2014

Analyze This: Usage and Your Collection: COUNTER: Basic Explanations to Disabuse Expectations

Athena Hoeppner
University of Central Florida

Kathleen McEvoy
EBSCO Information Services, k.mcevoy@ebsco.com

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Recommended Citation
Hoepner, Athena and McEvoy, Kathleen (2014) 'Analyze This: Usage and Your Collection: COUNTER: Basic Explanations to Disabuse Expectations,' Against the Grain: Vol. 26: Iss. 1, Article 39.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6682

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Basic Explanations to Disabuse Expectations

Analyze This: Usage and Your Collection — COUNTER:

by Athena Hoeppner (Electronic Resources Librarian, University of Central Florida)

Column Editor: Kathleen McEvoy (EBSCO Information Services) <KMcEvoy@ebsco.com>

As the Electronic Resources Librarian, I frequently compile usage reports for librarians and administrators. Almost as frequently, I find myself explaining the reports. In my experience, we librarians look at usage data through a lens of expectations. We expect stable usage with moderate increases yearly; we expect usage on par with our peers; and we look for low cost/use to prove the value of e-resources. Over the years, I've experienced many things which confound those expectations and lead to large fluctuations: usage lower than peers; and unreliable or un-calculable cost-per-use.

At the core of usage analysis and comparisons is the COUNTER Code of Practice. COUNTER establishes protocols widely adopted by e-resource vendors to produce and deliver consistent usage reports to libraries. The first Code of Practice, released in 2003, described seven reports. The newest release (required as of 31 December 2013) describes 23 reports. The reports document three basic types of interactions between users and e-resources: Search Activity, Full Content Access, and Turnaways, with variations for type of content (i.e., article, book, multimedia), mode of access (i.e., desktop, mobile device), file format delivered, and year of publication. For UCF’s searches and full content access data, I use the 10 go-to reports discussed below.

Search Activity Reports

Four reports give a complete account of all of UCF’s searches in COUNTER-compliant e-resources: Platform Report 1 (PR1), Database Report 1 (DB1), Book Report 5 (BR5), and Journal Report 4 (JR4). BR5 and JR4 include only Total Searches. PR1 and DR1 include a richer view of search behavior with data for:

- Regular Searches
- Searches-federated and automated
- Result Clicks
- Record Views

I sum searches from the PR1, BR5, and JR4 to calculate UCF’s total searches across all of our COUNTER-compliant e-resources. For vendors that offer more than one interface or service for interacting with the content, the platform report reveals how much each interface is used. For example, PR1 for EBSCO delineates searches run on their EBSCOhost, EDS, EDS API, and Mobile interfaces.

DB1 is more detailed than PR1, with usage for each database on a platform. On multi-database platforms, a single query typically runs simultaneously in several databases on a platform. The usage statistics count the search in each database, so one query can result in a 1x (number of databases) increase on the DB1 report. Use PR1 to see total usage instead of summing the data reported on DB1.

In Release 4 — sessions are no longer counted and reported, but Results Clicks and Record Views have been added. ARL needs to update its Survey in response to the changes, and Usage Summaries in Library Annual Reports around the world will look different next cycle!

Full Content Access Reports

COUNTER Release 4 offers reports for the variety of content types modern libraries provide to users, including articles, eBooks, eBook chapters or sections, and multimedia of all kinds. The following reports provide a complete view of UCF’s use of full content from COUNTER-compliant vendors:

- Book Report 1 (BR1) – title requests
- Book Report 2 (BR2) – section requests
- Journal Report 1 (JR1)
- Journal Report 1a (JR1a) – journal archives
- Journal Report 1 GOA (JR1GOA) – Gold Open Access
- Multimedia Report 1 (MR1)

Joe User: A Time Traveler’s Walk-Through

To illustrate how user behavior translates into usage statistics, let’s track Joe User as he proceeds through a typical library research session in three settings: Single Database, Federated Search, Web Scale Discovery (WSD). Joe’s basic behavior will remain consistent. He enters a query for “knee,” clicks on five results, and accesses five full content items. We’ll look just at the statistics in DB1, PR1, and the suite of full content reports JR1-MR1. For the sake of simplicity and space, I combined and compacted the data in the examples below.

One Database Setting

Joe starts his session in 2003, using one database, CINAHL, on one platform, EBSCOhost. He enters “knee,” clicks on five results, and opens five full-content items. His activity would generate the following search usage data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DB1 - Database</th>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Regular Searches</th>
<th>Federated Searches</th>
<th>Result Clicks</th>
<th>Record Views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CINAHL</td>
<td>EBSCOhost</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Joe opens one Springer book chapter, three full-text articles (one each from EBSCOhost, Wiley, and PLOS ONE), and one video from Alexander Street Press. Each opened item is counted on each vendor’s report appropriate for the content type. If the Wiley article is Gold Open Access, it is counted on JR1GOA. If it is from a purchased archive, it goes on JR1a. The article from PLOS ONE is not recorded on any COUNTER report — PLOS journals are green open access, so no authentication is needed to read the article and PLOS does not issue COUNTER reports, and instead uses article level metrics.

