eBooks in the Health Sciences: Trends and Challenges

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A Success Model for eBooks
from page 34

makes is much easier to provide access via discovery services.

We have just started to use DOIs (Digital Object Identifiers) on selected statistical books to enhance usability of our PDF files of those books. Starting in 2005, selected publications will embed DOIs which we are calling “Statlinks” next to statistical tables. These Statlinks will link to live Excel spreadsheet files containing the numbers found in the table. In time, we expect to load these spreadsheets into SourceOECD so they can be found separately from the eBooks. We are also hoping to provide links, via CrossRef, in bibliographical references found in our books. Our eBooks are gradually becoming platforms from which other content can be found.

The division between books, periodicals, and statistical databases is blurring. We are finding that users don't really care what kind of publication information comes from: the important thing is being able to find it. Services like Ingenta are responding by making their systems more friendly to non-journal content. This, in turn, could very well influence how we present content in future versions of SourceOECD.

A number of other publishers have noticed the attractiveness of our model as well. The World Bank launched their e-library in 2003 and the World Tourism Organisation and Oxford University Press launched theirs in 2004, all using the Ingenta platform.

Conclusion
At the end of 1997, OECD's book publishing operation was losing clients at an unsustainable rate, and this decline raised questions about the future of the OECD's book publishing program. By turning to the eBook, OECD has succeeded in creating a business platform from which it can move forward with confidence. The solution has proved to be the creation of an e-library sold on an annual subscription using the e-journals model. This model has succeeded in arresting the decline in the number of clients taking OECD standing order plans, has won back lost clients, and is actually bringing in new clients.

With online services, OECD now has the flexibility and potential to reach out and sell its book program to new market segments such as small and medium-sized institutions and institutions in developing countries. We now have the ability to publish a wider range of book types to an increasing readership.

Finally, the wonders of electronic distribution mean we now know much more about what is being read and what is not being read, and are better able to make publishing decisions for the future.

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T his article describes a current health sciences electronic book scene that may resemble experiences in other types of libraries. The phrase “electronic book” is used in a general sense to describe book content available in a computer readable format. It should be noted that this survey “from the trenches” has an admitted academic library emphasis.

Several years' experience has shown that things may not have changed much. Already in a 2002 survey of predominantly academic health sciences libraries, 99% of survey respondents indicated that their libraries provided access to electronic books.1 In 2004, more types of libraries, those at hospitals and smaller health institutions, probably offer some eBook access. Libraries usually begin their venture by looking for reliable “classic” textbooks online, defined by local needs and core lists. More consortia licenses of electronic gateways include health sciences books, benefiting more users in diverse types of libraries. Local decisions determine whether to seek, catalog, and link reputable online free health sciences books, from government and digital library project sources. The number of publishers and providers licensing eBook content expanded since 2002, but the "players" of 2002 are also still on the scene. (The Appendix provides a list of some electronic health sciences book collections and providers.)

Once a list of desired titles is developed, it must be determined if they are available online (preferably via a Web gateway), and through which provider(s). Checklists of criteria guide selection. Decisions are based on price, licensing parameters and restrictions, permitted user base, concurrent use, title-by-title vs. suite availability. Sometimes, desirable titles in a suite cannot be unbound from less desirable titles. Sometimes they can, but a persistent librarian has to know to request (or demand) it! The search interface is examined for usability, linking, and printing. Publisher platforms, just as with electronic journals, offer more "bells and whistles," beyond providing basic print book content.

WHAT IS AVAILABLE? WHAT ARE PRIORITIES?

Curriculum support: Cutting edge research is announced in health sciences journal literature, but broad overview reviews needed by health sciences students of various levels are found in textbook literature. Licensing and accreditation bodies for health professional education and residency programs have information literacy requirements that may include reading lists of books or book chapters. Instructors devise required and recommended book lists for students. For user convenience, as well as the capability of linking books and chapters in online reserve / reading list sites and course management systems, libraries usually seek online availability of reading list books.

Clinical and reference: Some electronic titles may be considered by librarians to be part of a desirable "quick reference" collection and would include health sciences dictionaries, laboratory value, and drug information resources. For healthcare practitioners, synopsis handbooks or "lab coat pocket book" series may be licensed. Libraries may license or contribute funds towards collaborative licensing of suites for general references, such as encyclopedias, English and foreign language dictionaries.

Basic sciences: Health sciences libraries are called upon to provide electronic access to basic sciences books and content, including laboratory protocols and methodology. Basic sciences textbooks are curricular reading in graduate schools and fundamental courses of health sciences programs. Books are useful to laboratory researchers and assistants. Some laboratory protocol series that "straddled the fence" in their print formats, as books, classed journal series, or loose leaf services, now resemble electronic journals or online databases. Much still depends on how indexing services, publishers, providers, and individual libraries treat them.

