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International Dateline -- Usage Statistics for Online Books: What Counts?

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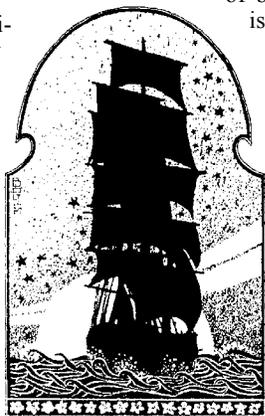
take a greater interest in remote storage facilities than they do collection development. And they have to: Where to put all those books that just might circulate one day? It's true that print books will always have a constituency; but equally true that today there are a lot of people on campus, some in high places, who would certainly not notice, would likely not care, and might even be delighted if some massive inter-library loan malfunction emptied the library of every last volume.

Always the very first criticism of eBooks is that nobody wants to read one from beginning to end. True enough, but somehow it's never mentioned, to balance the score, that as a rule nobody wants to read an academic library's print books cover-to-cover, either. That's not to say the books (some of them) aren't used. But, as opposed to what goes on in public libraries, scholars and students are much more likely, having checked out a book, to scan it, size it up, read a chapter or two maybe, check a reference, verify a fact, look at the bibliography, try to find some dimly recalled passage.

For these purposes, anyway, eBooks equal or better their print forebears. Especially when you haven't visited the library lately and might prefer to do your work from home or office or dorm, or while sitting in a café. Even for other uses, where print is superior, superior still to have eBook available too, for subsequent scanning, checking, verifying, finding.

And speaking of cafes, remember all that cultural weight of the print books? How will the books weigh in on that scale after we have a solid generation or so of students accustomed to walking into a library building and the only books in sight are the ones the people sitting around drinking coffee have with them at the moment? And for whom the digitization of every book in the world will not seem an astounding vision, but the way things always were, about as remarkable as color television? The amazing thing for this cohort will more likely be to hear that the print originals for these online works are all still around, somewhere.

And, that there used to be some doubt, and even debate, about the eBooks. 🐼



International Dateline — Usage Statistics for Online Books: What Counts?

by **Dr. Peter T. Shepherd** (Project Director, COUNTER Online Metrics, Project COUNTER, 39 Drummond Place, Edinburgh EH3 6NR, UK) <pt_shepherd@hotmail.com>

Release 1 of the new **COUNTER Code of Practice** for online books and reference works was published in April 2006, and marked the first expansion of **COUNTER's** coverage beyond journals and databases. This **Code of Practice** was developed with input from a task force of librarians and publishers with expert knowledge of books and reference works and is the first attempt to introduce a comprehensive industry standard for the recording and reporting of online usage data for these products. In order to facilitate both vendor compliance and library assimilation it was decided to make its overall format and structure consistent with the existing **COUNTER Code of Practice** for journals and databases. Only the content of the usage reports has been changed and the set of definitions of terms expanded. The specifications for report delivery, data processing, auditing, and compliance are identical to those that have already been shown to work in the **Code of Practice for Journals and Databases**.

One of the main challenges we faced in developing this new **Code of Practice** was the lack of consistency among publishers in the ways in which they define, structure and distribute online books. In the case of online journals there was a broad consensus that the most important content unit whose usage should be measured is the full-text article. Even before **COUNTER** most journal publishers were measuring downloads of full-text journal articles. **COUNTER's** main role was to ensure that they all did so using the same standards and protocols. For books no such consensus existed. Some publishers make online books available only as a single file that can be downloaded in its entirety, with no further vendor monitoring of usage being possible. Other publishers allow the downloading of individual chapters or entries, such as dictionary definitions or chemical structures. We felt it was appropriate to cover both these scenarios in the **Code of Practice** and this is reflected in the Usage Reports listed below. We also felt that the best way to encourage an informed debate what constitutes a meaningful measure of online book usage was to publish Release 1 of the **Code of Practice** with a limited number of core usage reports, obtain feedback how they work in practice, and include further enhancements in subsequent Releases.

The full text of Release 1 of the **COUNTER Code of Practice for Books and Reference Works** is freely accessible on the **COUNTER Website** (http://www.projectcounter.org/cop/books/cop_books_ref.pdf). Its main features are summarised below.

1. Definitions of Terms Used

The original **Code of Practice for Journals and Databases** contains an extensive list of data elements and other terms used in the usage reports and other parts of the **Code**. Where possible, existing definitions from **NISO**, **ISO**, **ARL** and other organizations have been used. Among the terms defined are “Vendor,” “Aggregator,” “Search,” “Item request,” “Consortium” and “Consortium member.” This comprehensive list of definitions is proving to be a useful industry resource and is becoming more and more widely used for purposes not directly related to **COUNTER**. It has now been expanded to cover books and reference works. New definitions include:

- **Chapter:** A subdivision of a book or of some categories of reference work; usually numbered and titled.
- **Entry:** A record of information in some categories of reference work (e.g., a dictionary definition).
- **Reference Work:** An authoritative source of information about a subject; used to find quick answers to questions.
- **Section:** A subdivision of a book or reference work (e.g., Chapter, entry)

As with journals and databases, where an appropriate existing definition exists this has been used and the source, such as **NISO** (the **National Information Standards Organization**) cited. The other definitions have been developed by the books task force, using a number of sources.