Multiple Databases/Federated Searches

We teleport Joe into the near past, 2009, where Joe tries MetaLib using a Nursing Quick Search form that sends the query to five databases: CINAHL and Alt-Health Watch from EBSCOhost, PsycInfo and Dissertations Full-text on ProQuest; and Cochrane from Ovid. Joe runs his search for “knee,” clicks two results from CINAHL, one from PsycInfo, and two from Cochrane.

This time, Joe’s usage is distributed across the five database, three platforms, plus MetaLib. Results Clicks and Record Views are new to Release 4, so I did not know how they are counted in federated search systems like MetaLib. Oliver Pesch, a COUNTER Executive Committee member, technical committee chair, and Chief Product Strategist at EBSCO, explained the accounting for me:

“Record Views” would be counted by the platform where the records are retrieved from; however, “Result Clicks” would happen on the platform that generated the result list. Therefore, in the table that follows, the Record Views continued on page 75
Joe catches up with modern times and Résearch and the Web Scale Discovery. Joe considers the activity being hosted by a COUNTER-compliant vendor site, the use is tallied on most suitable report: COUNTER.
I n my last column I provided an overview of the circumstances surrounding the Lan-
glois Public Library and my first year of service here. These circumstances are hardly unusual; I suspect more than a few readers will have thought to themselves, “well, what’s so notable about that?” My point in describing some of the day-to-day aspects of managing a small rural public library was to set the stage for a more encompassing discussion of the sustainability of such libraries, and libraries in general.

One of the first things I did upon arrival here was to join the Association for Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL). The organization consists of people involved in such institutions and has proven to be an invaluable resource for fielding questions ranging from board relations, programming, security systems, recommendations for equipment, policies and procedures, insurance, and on and on. Many small libraries operate with limited staff; directors in such libraries perform most if not all of the work necessary to operate a library, from staffing the circulation and reference desks and other traditional library functions, to ordering supplies, processing payroll, and changing the light bulbs.

One fundamental question confronting many of us is the basic issue: how do we keep this going?

The Langlois Public Library is a tax-supported public institution. We get $7,707 in property tax for every $1,000 of assessed value of all property owners in our district (which is an enviable mileage for a district; unfortunately our district is the size of a postage stamp). We benefit from grants, donations, Friends’ group fundraisers (book sales, craft fairs, silent auctions, etc.), and other supplemental funding. We partner whenever possible with our sister libraries in Agness, Gold Beach, and Port Orford.

We provide outreach through area schools, support community events, and open our space to local and regional groups seeking meeting rooms, facilities suitable for presentations, and the convenience of a local venue. We deliver educational and entertainment programming to a village otherwise unserved by such resources. We are the only community commons accessible to our patrons.

The Library enjoys broad support; many of our patrons are deeply committed to the Library and want very much to see it thrive and flourish far into the future. The Friends group devotes long hours to fundraising events throughout the year, and provides welcome additional money to purchase materials for the collection and new equipment, and to underwrite expanded programming opportunities. Dedicated volunteers help sustain longer opening hours and perform essential maintenance and upkeep on the facility.

Our service experience mirrors that of national trends: during economic downturns library use surges. We have many patrons who cannot afford internet access, can’t afford cable television, or books, and who need basic services such as faxing, scanning, and photocopying. Many visit us daily; we are usually busy.

Regrettably, our current foundations may not be enough to guarantee our long-term sustainability. Much of our budget consists of fixed costs: utilities, supplies, systems fees, and the like. These costs generally increase annually, whereas tax receipts do not. The local economy, long dependent on two moribund industries — fishing and timber — promises little. It’s the size of the difference with donations, grants, and other sources of funding becomes increasingly challenging. Unless we can craft an effective solution to address the fiscal realities facing us this library district will not survive, nor will the others in the county.

This scenario plays out across the state; indeed, throughout the nation. Oregon has already suffered entire county library systems forced to close (e.g., Hood River County; Jackson County). Although these counties have succeeded in re-opening their libraries, it has come at great cost — to taxpayers, to patrons, and to staff. Some, like Jackson County, must again put a ballot measure before taxpayers this year; failure to pass may mean closing once again.

Curry County, Oregon, does not have a unified county library system; each library is an independent tax district. Although most libraries in the county share an integrated library system and seek to pool resources for programming and collections, each of us performs a whole range of administrative tasks separately. This independence is a point of pride for many of our residents, but ultimately such a view is simply too naïve and insular.

For one thing, such redundancy consumes many too scant resources, diverting scarce budget dollars and staffing that could be more effectively deployed if we had a centralized county system. In practice our separate districts offer little real benefit. Invariably inconsistencies arise in service policies, cataloging, donor relations, grant writing, and general operational philosophies. At the end of the day, such independence is a luxury we can no longer afford.

Curry County also has the unfortunate distinction of being one of the poorest counties in the state. In 2013 we failed to pass a ballot measure to sustain funding of 911 and other emergency services, and the fate of law enforcement in the county after July 1, 2014 remains in jeopardy. How likely are future library initiatives to fare in such a climate?

I am convinced our future depends upon nurturing a new model for this county, and...