to eBook adoption was discovery. One descriptive response to a survey on this topic stated the following: “Users are often unaware that electronic books are available. We still need to do a better job of promoting their use”.⁴

As eJournal collections and acquisition models have stabilized, librarians have turned their attention to building eBook collections ... and integrating these new resources into their patrons’ workflow. **OCLC’s** acquisition of **NetLibrary** in 2004 created the availability of thousands of eBook records, and catalogers began to integrate these resources into library holdings. Resources that were previously “undiscovered” are now a click away for many patrons.⁵

Some libraries have even adopted new technology to further extend their patrons’ reach into their collections. The use of commercially available federated search engines allows users to search across the entire collections — books, journals, databases — greatly enhancing the user experience and ensuring that all relevant resources are accessible.⁶

Usability

One of the more subjective factors in the adoption of eBooks in health sciences deals with functionality. For many academic disciplines, the ability to access full-text materials electronically is often adequate to support the research and education needs of patrons. Health sciences content and the manner in which users interact with the content differs significantly from standard academic disciplines.⁷ Learners do not typically read health sciences materials in a linear fashion. Unlike their colleagues in the humanities and social sciences, health sciences students and professionals are typically searching for an answer. Traditional eBook delivery platforms, driven largely by print artifacts, struggled to deliver

against the grain people profile

Executive Director, Technology Services
Rittenhouse Book Distributors, Inc.
511 Feheley Drive, King of Prussia, PA 19406
Phone: (610) 277-1414 • Fax: (610) 277-0410
<meg.white@rittenhouse.com>
www.rittenhouse.com www.r2library.com

Meg White

BORN & LIVED: In chronological order: Ardmore PA, Athens, GA, Winston-Salem, NC, St. Louis, MO, Baltimore, MD, Villanova, PA.

EARLY LIFE: Born and raised in the Philadelphia suburbs, moved to Athens, GA for my last 2 years of high school. Younger brother and sister in a household that was sports-obsessed: watching and playing.

FAMILY: Husband, **Jabin White**, the XML wiz and history buff. Two children, **Kate** (10) and **Tommy** (6) Rhodesian Ridgeback, **Reyna** (10).

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Fortunate to have had a 20 year career in STM publishing and distribution. Past board member and President of the **American Medical Publishers Association**. Frequent speaker at industry events and seminars.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE: Reading, gardening, running, and volunteer work for **Steppingstones** (www.steppingstonescholars.org). Cheering for **Wake Forest Field Hockey** and other various **WFU** athletic teams.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *The Color Purple*/**Alice Walker**, *Bag of Bones*/**Stephen King**, *The Namesake*/**Jhumpa Lahiri**, *The Merchant of Venice*/**Williams Shakespeare** (play), *Three Lives*/**Gertrude Stein**, *Harry Potter* series/**J.K. Rowling**, *Winesburg, Ohio*/**Sherwood Anderson**, *The Plot Against America*/**Phillip Roth**.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Complacency, hypocrisy.

PHILOSOPHY: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” **Margaret Mead**

“The great challenge of adulthood is maintaining your idealism, even after you have lost your innocence.” **Bruce Springsteen**

“Once in a while, when everything is just right, there is a moment of magic. People can live on moments of magic.” **Sarah Caldwell**.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: (moments) Working with intelligent, highly-skilled, and passionate authors and customers has been and continue to be some of my favorite professional moments. I am also fortunate to have had the benefit of strong colleagues and the leadership and wisdom of some amazing bosses.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Happiness and healthiness, professionally and personally.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I like to take a holistic view ... we are in a time of transition, but we are part of an evolution, not a revolution (as our short term culture prefers and worships). I hope that the developing information landscape continues to power and value innovation. I think future generations of information professionals and researchers will look back at the years 1995-2020 as a time of formational change that allowed many fields to leap forward. 🌱

improved value over the print experience. The result was a lack of adoption of the “e” format for books. As technology has evolved, innovations in user interfaces, content delivery, and overall user experience have improved greatly. It is no longer acceptable to have online access to previous print-only material; users have come to expect the ability to find what they

need quickly and easily and interact with this material in meaningful ways.

So to paraphrase **Dr. Maya Angelou**, “what have we got for our journey now?” along the road to the adoption of health sciences eBooks? Since **ATG** first addressed this topic in 2001, we have certainly come a long way in terms

continued on page 30

of availability, access, and functionality, key barriers that encumbered widespread adoption. Given the efforts of so many professionals to make this innovation possible, it might be tempting to be caught in the weeds of this work ... to think only in terms of raw numbers of titles ... and to do so would be to ignore the larger framework in which we are all ultimately stakeholders.