2. Usage Reports

The **Code of Practice** provides a set of six basic usage reports that cover full-text requests for a whole title, as well as for sections (chapters, encyclopaedia entries) within a title. Searches, sessions and turnaways are also covered. These reports are:

- **Book Report 1:** Number of Successful Title Requests by Month and Title
- **Book Report 2:** Number of Successful Section Requests by Month and Title
- **Book Report 3:** Number of Turnaways by Month and Title
- **Book Report 4:** Number of Turnaways by Month and Service
- **Book Report 5:** Total Searches and Sessions by Month and Title
- **Book Report 6:** Total Searches and Sessions by Month and Service

The report formats, data processing guidelines and delivery protocols are exactly the same as those already in use for journals and databases. Likewise, searches, sessions and turnaways have been defined in the same way as for journals and databases and the usage reports relating to these (3, 4, 5 and 6 above) parallel those for journals and databases.

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these books, long strips of yellow paper with words like “counter revolutionary literature” had been pasted cross-wise on the shelving to identify these were corrupting materials and to save them from destruction. In 1979 the scraps of the paper strips were still visible. Now, the strips are long gone with open stack libraries the rule and a very wide range of materials to read. Yet, there are still some sensitive topics for which no books are acquired, e.g., Taiwanese independence, Tibetan independence, etc.

For the second question, which overlaps with the first one, are there any limits even for a public library or a university, I think the answer is NO, but again I would suggest that the librarian managing the collection should be allowed to exercise flexibility in how this is done. A theological library of any bent should provide access to “opposing points of view” even if its only purpose is to give its users an understanding of what they are up against. This is still a problem in many parts of the world. Librarians are not always free to build balanced collections. An acquaintance of mine back in the 1960s went to a Communist bookstore in one country only to be called in to explain what he was doing when he returned to his home country and the security police noticed his face among the photographs taken of all customers leaving that bookstore. This sort of activity has no place in a free society.

As for the third question, I don't think there are any libraries which introduce the books in their collections from their online or card (any still left?) catalogs using subject headings like Thug Authors, Ignoramus Authors, and Terrorist Authors. Yet, putting non rare books in a locked case for reasons other than preserva-

tion or value does send the reader a signal that something is awry — especially if the book is controversial within the social/cultural milieu of that library. In America, during the **Cultural Revolution** period of China, readers were subject to a mild form of “poisonous weed” labeling. When we bought books from stores like **China Books and Periodicals** (founded by the son of China missionaries but who embraced the New China) each one had a stamp on the title page indicating something like “Published in Communist China, etc.” Were I in America I think I could still find some of those books in the stacks to find the exact wording of what was stamped in the books but

since this was not the practice in Hong Kong, I can't. In any event, the reader was reminded that these were politically suspect; that they were published in a country declared to be an enemy of the American people, and the reader was to be aware of the poisonous nature of the contents.

Hopefully most libraries will continue to be places where different points of view can be read and heard, where readers are allowed to read broadly and develop their own conclusions, and where calls for this or that point of view to be censored will be rejected. This should be the goal; unfortunately it is still not a universal reality. 🌱

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3. Compliance

Compliance with the **Code of Practice** is encouraged in two ways. First, library and consortium customers are urged to include a clause in all relevant licence agreements specifying that vendors provide usage statistics that are **COUNTER** compliant. A standard form of words for this clause is provided in the **Code of Practice**. Second, to obtain ‘**COUNTER-compliant**’ status for their usage reports vendors are required to sign a formal Declaration of **COUNTER** Compliance and to allow **COUNTER** to review those of their usage reports that they claim are compliant. These reports are then listed in the Register of Vendors on the **COUNTER** Website (<http://www.projectcounter.org/compliantvendors.html>). Only vendors and reports listed there may be regarded as being **COUNTER** compliant. Vendor usage reports have been monitored at five library test sites, which are providing useful feedback to individual vendors and to **COUNTER**; this is helping improve implementation.

By September 2007, only eight vendors were compliant with the **Code of Practice for Books and Reference Works**. Why so few, when there are over 70 vendors compliant with the **Code of Practice for Journals and Databases**? Several reasons have become apparent. First, there has been much lower customer demand for usage statistics for online books, although there are signs that such demand is now building. Second, online books are at a much earlier stage in their evolution; vendors are still experimenting with a range of technical and business models. Third, even those vendors that are compliant with the **Code of Practice for Journals and Databases** have found it challenging to comply with the new **Code of Practice**. In some cases this is due to technical problems; online books are often published on a different platform with different technical capabilities. In other cases the problems are organizational; books are published in a different division than journals and the management has different priorities. Having said that, the number of applications for compliance with the **Code of Practice** has increased significantly in recent months.

4. Feedback

Since publication of this **Code of Practice** we have encouraged, and have received, feedback from a variety of sources (online discussion groups, seminars, etc.), which has proved very valuable. It is apparent that the debate on “what counts?” in online book usage statistics is livening up, not only as more books are being sold online, using a range of technical and business models, but also as librarians seek meaningful measures of their usage and value. It is already becoming clear that the set of core usage reports contained in Release 1 may have to be expanded. For example, in many cases measuring the number of searches may be a misleading indicator of value and a new metric that indicates the relevance of the search results obtained would be an improvement. This and other suggested enhancements will be taken into account as we begin serious work on Release 2. 🌱

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