2014

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Recommended Citation

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

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, multi-media), 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 DB1 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 statis-

tics 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.

DB1 - Database	Platform	Regular Searches	Federated Searches	Result Clicks	Record Views
CINAHL	EBSCOhost	1	0	5	5

PR1 - Platform	Regular Searches	Federated Searches	Result Clicks	Record Views
EBSCOhost	1	0	5	5

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.

Reported on	Count
BR1 from Springer	1
JR1 from EBSCO	1
JR1, JR1a, or JR1GOA from Wiley	1
MR1 from Alexander	1
Total for all platforms	4

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

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would be 2 for CINAHL, 1 for PsycInfo and 2 for Cochrane – and 0 for MetaLib since MetaLib does not host the “records” being viewed. The “Result Clicks” are as would be expected.

DB1 -Database	Platform	Regular Searches	Federated Searches	Result Clicks	Record Views
CINAHL	EBSCOhost	0	1	0	2
Alt-Health Watch	EBSCOhost	0	1	0	0
PsycInfo	ProQuest	0	1	0	1
Dissertations FT	ProQuest	0	1	0	0
Cochrane	Ovid	0	1	0	2
Metalib	Metalib	1	0	5	0
Total		1	5	5	5

PR1 - Platform	Regular Searches	Federated Searches	Result Clicks	Record Views
EBSCOhost	0	1	0	2
ProQuest	0	1	0	1
Ovid	0	1	0	2
MetaLib	1	0	5	0
Total	1	3	5	5

content-provider’s **COUNTER DB1** report. **EBSCOhost** PR1 report would only reflect Result Clicks and Record Views for databases hosted, searched, and accessed on **EBSCOhost**.

Assuming that Joe discovers and selects the exact same full content as in the scenario, there is no change in the full content usage statistics. The full content reports are not affected by federation. How the user got to the full-text makes no difference, be it through an A/I database, a link in an online course system, or a Google Scholar search. So long as the content is hosted on a **COUNTER**-compliant vendor site, the use is tallied on most suitable report: JR1, JR1a, JR1GOA, BR1, BR2, and MR1.

Web Scale Discovery

Joe catches up with modern times and repeats his activity in a Web scale discovery service with one query, five clicks on results, and five full-content accesses as before. Because WSD is relatively new, and because Release 4 is brand new, I was once again unsure how the activity translates into **COUNTER** statistics. **Oliver Pesch** explained:

*Our user Joe searches **EBSCO** Discovery Service (EDS), which covers 100 databases (for sake of an example)... each of the 100 databases will receive a +1 for “Searches — Federated and Automated”; however, the PR1 for **EBSCOhost** will receive only a +1 for Searches Regular to represent the user’s actual search on EDS. Since EDS shows which database a result is from, each result click will be attributed to the database the result*

Each WSD service ingests records and content differently, which may affect the Result Click and Record View statistics. Consider the different approaches used by EDS and Summon when multiple data sources supply metadata for an item. **EBSCO** Discovery Service identifies and the associates multiple records for the item, but keeps each record separate. Summon matches and merges multiple records for a single item to create a Summon record. In search results, EDS shows the best original record for the item. Summon shows the Summon record. In EDS, when Joe clicks and views a record, he sees a record supplied by specific database, and the usage is attributed to that database. In Summon, when Joe clicks and views a record, he sees the Summon record and I suspect the usage is attributed to the Summon, not to the databases that originally supplied the metadata.

The scenarios above illustrate how changes in search modes and technologies can have a big effect on statistics. Search statistic increased from 1 to 6 to 100+.

Choices, Circumstances, and Complications

Now that we’ve examined how searches, clicks, and full-text data are affected by different scenarios, I’ll revisit to my original point that year-to-year or library-to-library comparisons of **COUNTER** data is problematic. The scenarios demonstrate that a library’s use of federation or WSD has an appreciable effect on search statistics. I experienced this impact first hand in the late 2000s when many of **UCF**’s peers implemented federated search as their primary access to e-resources. **UCF** chose to use federated searching in a limited capacity. For a couple of years, around **ARL** Survey and Annual Report time, I had to explain why **UCF**’s search statistics were much lower than our similarly sized peers.

One year, **UCF**’s limited federate search implementation, dubbed Quick Articles, experienced a hiccup. We included only three databases in our general search group, and one stopped working with our system for a period of months. Even though we did not steer traffic to Quick Articles, our search statistics for the problem database plummeted. I have seen similar effects from network and EZproxy down time.

DB1 -Database	Platform	Regular Searches	Federated Searches	Result Clicks	Record Views
CINAHL	EBSCOhost	0	1	2	2
Alt-Health Watch	EBSCOhost	0	1	0	0
PsycInfo	ProQuest	0	1	1	1
Dissertations FT	ProQuest	0	1	0	0
Cochrane	Ovid	0	1	2	2
Database 001	Vendor X	0	1	0	0
Database 100	Vendor XXX	0	1	0	0
EDS	EBSCO	1	0	0	0
Total		1	100+	5	5

PR1 - Platform	Regular Searches	Federated Searches	Result Clicks	Record Views
EDS	1	0	5	5

Some libraries make the perfectly valid choice to encourage searching individual databases. Most will

implement a discovery service and include as many relevant databases as possible. The exact contents of the discovery index will vary from service to service and library to library. In addition, each discovery service uses proprietary relevancy ranking algorithms. Even if the services included exactly the same data sources in their index, they would each surface different results in the first few pages. All of these choices and differences will increase use of some e-resources and likely decrease use of others. Different choices by libraries may result in peer libraries showing very different usage patterns.

Cost-per-use calculations are also affected by the issues above, but the larger difficulty stems from inconstancies in the availability and granularity of pricing data. Many of **UCF**’s

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Notes from Langlois — Thoughts on Sustainability

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In my last column I provided an overview of the circumstances surrounding the **Langlois 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 \$.7707 in property tax for every \$1,000 of assessed value of all property owners in our district (which is an enviable millage 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, 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 likelihood of recovery. As the gap between costs and taxes collected widens, the strain of offsetting 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. Our ongoing collective health will rely upon coming to understand such independence as a critical liability.

For one thing, such redundancy consumes too many 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

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e-journals are part of state-wide packages, and many are access-only titles. We have access to thousands of e-journals with no itemized prices. Our most used databases are, similarly, grouped into packages with no itemized pricing. Such cases make it impossible to calculate price-per-use.

In addition, much of our full-text usage is from aggregator databases. To calculate the cost-per-use for a journal available through

both a direct subscription and through aggregators requires summing the use wherever the journal is hosted, but determining the full price for access to the journal becomes too complicated and is not feasible.

I’d like to conclude by stating that I am a fan of **COUNTER** and do think that libraries should use **COUNTER** data for many purposes, including year-to-year and library-to-library comparisons. I hope that I’ve provided some basis for making such comparison with some care, and with plenty of salt. More details, including descriptions of the reports I did not cover, are available in the full *The COUNTER*

Code of Practice for e-Resources: Release 4 on **COUNTER** Code of Practice site: http://www.projectcounter.org/code_practice.html

The COUNTER Code of Practice for e-Resources: Release 4. Published April 2012. <http://www.projectcounter.org/r4/COPR4.pdf>

Appendix A (Glossary of Terms). Updated November 2012. <http://www.projectcounter.org/r4/APPA.pdf>

COUNTER Compliance. A step by step Guide for Vendors. Published May 2012. http://www.projectcounter.org/documents/COUNTER_compliance_stepwise_guide.pdf

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