Platform Choice: Policies and Practice

Tina Feick
Harrassowitz, tfeick@harrassowitz.de

Jason Price
Claremont Colleges, jprice@alumni.iu.edu

Susan Macicak
University of Texas at Austin, macicak@austin.utexas.edu

Dennis Brunning
Arizona State University, brunning@asu.edu

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Tina Feick, Director of Sales and Marketing, North America, Harrassowitz
Jason Price, Asssistant Director of Operations and Management, Claremont Colleges Library
Susan Macicak, Collection Development, The University of Texas Libraries Austin
Dennis Brunning, Librarian for the Herberger School for Design and the Arts, Hayden Library, Arizona State University
Anne McKee, Program Officer for Resource Sharing, Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA)
Mary Marshall, Sales Director, DeGruyter (Moderator)

Abstract:
The evolution from a single e-book platform option to numerous platform choices has created a challenge. This dilemma touches all players in the selection and delivery of information including the library patrons, the content selectors, and e-resource managers. In times of stretching limited dollars, effective asset allocation is an increasing concern. The primary speaker will introduce the session and option of platform neutral. The individual librarians will present an aspect of how they implemented their choice. Here are issues identified to be addressed: when to use multiple platforms or not; using cost measures to evaluate a platform; using a discovery system to avoid platform choice. The actual issues to be covered will reflect the experiences of the three participating librarians from their own experience. Attendees will learn how other librarians have approached and managed the challenge. The attendees will have practical examples they can decide to apply to their situation. Open issues are expected to be raised through the Q&A session such as the evolving options for readers and mobile delivery.

Tina Feick, HARRASSOWITZ

Five years ago all of the information supply industry thought e-books would take the library world by storm. It has been a slow process—lots of discussions, reading, experimenting with publisher packages and e-book platforms, and filtering through the issues. Now, it seems that the comfort level has improved and there is serious consideration of incorporating e-books into the selection/acquisitions process. As a bookseller and a subscription agent, HARRASSOWITZ has not only been watching the progress, but has been active in developing e-book services. Package plans have been the norm for some time and well suited in our role of subscription agent. Being also a bookseller, moving e-books into approval plans is becoming a reality with publisher plans such as with De Gruyter. As with e-journals, HARRASSOWITZ maintains a "platform neutral" policy—not favoring one platform over the other. The complexities of working with multiple platforms are a challenging endeavor. Mary Marshall of De Gruyter and I were talking about this situation at a conference and led us to wonder how libraries were selecting platforms—thus this panel.

For our panel we selected four experts in the library field and developed a list of questions. The responses are below.

Jason Price, Claremont Colleges Library

1. **One major concern voiced in the literature is that the same title appears on multiple aggregator platforms. How true is that?**

In my opinion, the ideal would be that every book is available on every platform. That would be the only way to provide libraries real platform choice. Unfortunately, the reality is extremely far from that ideal.

Limited availability comes in two main forms:
  1) The majority of new academic books are not available in electronic format at the time of publication
     a. In a late 2008 study of >100,000 print books purchased by 5 libraries in 2006, only 3 out of 10 were available in electronic format from any major e-book aggregator.
     b. YBP has confirmed that currently only about 30% of print books they profile have e-book

versions available during their publication year.

    c. Of this 30%, about 1/3 do not come out simultaneously with print.

2) Only a small proportion of e-books are available from all four aggregators.
    a. In the same study, more than half of the e-books in the aggregator marketplace were only available from a single aggregator.
    b. Only about 5% were available from all four.

These limitations have almost certainly eased some in the past three years, but bibliographers and acquisitions staff will confirm that it is still far from possible to choose a single aggregator to host all of their e-books. Nevertheless, libraries often do have choices as to which aggregator to use for an individual title, so best practice requires that libraries create a hierarchy of platform preference.

2. So, if a library wants to purchase an e-book, it is essential to know the differences among the aggregator platforms? What are the basic differences in the service offerings?