Examination review: Some educators are skeptical about the efficacy of commercial health professional board and certification examination review resources.1 Electronically available review resources present their own challenges. Examination questions may be "hidden" in appendices to online textbooks. Some review series are available in health sciences or even non-health sciences electronic book provider gateways. Some print series have evolved into examination review databases. Some databases have been designed "from scratch." This genre seems to be moving away from the "choppy" book-like format, as online modules are designed and licensed to target specific examination audiences.

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1 <http://www.against-the-grain.com>
Beyond textbooks: Health sciences libraries may not actively license electronic books from general and niche subject providers, since available titles may be peripheral, secondary, or not “core.” It can be beneficial to take advantage of, or contribute towards, licensing these collections. General gateways, such as netLibrary and ebrary, provide online access to consumer health, alternative medicine, health policy, and other Specialty collection licenses, such as Eighteenth Century Collection Online (ECCO) and Early English Books Online (EEBO), include access to classic history of the health sciences titles, thereby providing wide access, in online form, to content of valuable, restricted access, or not widely available print titles.

**CURRENCY AND ARCHIVING**

Health science fields can easily be added to subject areas referred to by John Cox, who wrote about decisions of Irish University librarians: “There was...a definite feeling that eBooks could support learning activities in certain subjects (e.g., business, law, computer science) where information is structured in relatively discrete blocks and where a high premium is placed on currency...” Currency is not uniformly provided in the health sciences electronic book world. Some online textbooks are updated as “editions”, similar to their print counterparts. Sometimes new print editions are released before or after the online version. Titles may be continuously updated, becoming database-like. There can be differences in content selecting when accessed among various providers. The venerable Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine, for example, is called Harrison's Online, with daily updates and e-only content on the publisher provider site, while third party providers may only be provided with less frequently updated content of the basic text.

**Ramune Kubilius**

BORN & LIVED: Born in Montreal, Canada. From age 8 1/2, lived, raised, educated, and worked in greater Chickagoland area.

FAMILY: My parents were born and raised in Lithuania. In post-WWII years, my father lived in Germany and England, before emigrating to Canada; my mother lived in Germany and emigrated to Canada. Canada is where they met and where two of my three siblings and I were born. We moved to the United States mostly because of job opportunities for my father, an electrical engineer.

EDUCATION: B.S. in Medical Records Administration; MALIS in Library Science.

FIRST JOB: (As a minor): In 7th and 8th grades: “Babysat” 1st and 2nd grade boys for two summers while their mother worked—mostly involved baking and keeping them out of trouble... (After bachelor’s degree): Medical records technician, Little Company of Mary Hospital, Evergreen Park, IL.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Since earning my bachelor’s degree, I have worked in two hospitals and three medical schools. Four of the five jobs were in libraries. I belong to and participate in various activities of various library organizations: Health Sciences Librarians of Illinois (HSLI), Midwest Chapter/Medical Library Association, Medical Library Association, Special Libraries Association. In recent years, I have also gotten “hooked” on the Charleston Conferences, organizing the health sciences Lively Lunches and occasionally suggesting speakers...

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: I can’t help myself...Aside from a bit of traveling, Lithuanian folk dancing and occasional aerobics classes, a number of non-family related activities revolve around information gathering or disseminating activities in the voluntary organizations to which I belong...

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Librarians (call us what you will) have a role in the library and information world of the future, but it may be up to each of us to carve out niches that suits our skills, personalities, and inclinations. In a democratic society it’s hard to standardize or uniformly prognosticate what all of us could, should and might be doing...
Retrospective historical research tracks the progress of biomedicine (not only for medical malpractice reasons), and may require access to several editions of books. One 2004 electronic book survey respondent indicated, "There are concerns about older editions, since, unlike electronic journals, older electronic book editions are not archived." Archiving, if done, must be arranged and planned by the licensee.

**ELECTRONIC HYBRIDS AND SUPPLEMENTS**

The health sciences book collection development world is full of electronic book hybrids and flavors. Listings of health sciences books on book vendor or publisher Websites often provide choices beyond hardcover v.s. soft cover versions. Print books may come with accompanying CD-ROM supplements. Books may be ordered with optional CD-ROMs (regular and mini-size), or be available entirely on CD-ROM or DVD, or for the PDA. Online sites supplementing print content may require a pass code or online subscription. Special installation or password control is not easy to manage in a multi-user library environment. One commentary that often engenders joking agreement among health sciences librarians is: "We wouldn’t mind if the accompanying CD-ROMs just grew legs and walked."

