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Commercial Publisher eBook Platforms

Cris Ferguson

Murray State University, cferguson13@murraystate.edu

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by **Cris Ferguson** (Director of Technical Services, Murray State University) <cferguson13@murraystate.edu>

Defining Commercial Publishers

The April 2013 Library Technology Report, "E-book Platforms for Libraries," provides an excellent overview of eBook publishers and providers, including a comprehensive directory of eBook platforms. The directory lists eBook platforms for a wide variety of markets, age groups, and library types, and includes publishers, aggregators, distributors, and university presses.

While many eBook platforms can be clearly classified as aggregators, university presses or commercial publishers, others are more difficult to label and identify. For example, **Safari Books Online** initially included content largely from **O'Reilly Media** and **Pearson Education**, but it has expanded to include content from almost 200 different publishers. The same is true of **Gale**, who publishes its own eBook content, but is classified in the Library Technology Report as an aggregator because of the content from other publishers available on the platform.

For the purposes of this analysis, a commercial eBook publisher is defined as a publisher whose eBook platform contains primarily its own content. Looking through the Library Technology Report, the list of commercial publishers that cater specifically, at least in some part, to the academic market is surprisingly short, with only 14 eBook publishers listed: **ABC-CLIO**, **De Gruyter**, **LexisNexis**, **McGraw-Hill**, **Routledge** (a division of **Taylor & Francis**), the **American Psychological Association**, **SAGE**, **Elsevier**, **ME Sharpe**, **Springer**, **Taylor & Francis**, **Wiley**, and **World Book**.

This article examines the eBook platforms of five large commercial academic eBook publishers, **Elsevier, SAGE**, **Springer**, **Taylor & Francis**, and **Wiley**, with the goal of identifying general trends across commercial publisher eBook platforms. (Note that this examination does not include university presses, which face their own unique challenges and are dealt with in a separate article in this issue of *Against the Grain*.)

Platform Content

An important consideration for the evaluation of a publisher's platform is the eBook content itself, as well as the publisher's treatment of that content. Issues to consider include the number of eBook titles available, subject areas covered, whether or not monographs and reference titles can be cross-searched or are available on different platforms, and if the publication of the electronic version is delayed or embargoed from the time of the publication of the print version.

The subject areas covered and the number of titles available in each subject area will clearly vary from publisher to publisher. When considering a broad subject collection of eBooks, it is helpful to look at the number of titles included in the collection, the average cost per title, and whether the collection includes monographs, reference works or both.

It is important to note that commercial publishers vary in their treatment of monographs and reference books. Some publishers, **SAGE**, **Springer**, and **Wiley**, for example, make monographic works, reference materials, and journal articles available on a single platform. **Wiley** also makes many of its major reference works available on the **Blackwell Reference Online** platform. Other publishers provide access to eBooks (both reference and monographs) on one platform and journal content on another separate platform. **SAGE**, for example, provides access to 388 reference titles and almost 2,400 monographic titles through the **SAGE Knowledge** platform, where all eBook content is cross-searchable. However, **SAGE's** journal content is on the separate **SAGE Journals** platform. **Taylor & Francis** makes its reference materials, monographs, and journals on three entirely unique platforms, which are not cross searchable.

Libraries are familiar with the fact that journal publishers often embargo content in aggregated journal databases. The same can be true of eBook content. Commercial publishers often delay the release of an eBook until after the print version has already been available for some period of time. The release date of the eBook can vary from anywhere from a few weeks to a full year after the publication of the print. Publishers fear that, if the eBook is released the same time as the print, the two formats will compete for sales. By delaying the release of the eBook, libraries could be in a position to purchase a title twice, first the print version to provide immediate access and later the eBook to provide the benefits of electronic access. The less time between the publication of the print and electronic versions, the better it is for libraries.

Platform Functionality

The good news for libraries is that access and use of eBook content tends to be less restricted in terms of digital rights management on publisher platforms than on aggregated platforms. Institutions are less like to run into restrictions on viewing, downloading, printing, sharing, etc. Where some aggregated platforms restrict the number of users that may view an eBook at one time or limit the number of pages that can be printed out, publisher platforms are typically without such limitations. Any number of users may view or download a book chapter at any given time, and the entirety of the eBook can be printed out, albeit often only one chapter at a time.

That is not to say, however, that titles from commercial publishers are completely DRM free. For example, while the majority of the **Taylor & Francis** eBooks are DRM free, some titles have DRM in place to restrict the number of concurrent users and downloading.

With the growing ubiquity of tablet devices and eBook readers, another important issue to consider in terms of platform functionality is whether or not the title can be downloaded and viewed on a tablet device such as a Kindle or iPad. All five of the publishers surveyed for this article make eBook content available in a PDF format, which can be downloaded and viewed on both Kindles and iPads, as well as many other tablet-type devices. However, it does not appear that alternatives, such as the epub format, are being supported at this time.