A study published in *The Journal of the Medical Library Association* "Assessing Print and Electronic Use of Reference/Core Medical Textbooks,"⁸ defines the importance and impact of moving large amounts of previously print-only materials to electronic formats — usage. The authors compared usage rates of print books in their collection to usage for the same titles online. Usage of the digital versions was exponentially higher than the print alternative.

As a project manager in this area for the last five years, I have been amazed at the consistent response from librarians when asked (sometimes at the **Juried Product Development Forums** in Charleston!) about the types of eBook content and subject areas most in demand electronically. Almost uniformly, the replies have been "more is better." Given the data from the study in **JMLA**, this anecdotal, almost knee-jerk reply appears to have some real basis in fact. If we provide access to quality information in a way that enables

the user's work or research, usage inevitably increases. And, as information professionals know, increased access to information leads to innovation.

Web 2.0 and Beyond

Given the hype around **Web 2.0** and the continued evolution of the Internet, we may forget that we are part of a work in progress, and one that can now be viewed longitudinally with some defined stages of development. First: connectivity. Then: "stuff to look at". Now: interactivity, collaboration, knowledge management, and innovation. In an environment that is increasingly fertile, it remains to be seen what will grow, what it will look like, and who will play what role in this continued evolution. Will the book remain a unit of organization and delivery? Will eBooks evolve into online communities that morph and grow organically? What, if any, role does traditional peer review play? Publishers? Librarians? Federal agencies? Professional societies? Certainly, the creation of online products such as **UpToDate** (www.uptodate.com) and more recently, **MedPedia**,⁹ will challenge and hopefully enhance existing models

We are in the midst of a transition that may be painful and, at times, murky, but the payoffs, even in the early stages, are proving to be significant in terms of increased access and discovery for users. As incremental as these changes may appear, eBooks will prove to be an important building block on the way to our digital future. And this is an idea that we can all get excited about. 🍄

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eBooks in Academic Health Sciences Libraries

by **Elizabeth R. Lorbeer** (Associate Director for Content Management & Assistant Professor, Lister Hill Library of the Health Sciences, University of Alabama at Birmingham, 1530 3rd Avenue South, Birmingham, AL 35294-0013) <lizlorbeer@uab.edu>

and **Nicole Mitchell** (Reference Librarian & Instructor, Lister Hill Library of the Health Sciences, University of Alabama at Birmingham, 1530 3rd Avenue South, Birmingham, AL 35294-0013) <anmitch@uab.edu>

Introduction

Many of today's library users no longer prefer the traditional print textbook. Instead, eBook collections are being utilized more and more. Through growing eBook collections, users receive the textbook content they need in a digitized medium. This trend is especially true for academic health sciences and medical libraries. Health professionals, including students, are accustomed to locating and utilizing biomedical journals and databases that are abundantly available on the Internet. They are not reading works cover-to-cover but are looking for snippets of reliable information to satisfy questions, facts, and curiosity. Rather than reading an entire eBook, a 2006 survey¹ showed that most faculty tend to read only a few pages or an entire chapter at most. Users want the convenience of being able to access and search eBooks wherever they

are — whether they are in the classroom, at the bench, or at the bedside — without having to visit the physical library.

With the maturity of eBook platforms over the last ten years, publishers have been busy repurposing print content by digitizing vast subject collections in the basic and clinical sciences. Compared to their general academic counterparts, eBook platforms in the health sciences are often more robust and are considered to be more like content databases. Thus, in anticipation of meeting the various health information needs of both professionals and students, these eBook "databases" offer much additional content such as clinical guidelines, drug indices, images, videos, and self-assessment tests. Media content is integrated with the actual text of the book. References can be interlinked between chapters as well as linked to other

works. Faculty now also have the capability of linking directly to chapters or sections within their course management systems. No longer do they have to put a print book on reserve in the library. Now, they can simply create a link to the desired content.

Curricular Needs

In the fall of 2007, the **University of Alabama School of Medicine (UASOM)** at the **University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)** began a new integrated curriculum that emphasizes teaching the basic sciences structured around organ-based systems. This change in pedagogy meant traditional, semester-long courses like anatomy and pathology were now based on organ-based modules and would be taught over several semesters. Small discussion groups were introduced to replace lengthy lectures and the memorization and regurgitation of facts. The new curriculum required the **UASOM** course directors to revise their lectures and reorganize reading lists. A

continued on page 32