I would argue that it is very important for libraries to know the difference among aggregator platforms so that they can prioritize them because:

1) Discoverability is still far better within a platform than it is between them
    a. As with print books, library catalogs provide an entry into the e-book "stacks" but browsing & full text searching within a platform is likely to represent a majority of e-book usage.
    b. Since each platform is effectively a different location, the more that e-books are spread across different platforms, the less effective that browsing and full text search becomes
    c. Thus it is a benefit for users to have their library's e-books concentrated on the fewest 'best' platforms.
2) Aggregator platforms still differ greatly in their use restrictions and pricing models, and these differences have a significant impact on the user experience.
    a. Pricing Models
        i. Lease/Subscription Model
        ii. Usage Driven purchasing (AKA patron driven or demand driven)
        iii. Short term loans
        iv. Simultaneous Use Restrictions
    b. Use Restrictions/Digital Rights Management
        i. Printing
        ii. Downloading
        iii. E-reserves
        iv. ILL/Scholarly Sharing

3. What about publisher platforms? Are there advantages/disadvantages to going direct?

This is a favorite topic of mine, one that earned me a nickname: the DRMinator. (After living in the shadow of Gov. Schwarzenegger, this seems especially apropos.)

Most publisher hosted e-books are DRM free, allowing chapter level downloads of entire books. We know this is what our users want, effectively matching e-journal article access. They also lack simultaneous use restrictions, and tend to be priced similarly to the cost of the print book.

I feel strongly that libraries should be pursuing this level of access for any e-book content that they "own" and pay full price for. This has caused me to be extremely reluctant to buy full price (or higher) books on aggregator platforms, especially without usage driven evidence of demand for each particular book.

The major disadvantages to going direct are that most publishers (including some of the big guys like Oxford and Springer) cannot currently provide title by title access, and none of them have sophisticated usage driven systems in place.

I have envisioned a win-win setup where the aggregators usage driven systems drive purchasing of publisher hosted books, but this would take a lot of cooperation and significant demand.

Alternatively (or additionally), e-book aggregators are continually negotiating DRM reductions, and better simultaneous use options, which may reduce the need for this combined approach.

Susan Macicak, University of Texas Austin

4. What about approval plans? How will this affect platform choice and the challenges of integrating e-books into an approval plan? What has your institution considered in this regard?
Designating preferred electronic format in an approval plan, for specific publishers, subjects or non-subject parameters, is a major challenge given the difficulty projecting which platforms will offer which titles, the inability to accurately predict the rate of simultaneous publication, the relationships/licenses with vendors and platforms in place, whether a platform offers multiple simultaneous users vs. single user licenses only or a mix, as well as the importance of format for a particular academic area (for example, Art and Architecture Librarians at UT continue to prefer print over e).

The UT Libraries are still in planning stages for anticipated 2012 rollout of e-preferred approval via YBP's GOBI where the e-book must be released within eight weeks of the publication of the print format to be sent. At the moment, only about 20% of the titles profiled offer an e-book, so a major consideration, if a library prefers electronic, is whether it makes sense to set up as many vendor platform relationships as possible in order to cascade choices to ensure an e-book copy, if available is sent. UT will start with ebrary, perhaps expanded to other platforms and vendors once the processes are matured.

In parallel with the integration into YBP GOBI for preferred electronic format, UT Libraries will also pursue a demand driven access program with ebrary through GOBI. One goal for this program is to expand the scope of e-books offered to include publishers and titles not available through EBL. Another major goal is to incorporate bibliographer participation in the selection of DDA eligible titles through creation of a set of profiles, as well as title by title selection. Given the lackluster buy-in for DDA on the part of some bibliographers at UT, even after four plus years, the ability to view approval

activity along with print holdings and e-availabilty (by uploading data about current holdings from netLibrary, EBL and other vendors) in one interface is expected to simplify and inform selection of DDA records for discovery. We expect the data on what is being read can provide real time feedback to bibliographers about how accurately they anticipate user needs and what to tweak going forward.

Ideally, any platform offered would be a desirable option, giving the broadest range of choice for a given title. In reality, given that our EBL program is running smoothly and predictably, we expect to instead move some "pressure" off EBL carrying the DDA load so that we can build the discovery pool with a variety of other providers in future. By taking some of the burden off EBL, we're likely to have to purge fewer titles (more below), keeping that risk pool robust.