Some publishers have reinvented popular print titles. Anatomy atlases can now be mounted for intranet use as CAI (computer assisted instructional) programs. Atlas images may be available on presentation software CD-ROMs for instructors. Librarian postings on discussion lists describe faculty requests to place CD-ROM, DVD, and other content on servers, accessible through course management systems. Some libraries have been asked by instructors to digitize and provide controlled online access to content from print textbooks. Publisher and copyright guidelines may not be clear or uniform, so librarians have found themselves seeking publisher permission...

**PERSONAL DIGITAL ASSISTANT (PDA) CONTENT**

In describing health sciences content for PDAs, Carol Tenopir wrote: "PDAs are particularly suited to fact checking in structured information sources, such as drug or disease handbooks." PDAs are popular among health care professionals and incorporated in some educational programs. As Tenopir noted: "Doctors are early adopters of PDAs, with an estimated 35-50 percent of physicians (and 80 percent of U.S. medical students) currently using them."

In late 2001, Sherry Thompson wrote that "the health sciences marketplace offers opportunities to distribute not only online eBook content and PDA content, but a variety of networked digital resources as well." In 2004, Tenopir wrote: "Information providers that serve the medical market are aggressively developing special search options for PDAs." Book publishers and vendors often list PDA books on their Websites, but usually individuals are the purchasers. Commercial and health professional Websites have sprouted up, providing health sciences PDA users with links to free and fee-based book content.

It’s now common for public libraries to license large collections of electronic books available for loan and also content that can be read on PDAs. Health sciences libraries’ guiding principles still mostly seem to be: Wait and see, survey, or seek a grant to explore....

Health sciences libraries have: collaborated with other departments on loading licensed content on PDAs (e.g., drug reference content); lent devices; provided sync or cradle stations; sponsored, taught or co-taught PDA use sessions. Many libraries create online guides and “shopping lists” of free and fee-based health sciences PDA book-like content. PDA downloading capabilities may be part of Web-based electronic book products already licensed by libraries. Patricia W. Martin, University of Michigan, described "Publishing for the PDA—A Medical Campus Collaboration." The goal of the team’s project was to publish locally-produced pocket manuals in a PDA format, for in-house use at the point of care" because librarians at the Medical Library “wanted to explore the role of the library as a publisher of local reference materials in a PDA format."
ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES REMAIN

Electronic book choices resemble collection development decisions—they are based on institutions' budgets, guidelines, selectors' experience, staff perceptions and instinct, user surveys, and usability studies. "Riding herd" on health sciences electronic books is similar to electronic journals management, with unique challenges. Search interfaces are revamped. Books are changed with new interfaces or editions. Titles temporarily "disappear" or are replaced with other titles, due to behind-the-scene business decisions not always announced to licensees. One colleague described collection development duties that now include examining usage and prices, then "swapping titles out and in," within a gateway, or switching providers. Many electronic journal and database providers have user advisory boards. Hopefully, electronic book providers take advantage of user and librarian input before they make major decisions or changes!

In the 2004 follow-up to a 2002 electronic book survey, academic health sciences librarians responded to the question: "What short phrases would you use to describe your library's satisfaction with electronic book availability, cost, and/or user satisfaction?" Responses included: Different users have different approaches to literature. There is still a mix of preference for the electronic versus the print formats. All formats get used. Availability is so spotty it's downright eccentric. Costs are way out of proportion. Costs are worthwhile. High user satisfaction—convenient, ready reference resources, meet teaching and clinical practice needs. Frustration with some of the choices for packages and lack of flexibility. Users should not have to learn each package's search interfaces. Would like more eBooks and more eBooks licensed for PDA use.

One more descriptive response was: "Users are often unaware that electronic books are available. We still need to do a better job of promoting their use. Unlike e-journals, these are not on the users' "radar." Unless they are used for course assignments, users (both faculty and students) are not aware of their existence... Costs are always a factor and we may have to scale back our offerings. As subscription/standing order types of resources, they become part of the ongoing expenses within our budgets. We track electronic serials in one budget code and other electronic resources as electronic continuations—these include eBooks, databases, mixed format, etc.

Users often have MEDLINE expectations, of "one stop searching," with convenient links to free and licensed full-text content. One medical student asked: "Can we search across all of the eBooks, like we do searches in Google?" At this time, Google Scholar is still under development. Challenges remain in areas such as online title availability, stability, costs, archives, and standards... To answer the questions posed by the student and the 2002 poster, "Health Sciences E-Books: Are We There Yet?" it can be maintained that in 2004, we're still at the beginning of the journey... During our anticipated travels, we need to make "rest stops"—to develop a new working definition for "book" and to agree on our desired destination..."