Most publishers make eBooks available on a chapter-by-chapter basis. Users can download or print out the entirety of a book, but they have to do it one chapter at a time. **Springer** has recently added a feature allowing users to download the entirety of a book all at once as a single PDF, rather than a single chapter at a time, thus greatly improving the navigability and usability of the downloaded eBook.
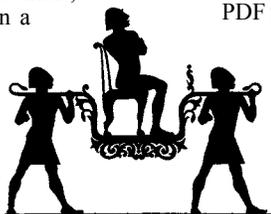
Pricing Models

eBooks are available from commercial publishers through a variety of pricing models. Options typically include outright purchases of eBook titles, both individually and as part of larger packages, or subscriptions to subject collections. Libraries can opt to purchase or subscribe to titles as part of a package, or they could choose to purchase individual titles and build their own collections.

When purchasing eBooks individually, on title-by-title basis, the price of the eBook is sometimes higher than the price of the print. For example, a **SAGE** eBook runs 125% of the cost of the print version of the same book. The justification for the higher price is the increased accessibility of the content and the added functionality that the electronic format offers.

It is important to note that not all publishers offer all titles for individual purchase. The vast majority of **Springer's** eBooks are sold as annual subject packages, with tiered pricing based upon the size and research level of the institution. While initially **Springer's** eBook pricing had a direct relationship to the corresponding print versions, the company has moved away from this model to reflect better the database environment in which the content is hosted.

The decision to purchase or subscribe to a collection of eBooks, as opposed to acquiring the eBooks title-by-title, is not that different than the decision libraries face when investigating the Big Deal journal packages. Questions to ask include: What is the average cost per title in the package? What subject areas does the collection cover? What is the possible duplication with the existing print collection? Are the titles in the collection worth the large

Commercial Publisher eBook ...
from page 30

investment? How many of the titles will patrons actually use?

Demand-Driven Acquisitions (DDA), also sometimes called Patron-Driven Acquisitions (PDA), describes a pricing model that allows libraries to purchase eBook titles at the point of use. Typically, the library loads MARC records into the catalog, but does not actually pay for a title until a patron clicks on the link in the catalog and is passed through to the eBook. While a number of aggregated eBook vendors have been offering DDA for quite some time, the use of this pricing model by commercial publishers is still relatively new.

Elsevier and **Springer** both permit libraries and individual users to purchase individual book chapters on demand using a credit card. **Wiley** permits libraries to access single book chapters using their Article Select Tokens and through Pay-Per-View access. Libraries must purchase a minimum of 100 Article Select Tokens, which then can be used to access journal or eBook content that the library does not already own or subscribe to. **Elsevier's** ArticleChoice program allows libraries to place money on deposit, drawing down from those deposited funds as content is downloaded by authorized users. While ArticleChoice is primarily intended for the purchase of journal articles, book chapters can also be purchased

through this program. In addition, **Elsevier** offers what it calls Evidence-Based Selection (EBS) for monographic eBooks. Through the EBS program, the library pays what **Elsevier** characterizes as a modest up-front fee, and , in exchange, the library gains access to a wide range of eBooks on ScienceDirect. The exact amount of the EBS fee is determined by a percentage of the total value of the content the library chooses, usually in a particular subject area. MARC records for the respective eBooks are provided, and access to those titles is turned on for one year. At the end of the 12-month period, the library reviews the usage of the eBooks and decides which titles to keep in perpetuity, priced up to the value of the initial investment.

The Future of Academic eBooks: Interactive Content?

The demand for enhanced, interactive, and multimedia content is growing in academia, particularly in light of online degree programs and the necessity to support distance education initiatives. One of the most well-known examples of the incorporation of interactive multimedia content into the academic publishing model is **JoVE**, the *Journal of Visualized Experiments*. Launched by **Moshe Pritzker**, a researcher at **Princeton University**, **JoVE** publishes biological, medical, chemical, and physical research in a video format. All the video content is peer-reviewed and indexed in **PubMed**.

From its inception in 2006, **JoVE** has grown to publish sections in eight different subject areas. A ninth subject area, Environment, will be added this fall. According to **Ward Parry**, Director of Library Relations at **JoVE**, since turning to a subscription model only four years ago in 2009, **JoVE's** subscriber base has grown to include 540 institutions in 40 different countries. **Parry** states that this number has grown 50% over the past year. **JoVE's** rapid growth can be viewed as an indicator of the market demand for multimedia content in the academic publishing arena, which includes the eBook market.

At this point in time, the interactive content in eBook platforms is largely confined to tools that assist in the navigation through the book or in the bookmarking of content. The inclusion of supplementary interactive, multimedia content, like **JoVE's** video content, is still relatively low and underutilized. "A recent survey of book publishers conducted by digital publishing solutions provider **Aptara, Inc.** found that while 64% of publishers are creating eBooks, only 21% are producing enhanced eBooks." (Abel 2011)

Possibilities for enhanced content for eBooks could include embedded videos, maps, music downloadable data sets, and more. A few of the publishers surveyed for this article are including this type of interactive content in their reference sources. For example, **Taylor & Francis** includes interactive content

in reference resources like the **Routledge** Performance Archive. The same is true for **SAGE**, who includes 72 videos as part of their multimedia reference collection. However, none of the surveyed publishers appear to have any interactive, enhanced monographs available at this time.