Going forward, major issues affecting platform choice in DDA within and without the approval framework is trigger predictability, inconsistency regarding whether loans are available as opposed to outright purchases only for some titles, and whether it makes most financial sense and is even possible to designate specific groups of titles as purchase outright even when loans are available. An example of when we'd want to do this is illustrated by our discovery that with Duke University Press in our initial pilot with ebrary DDA since July of this year, we didn't actually need to offer three STLs to purchase on 4th use: The Duke material is so popular on campus, that it makes most sense just to buy them all outright as purchases and saving the rental costs.

It may be helpful for some libraries to take advantage of titles being offered by publisher platforms as opposed to aggregator for a variety of reasons, including to avoid DRM as Jason discusses in his ATG article, but in other settings having too many platforms offered could result in a perceived "set of silos"—especially when web-scale discovery is yet to be implemented, such as at UT—compared with the consistency of experience offered by aggregators.

5. What about purging catalog records? What are the considerations?
The need to manage the risk pool, or "potential spend" is the underlying rationale for routine purg-

es of DDA record loads. Throughout four years of managing our EBL program, we've come well within budget while adding weekly updates of newly available titles only because we choose to continue to purge. Removing any title not used beyond the five minute browse period in the previous 12 months at the close of each fiscal year enables us to continue to offer a constantly refreshed body of content via the catalog, link resolver and EBL platform.

In addition to monitoring the spend on an ongoing basis, comparing month over month the amount expended for STLs and purchases, keeping close watch on use trends and patterns allows us to be nimble and prepare for proactive trimming in-between fiscal year-end purges should that be required. Late this summer, we chose to select some "expendable" publisher content as a precaution, for example. Another earlier non-routine purge was of a specific body of journal monographs where we knew we already had access**.**

The title purge is a major issue and cause of great angst for a few bibliographers who argue that they elected to not purchase certain titles in print because of electronic availability at the time, but now it's gone. How will faculty get the books finally reviewed two years after publication? What if a book doesn't find its audience for 12 months or more? Response: longstanding DDA mechanisms including an online purchase request form, verbally at a public service point, through chat, email, written suggestions, directly to subject specialists and by interlibrary loan request. This position on purging often coincides with the misconception that the catalog is the only mechanism for discovery and once a title is removed it is invisible.

While more tinkering with the scope of books loaded regularly might allow for a smaller risk pool we could afford to keep alive longer, I believe that treads down the path of assumption regarding our superior knowledge of what our patrons want to and should be reading. Meanwhile masses of circulation data for our print collections indicate those assumptions haven't been accurate or always well-informed.

Obviously there is a balance to be struck between opening the floodgates and defining a risk pool

driven by usage data, trends on campus, bibliographer expertise and electronic availability. A main consideration for some is that in an era of belt tightening, it may seem wasteful to spend money on titles that don't add to a well-crafted, coherent body of content to support a discipline. Is it ok to just "Give the People What They Want" and change the nature of collection development as a core function of the library? The debate rages on in our institution. Meanwhile patrons continue to be delighted at the expanse of content they have access to (or can ask to have turned on if it is available as an e-book). Given the resources and the mandate to continue building an essential core collection in print, and allowing electronic versions of these be accessed and read, while turning our readers loose on the long tail of whatever else is available, a most-fascinating and actionable real-time picture emerges of what is important to research among our readers.

6. What about de-duping? What is the process to avoid duplicating titles and what is the cost involved?
One of the main ways UT Libraries have considered de-duping between platforms is by publisher. However, given the differences in how some imprints are handled, we've seen some slip through the cracks. A good example is a title: Flawless consulting : a guide to getting your expertise used (2011) already included in the catalog , rented and purchased from EBL with the publisher as "Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2011" but inadvertently loaded through our ebrary pilot because in that case the publisher as listed "San Francisco : Pfeiffer, c2011". Having drawn up the list by publisher for ebrary and used Pfeiffer, I didn't expect it to be a duplicate. Yet on a campus our size both copies (as well as earlier editions in electronic and print) are very heavily used. In fact the ebrary edition is the top book used in the pilot thus far.

