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Technology Left Behind -- eBook Rollout Revisited

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Technology Left Behind — eBook Rollout Revisited

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Column Editor's Note: In the November 2006 issue of *Against the Grain*, the eBook Rollout profiled and contrasted twelve different eBook providers, incorporating a chart that highlighted a variety of factors, including coverage of the various eBook collections, functionality of the platforms, and pricing models. The eBook Rollout, while not a comprehensive picture of the eBook market, proved popular with *ATG* readers, librarians and publishers alike. This month's column will revisit the Rollout, providing a brief update on the eBook market. Several eBook vendors that were not included in the first Rollout are profiled, and updates on a number of the vendors that participated the first time around are also provided. — **CF**

Fifteen different eBook providers were surveyed for this revisit of the eBook Rollout. Nine of the respondents (**ACLS Humanities E-Books, eBook Library, Elsevier ScienceDirect, Gale Virtual Reference Library, MyiLibrary, Oxford University Press, Springer, Taylor and Francis, and xreferplus**) participated in the original survey, and six (**Blackwell Publishing, CRC NetBASES, Greenwood, OverDrive, Safari, and Wiley**) are new to the eBook Rollout.

Each of the participating eBook providers was sent a survey consisting of nineteen questions (listed below). The first seventeen questions were pulled from the original eBook Rollout, and the last two questions are new to the survey. (As with the previous Rollout, the provider responses have been summarized in a supplementary chart. Because of space constraints, the chart will not be published in the print edition of *ATG*, but will be provided free of charge on the *ATG* Website. The complete eBook Rollout Revisited chart can be accessed at: http://www.against-the-grain.com/_old/ebookrollout/.)

1. What year did your company begin offering eBooks?
2. How many eBooks do you currently offer? (If your product includes other types of materials, in addition to eBooks, please include break down by type of resource in addition to the total number.)
3. What subject areas do your eBooks cover?
4. How many publishers are represented in your eBook collection?
5. Are eBooks sold on a title-by-title basis, as part of a subject collection(s), or both?
6. How many users may view a single eBook at one time?

7. Do you require that users "check-out" an eBook to use it?
8. Is a proprietary reader or piece of software required to view your eBooks?
9. How are the eBooks displayed to users? As PDF page images? As HTML? Some other file format?
10. Can users print portions of the eBook?
11. Can users download portions of an eBook?
12. Can users copy and paste portions of an eBook?
13. Do you offer MARC records for eBooks? Are the MARC records provided as part of the eBook sale, or is there an additional fee?
14. Please briefly explain your pricing model. (Can eBooks be purchased outright or are they licensed via subscription only? Can institutions choose which pricing model they prefer? If eBooks can be purchased outright, what kind of on-going maintenance costs are there?)
15. Do you work with consortia to provide special pricing and group access?
16. Please give an example of an eBook you offer, and provide both the print and the online cost.
17. BRIEFLY, describe the primary type of eBook(s) you offer. Reference materials? Non-fiction? Fiction? Scholarly? Research Oriented? Etc.
18. What kinds of new products and services are you working on for eBook customers?
19. How much market penetration have you had in the past year? (How many eBooks are you selling, and what type of organization do you consider to be your primary buyer / audience?)

The first eBook Rollout column included some discussion of the coverage of the eBook services, access and use restrictions, and pricing options. The discussion in this update will take a second look at the coverage of the various collections and also touch on two new topics, the availability of MARC records and the new products and services eBook providers currently have in development.

Collection Coverage

There have been a few changes in the content and coverage available from the nine of the eBook providers that appeared in the previous eBook Rollout, all of which

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ACLS Humanities E-Book

<http://www.humanitiesebook.org/>

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CRC NetBASES

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eBook Library (EBL)

<http://www.ebllib.com>

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Elsevier ScienceDirect

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Gale Virtual Reference Library

<http://www.gale.com/gvrl/>

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indicated an increase in the number of titles provided through their services. For example, in December 2006, **Ingram Industries, Inc.** acquired **Coutts** and **MylLibrary**, a **Coutts** affiliate (<http://www.mylibrary.com/company/pdfs/Ingram%20MylLibrary.pdf>). As part of the **Ingram Digital Group**, **MylLibrary** now has access to over 7000 additional publisher relationships, which, according to **Martin Marlow**, Vice President, Product and Marketing at the **Ingram Digital Group**, potentially enables **MylLibrary** to offer more content.

Last fall the **ACLS** eBooks were included in the eBook Rollout under the name **ACLS History E-Book Project**. Since that time, the project has both changed its name and expanded its content to incorporate all areas of the Humanities, not just History. The organization's new name, **ACLS Humanities E-Book**, reflects the broadening of the product's scope.

