

Against the Grain

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No Limitations on the Use of eBooks: A Bold Move by Springer Nature

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No Limitations on the Use of eBooks: A Bold Move by Springer Nature

by **Wouter van der Velde** (Senior eProduct Manager eBooks, Springer Nature) <wouter.vandervelde@springernature.com>

In 2006, it launched an eBook program with the end users' best interests in mind — a program that stands apart in publishing, even today.

When **Springer**, now part of the **Springer Nature** company, launched its eBook program back in 2006, a lot of research and consultation had gone into the big question: How do we protect intellectual property and at the same time make research content easily accessible for librarians, researchers and students?

Our library advisory board members strongly advised us to not wrap the books in Digital Rights Management (DRM), which was perceived as one of the biggest annoyances by their patrons. The second largest inconvenience with eBook offerings was that not every book would be available as an eBook, leaving still a lot of administrative work and additional cost to the library, students and researchers.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s the music industry invested billions in protecting the most popular music carrier so that Compact Discs could not be copied. However, after each release of new security algorithms, it was a matter of days before the “code was broken,” and music was distributed illegally anyway. **Apple** actually understood the user's problems: Many people don't necessarily want to buy a full album of music, CD-singles were too expensive and the convenience of just downloading the MP3 anywhere is evident. At the time of the launch of iTunes in 2001, one could finally purchase a single song at a reasonable price, it would work, the quality was guaranteed and it saved the consumer time by

not having to download and try five different versions of the same song, where four out of five were recorded in bad quality.

So, taking a cue from **Apple**, **Springer** made a bold decision in publishing: It made all its books available as an eBook and bundled them into subject collections. Basically, not a single book was excluded from the collections, so all textbooks, monographs, and major reference works would have to be included as eBooks in the subject collections, and without any DRM protection or limitation on the usage of the content.

This strategy of “no limitations to the use of eBooks” indeed imposes a risk of piracy, illegal downloading and distribution of illegal copies. But, bearing in mind the music industry's failure, the decision was made to include all book types, and not protect them with DRM and invest a lot of money in such a mechanism that would only irritate users. Also, such protection would be counter-productive and would even encourage piracy — and that would not take the rights of our authors seriously.

Regardless of the existence or lack of DRM, there are always risks of illegally distributed copies of copyrighted content. When this happens, it's not only an embarrassment towards our authors, who are

remunerated for their work by legally sold copies, but also for our (library) customers, who invest in the content to serve their patrons. Therefore, **Springer Nature** has a global anti-piracy team, dedicated to fight piracy actively by scanning the Internet for illegally distributed copies. As soon as piracy is detected, (legal) action is taken ensuring the continued success of our authors and **Springer Nature** eBooks' DRM-free policy.

Our philosophy has always been to think from a user perspective: If a teacher wants to use a textbook in their curriculum, all students in that particular class should be able to access the textbook at the same time. Students should be able to download it to their device or print it out to use it for their study, wherever, whenever. A researcher should be able to print out the exact pages he needs in the laboratory or on her/his tablet while on the road to a conference, and/or easily share it with his colleague. Also, the librarian should be able to count on the fact that the **Springer-eBook** (or other of the imprints belonging to the **Springer Nature** publishing group) is available for their patrons. When we prioritize the needs and experiences of those that are interacting with — and depending upon — our eBook content, the end result outlasts whatever trends might be present in publishing. 🐾



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community about the benefits of inclusive access. “**McGraw-Hill Education** is proud to be working with **OhioLINK** and appreciates their partnership throughout this learning experience,” says **Becker**. She adds that **OhioLINK's Gwen Evans, Amy Pawlowski and Holly Davis** “have been amazing to work with.”

“They've really come at this with an open-minded approach and been truly interested to learn what we've done in the past with other institutions to make this program successful,” she says, “and making sure I'm aware of any challenges and needs they have so I can address them up front.”

The partnership has led **McGraw-Hill Education** to reach out to other library consor-

tiums across the country to open a dialogue and begin to include institutions' librarians into the conversations happening amongst the individual campuses. “Now we know they also have an interest in making course materials more affordable to students,” says **Becker**. “We want to make sure we are not overlooking them but instead starting to collaborate on various ways to meet the students' needs. We would be thrilled for the opportunity to work more closely with the library community.”

McGraw-Hill has inclusive access agreements with over 400 college campuses nationwide, and with its significantly-reduced pricing has saved students more than \$40 million in 2018 over the same products purchased by these institutions in 2017. For example, the retail cost of a new chemistry book is roughly \$195. “And maybe you would wait to buy the book three weeks into the course because you

didn't think it was absolutely imperative to your course grade,” says **Becker**. With inclusive access, all students enrolled in the class have immediate access to the book through an institution's learning management system — at a price of approximately \$45.

“Not only are the students saving money,” says **Becker**, “they are getting access on day one, which helps to improve retention and outcomes.”

According to **NACS** the estimated annual student spend on course materials has fallen from \$701 per student in 2007-2008 to \$484 per student. (2017-2018 edition of *Student Watch: Attitudes and Behaviors toward Course Materials from the National Association of College Stores.*) 🐾