Reflecting on this has spurred a discussion about the feasibility of routinely deduping prior to loading records, but it isn't and exact science or even clear whether a field such as OCLC number would be sufficient. As our EBL records for daily purchases are now done daily and ebrary record updates will soon move to a more than once a week frequency, we aren't yet convinced that the cost in staff time and effort to

catch a few dupes is worth it. We're leaning toward considering de-duping on the front end, as part of the pool selection process for each vendor while willing to accept some inadvertent duplication.

Having added netLibrary titles for over a decade on behalf of UT system—with selectors from all campuses choosing and one book per user model, we hadn't bothered deduping with these when we began the EBL demand driven program in 07. More than one access point, or copy for a title especially when the second one added has multiple users, is not seen as a bad thing by any of our staff. With the maturation of vendor neutral records and forensics for occasional cases of discovered dupes, we hope to mature the processes and minimize the waste.

Dennis Brunning, Arizona State University

7. How can discovery tools help users get to the e-book no matter what the platform?
Discovery services, where indexing from publishers and database providers is "pre-indexed" for quick and multiple cross searching, is the most quickly evolving tool in the library toolkit. It improves on its forerunner—federated searching—by going beyond real-time searching of each database. Like Google search, the information map is already drawn; the user simply plugs in search terms and discovers content across many sources.

As quickly as librarians can imagine the beauty of such a system, we can as quickly imagine why it came about. In a word: Google. We've all grown familiar to that simple search box which through engineering and magic seeks out what we want from the world's information registered in web pages.

For commerce and consumer, Google's task is platform neutral. There is one platform—the web and its HTML standard—and since all conform to it, Google simply indexes it. To get information out to the world via Google you simply have to open your pages to its crawler. It routinely does the rest.

Discovery services like Summon are borrowing this principle in idea. The implementation involves several technical, business, and legal challenges. Generally, the more platform neutral your product, that is, the less technical, legal, and business hurdles you

present to the discovery effort, the more "fit" you will have with its capabilities.

From a user's point of view, a discovery service locates content which can be on any platform. Presumably this platform has features that promote readability and research. Unfortunately, there are no standards here and the user is on their own.

8. With PDA programs, what are the concerns for faculty and selectors – especially being more "hands on"?
Amazon is the model for patron driven acquisition. This is how most of us do book shopping; even how most of find books. You would think that Google has a role here—just ask around, it doesn't. What smarter and easier step was it to just put your users within a click or two of book purchase or reading online? Yes there are a few wrinkles—can we afford it, will it skew to our users wish to become selectors. And it doesn't hurt the vendor of least resistance in pursuit of the rush order is Amazon.

Discovery services, done right—and believe me they are increasingly doing it right, maps marc records into its indexing pile, and allows book discovery from a single search box. Right now, discovery services rely on a search first then update by search criteria approach. Most libraries configure the service to allow keyword searching; the first result set than can be updated by selecting criteria like date ranges, book formats etc. This works similar to Amazon. This is okay. To make it a new book ordering tool requires a few learning steps—to set the initial display sort to date—newest first—and the format to book or online as location—that sort of thing.

What discovery services need to serve the PDA user is a feature that Google spent many research hours and dollars on. A way to presort your results for instant categorization among the search results most sought after by Google users. Based upon your searches and click behavior, Google organizes results in bundles for you to review—travel, books, map locations and so forth.

If discovery services could achieve this even partially it would take PDA to new performance which could really test its value in this new world of collection management.

Of course none of this addresses the leverage we get from book content discoverable through our new tools. What DeGruyter as a medium sized scholarly publisher can do is to create and manage the best meta-data these tools use, keep it current and accurate. What an agency like Harrassowitz can do is help its publishers in the successful back-end management of content for its customers. Harrassowitz has always been the go to publisher for small, hard to find and hard to work with world publishers. Rather than being focused on platform neutrality—an idea that is hard to keep in today's commercial web environment—both businesses can work to understand discovery services for its customers and help make it a valuable and cost-effective venture going forward.