While **SAGE** does not have interactive monographs available, the company is actively producing interactive textbooks. These enhanced textbooks include "integrated links to engaging video and audio, as well as access to complete academic and professional articles, all from the same pages found in the printed text." Users also have access to study tools such as highlighting, bookmarking, note-taking, and more. According a November 2012 post on the **SAGE** Connection blog, the eBook version can be used in conjunction with the traditional textbook (students get access to the eBook for no additional cost with purchase of a new print book), or the interactive eBook can be purchased on its own at a discounted price. Students have access to the eBook for six months after registration. Textbooks that have been converted to this interactive format include titles such as *Leadership, Social Problems*, and *The Communication Age*. (A demo of interactive features in *The Communication Age* can be seen at *http://www.sagepub.com/edwards/demo/*. In addition to the text and images from the textbook, the demo chapter includes links to audio and video files, as well as journal articles.)

The incorporation of interactive content into monographic eBooks will present a unique set of challenges, both for libraries and publishers. For example, who is responsible for the creation and incorporation of the interactive content: the author of the book, the publisher, a third party? In the case of **JoVE**, **JoVE's** in-house production team produces almost all of the videos on the **JoVE** site. The production process includes script writing, filming, editing, animation, and voice over work. The entire process takes approximately seven months, a significant investment of time and manpower.

In terms of interactive content in eBooks, challenges and questions include issues of file format, compatibility, accessibility, and cost. In what file format should the content be? Could libraries select a preferred format? Will additional software be required to make interactive content viewable to and usable by users? How do we ensure compatibility of the interactive content across the wide variety of eBook devices on the market? How should eBooks with interactive content be priced compared to print books or even unenhanced eBooks? What kind of DRM might be required by the publisher as a result of the addition of the interactive content?

It remains to be seen how and at what pace commercial publishers like **SAGE** might move forward with the creating of enhanced monographs. While the issues outlined above are not insurmountable, they may certainly inhibit a commercial publisher's ability to move forward with the production of eBooks with interactive content, especially at the rate at which libraries and patrons might demand them.

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University Press eBook Platforms: A Brief Overview

by **Mark Johnson** (Director, Publisher Relations, HighWire Press, Stanford University) <mjohnson@highwire.stanford.edu>

Introduction

As consumer demand for eBooks has grown, so too has the demand for scholarly books (monographs) in electronic format. Libraries are looking to purchase eBooks to save shelf space and to better serve patrons who prefer to read books on their computers or eBook readers. While most university press book revenue still comes from print books, publishers at major university presses are planning for the future by actively moving into the eBook space. This is a brave new world of scholarly books online, and current eBooks platforms vary significantly. In this article, I will be examining several of the leading university press eBook platforms, including "the big three" — **Johns Hopkins' Project MUSE**, **Oxford's University Press Scholarship Online (UPSO)**, and **JSTOR** — as well as **BiblioVault**, **Cambridge Books Online**, **ebrary**, and the **eDuke Books Scholarly Collection**.

Online eBook platforms are facing challenges very similar to those faced by their journal colleagues five to ten years ago. Most of the journal publishers with whom I work at **Stanford University's HighWire Press** have successfully transitioned their business from a 1990s print model to a predominantly electronic model. Think of the modern journal Website as something akin to the modern car: because all automobile manufactures now use wind-tunnel testing, most cars on the road today have the same aerodynamic profile. Online journal users know what they want (for example, PDFs of articles, hyperlinked references, and article-level usage statistics), and thus journal sites are looking very similar these days. Books, on the other hand, have just begun their online evolution, and their features and functionality have not yet been standardized to allow for a consistent user experience from book to book, site to site, and platform to platform. It will be exciting to watch how these eBook platforms evolve over the next several years.

Project MUSE — *http://muse.jhu.edu*

Johns Hopkins University Press founded **Project MUSE** in 1995 as a sales and hosting consortium for university press journals, particularly focusing on the social sciences and humanities. **MUSE** launched books from the **University Press Content Consortia (UPCC)** in 2012. **Project MUSE** now hosts over 20,000 books on behalf of over 90 publishers participating in the **UPCC**.

Books first entered the picture when **MUSE** partnered with the **University Press eBook Consortium (UPeC)** in 2009 to explore the feasibility of a university press-based eBook initiative. **UPeC** received funding from the **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation** to survey the needs of the library community and, based on the results of that survey, to develop and test a business model. **Project MUSE** was selected in 2011 to implement **UPeC's** plan for a transformative and sustainable product offering digital versions of book-length works from many distinguished scholarly presses. As a result, **UPCC Book Collections** on **Project MUSE** launched in January 2012.[1]