There have been recent developments in some of the companies that are new to the survey as well. **Blackwell Publishing**, who for a number of years has licensed its books through eBook vendors such as **NetLibrary**, only started offering eBooks on its own platform in January 2007. In addition, as of February 5, 2007, **John Wiley & Sons** acquired **Blackwell** (<http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/pdf/wiley2.pdf>). While the two companies are listed separately in the new chart, **Wiley's** responses to the survey indicate that **Blackwell** titles will be included on **Wiley** platform sometime in the future.

Also, new to the eBook Rollout is **OverDrive**, the only new respondent that can be classified as an eBook aggregator. **OverDrive** is unique in that it incorporates 11,000 audiobooks, 2500 videos, ad 5,000 music files with its offerings of 50,000 eBooks. **OverDrive** is also the only eBook provider included in the Rollout whose eBooks are primarily meant to be downloaded rather than viewed over the Internet.

MARC Records

In the February 2007 issue of **ATG**, **Kristin E. Miller**, Electronic Resources Cataloger at the **University North Carolina at Chapel Hill**, wrote a special report on the issues and challenges of cataloging eBooks. **Miller** points out that, "As the volume of eBook content grows, libraries are grappling with how to integrate this content into their online catalogs." Consequently, the availability and validity of MARC records is of growing concern and importance to libraries providing access

to eBooks. **Miller** goes on to say that vendor supplied MARC records potentially offer one part of a solution to the eBook cataloging dilemma, stating "these vendor-supplied records free the library from having to provide title-by-title cataloging, and may be loaded quickly into the catalog." **Miller** continues with some discussion of some factors to take into consideration when using vendor supplied MARC records.

Of the fifteen eBook products highlighted here, ten of the respondents (**ACLS Humanities E-Book**, **Blackwell Publishing**, **CRC NetBASES**, **EBook Library**, **Gale Virtual Reference Library**, **MylLibrary**, **Oxford University Press**, **Springer**, **Taylor & Francis**, and **xrefer**) provide MARC records at no additional cost. Three others (**Greenwood**, **Overdrive**, and **Wiley**) indicated that libraries could acquire MARC records from **OCLC**. Two others, **Safari** and **Elsevier ScienceDirect**, do not provide MARC records at this time. However, **Elsevier** did indicate plans to offer **OCLC**-created MARC records free of charge in the near future.

When comparing eBook services that provide MARC records at no extra cost with the purchase of their eBooks, it may be helpful to consider how the MARC records are delivered and whether or not the vendor will customize the MARC record prior to delivery. For example, **xrefer** provides access to MARC records through the **xreferplus** administrative module, and **MylLibrary** will customize MARC records to an institution's specifications, adding local fields and location codes and assigning unique call numbers.

Products and Services in Development

One of the two new questions on the most recently conducted survey was *What kinds of new products and services are you working on for eBook customers?*. While the answer to this question varied from product to product, the responses can be lumped into two very broad categories: 1) providers that are focused on improving content and 2) providers that are working on their interface and/or other user-oriented services.

Apparent in the survey responses was a general trend towards the increasing coverage available in the various collections. However, a few eBook providers in particular are especially focused on improving content and increasing the number of available titles. For example, in the past 6 months, the



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Greenwood

<http://ebooks.greenwood.com/>

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OverDrive

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Oxford University Press

<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/>

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/>

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Safari Books Online

<http://www.safaribooksonline.com/>

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Springer

<http://www.springer.com>

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ACLS Humanities E-Book has increased the number of titles being offered from just under 1400 to over 1500 titles. For its future development, **ACLS Humanities E-Book** indicated it is continuing to concentrate on expanding the number of titles offered. Similarly, **Oxford University Press** is also focusing on content, having recently announced the addition of nine new subject collections to **Oxford Scholarship Online**, available in Fall 2007.

Some of the eBook providers stated that their newest developments were geared more towards improvement and development of their end-user interface. **Thomson Gale** has launched an updated interface for the **Gale Virtual Reference Library**, offering a variety of new user-requested features including searching within results, easier navigation, and better limiters. Also working on their interface is **Taylor and Francis**, who will be migrating the **T & F** eBook platform to **InformaWorld** later this year. This move will enable customers to search and to access both eBooks and electronic journals at the same time.

An example of innovation in the area of user-oriented services is **MyLibrary's** recent launch of a new eBook Loan service in partnership with **CISTI**. Users can select to "borrow" an eBook from several major schol-

arly publishers. Each loan costs US\$25, and users will have access to the eBook through a URL, which is received via email upon receipt of payment. The link to the borrowed eBook expires automatically at the end of the 30 day loan period.