Anne McKee, GWLA

9. GWLA has been considering e-books. As you approach multiple platforms, what will be your requirements for licensing, including ILL?
The Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA) began informally in the 1980s among the then members of the Big 8 Athletic Conference. Over the next several years, libraries outside the conference were invited to join the consortium and various name changes evolved through the years. The current and permanent name was formalized in 2001. We currently have 32 members in 17 states in the "greater Midwest."

Like other large consortiums, GWLA has several committees. The Resource Sharing and Document Delivery Committee (formerly ILL) is the longest and oldest standing committee within GWLA and certainly still one of the most active. Our ILL reciprocity agreement precludes any other formulized GWLA program/benefit by several years. The ability to freely share material between our members still remains one of our "must meet" criteria when licensing any type of electronic content. Several years ago, as the negotiator for all licenses and legal signatory, I began inserting "prevailing technology of the day" terminology when referring to ILL/document delivery software in any and all of our licenses for e-content.

Quite simply, GWLA firmly believes in fair use and the ability to loan material regardless of content.

We will not sign any license where ILL is forbidden or restricted. Our general mantra is: "whatever we can do in paper, we should be able to do in electronic format." We understand that the technology is lacking for this endeavor and GWLA is committed in helping to bridge this gap. A task force is exploring some ways that e-book lending could occur. While we are not ready to announce anything "primetime" yet, I can tell you that "we are investigating a novel approach to an existing idea" (task force member, Ryan Litsey, Texas Tech University). When the technology has been solved, our "prevailing technology of the day" statement will cover all the legal bases. Stay tuned folks!

10: What is GWLA's view on e-book packages?
Regardless of what publishers/vendors/e-content providers may believe, consortia are simply NOT all alike. One consortium's wishes may be completely contrary to another consortium's unique needs and perspectives. It can become rather frustrating reminding vendors, publishers and even other consortia of that fact. GWLA libraries decided very early on that consortial purchasing of set e-book packages is not the way to proceed in acquiring e-book content…

Frankly, GWLA learned some lessons from the e-journal packages and librarians as a whole are savvier. Certainly, e-journal packages provide many titles that are needed to support the members' curricula. However, these large packages also include dozens of journal titles that are not needed or wanted. Why be forced to accept titles that were not selected and pay for what is not used? To be fiscally responsible, the GWLA members cannot in good faith expend monies for content that is of little or no use to the faculty and students. Therefore, GWLA members prefer to order e-books title-by-title (as libraries have done for decades with firm orders); but with a discount and no ERM. (Remember the phrase "whatever we can do in paper…"?) GWLA's needs and wishes have been outlined to publishers again and again. While the language may differ, the response is always the same: "We've heard that many times from libraries but we only want to sell large packages in order to offer a discount to libraries." In other words, the publishers learned from e-journal packages as well. If a bundled package worked so well for their e-journals, we can it again for e-books! While we haven't found a

publisher yet willing to meet our requests, GWLA has been able to achieve a discount for title-by-title ordering through our PDA agreements.

11. With a look to the future, what is GWLA's concept of an e-resource platform?
Our members believe libraries (and yes, that includes our member as well) have done great disservices to users by licensing content on multiple, vendor-specific platforms. The challenges these multiple platforms present are very difficult to overcome. Librarians have spent untold amounts of time instructing users in each platform's nuances. Why can't there be an open source platform created to support platform-neutral access for both e-journals and e-books? Libraries need to demonstrate a united front to the publishers and e-content providers. If libraries need a vendor neutral e-resource platform, then we also need a vendor-neutral e-reader as well. (We are reinventing the wheel over and over.) Already thin budgets could be stretched farther if libraries were not required to purchase e-books in various vendor-specific formats. As tech-

nology advances, libraries will find it as difficult providing access to this legacy e-book content as they have found providing access to the microfiche and film of the past.

Sure, GWLA dreams big but we are willing to work with the vendors and publishers to create a vendor-neutral platform. What a win-win to would be for everyone in the library marketplace!

Discussion Afterwards:
Discussion after the panel centered on how to help selectors move into the e-book arena. A suggestion from the audience was to start with one publisher platform and then expand from there.

A concern was expressed about the proliferation of university press platforms and whether they all could survive.

Mary Marshall thanked the attendees and the panelists and asked everyone to enjoy Charleston.