Conclusion

Each time I conduct an eBook survey all of the products, questions, and issues I am neglecting become more apparent to me. For example, this column surveyed eBook publishers and aggregators of current eBook content. It does not address databases of older eBooks such as **Early English Books Online**, nor does it deal with databases like Literature Online that incorporate various types of content, including both journals and eBooks. (Both of these resources were mentioned in the **Miller** article.)

Other areas that could be investigated in the future include:

- the availability of usage statistics
- the existence of eBook standards and vendor compliance with those standards
- mergers and developments within the eBook industry, and
- the developing role of the book agent in the acquisition of eBooks.

Because of the growing interest in the eBook market and my own inability to ask all

of the questions I want to in one shot, the eBook Rollout is going to become a regular feature on the **ATG Website**. If there is an eBook product / vendor that you would like to see profiled or a profile you would like to see updated, please let me know. If there are questions that you would like to have answered that have not previously been included in the survey, feel free to send those to me as well. My goal is for these profiles to become a consistent and reliable online resource for libraries, publishers, and vendors involved in the eBook market.

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Miller, Kristin. "Cataloging eBooks: an Overview of Issues and Challenges." *Against the Grain* 19, no. 1 (February 2007): 45-47.

Silberer, Zsolt and David Bass. "Battle for eBook Mindshare: it's all about the rights." *IFLA Journal* 33, no. 1 (2007): 23-31.

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I would like to once again thank the eBook providers that kindly and patiently answered my many questions. If you have any questions or would like further information on any of the services highlighted here or in the eBook chart, please see the accompanying contact information for each of the participating eBook providers. 🌲

I Hear the Train A Comin' — An Interview with Joseph J. Esposito

Column Editor: **Greg Tananbaum** (Consulting Services at the Intersection of Technology, Content, and Academia)
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In this month's column, I have the distinct pleasure of interviewing **Joseph J. Esposito**. **Joe** is President of **Portable CEO**, an independent consultancy providing strategy assessment and interim management to the information industries. Over the course of his career, he has been associated with various publishers in all segments of the industry and was involved from an early time with new media publishing. He has served as an executive at **Simon & Schuster** and **Random House**, as President of **Merriam-Webster**, and CEO of **Encyclopaedia Britannica**, where he was responsible for the launch of the first Internet service of its kind. In his consulting life, recent projects range from business development for a large not-for-profit institution, electronic textbooks, **The Processed Book Project** (experimental interactive texts; see <http://prosaix.com/pbos>), and consultation on mergers and acquisitions. Anyone familiar with the **Liblicense** listserv will know that **Joe** brings an interesting and insightful perspective to matters of scholarly communication.

GT: Does scholarly publishing still matter?

JE: Certainly scholarly publishing remains a central activity of the research community.

But you may mean something else: Does *traditional* scholarly publishing matter? It depends what you mean by "traditional." If you mean hardcopy publications, I would say, yes, publishing still matters, but the world outside that kind of publishing is growing far more rapidly than the traditional, hardcopy variety. But if you mean traditional publishing with an electronic dimension, I would say it matters more than ever, and will matter more and more in the coming years, as the limitations of Open Access become more apparent. What OA does is open the floodgates to all sorts of information that competes for our attention, but the real problem of the "Information Age" or "Knowledge Economy" or whatever you want to call it is not access but the time and attention to study what we do have access to. Would you rather have access to more information, or would you prefer to have an additional two hours of your work day to review the information you have? Time, not information, is the scarce resource, and traditional publishing models in digital form are more respectful than any other models of a researcher's attention.

GT: Beyond the obvious transformations the Internet has brought to scholarly publishing (electronic dissemination, automated

workflows, etc.), how has the Web changed the fundamental nature of scholarly communication?

JE: The Web is serving to migrate economic value away from primary content (research articles, books, etc.) to the indexes that point people to that content. **Google** is the best example of this, of course. Subscription fees and advertisements that used to benefit the publishers of primary content are now being eroded by the advertising that appears on the **Google** search engine results pages. This is a break with the past by degree, not kind: there have always been indexes and they always took in some of the money, but not the proportion that they do now. One wonders if a new equilibrium will be reached at some point. One also has to wonder what the future is for some major properties — *Chemical Abstracts*, for example — which are outstanding indexes, but now must be managed carefully, as they could find themselves supplanted by the default, universal search window, which happens to be **Google**. If we have a universal index, why do we need any others?

GT: Do we as a profession focus too much on the journal as a unit of currency?

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