

The challenge of ebooks in academic institutions. (JISC) project

Curation/management of ebooks: Case study

University of Hertfordshire.

From the University: Sarah Halliday, Jackie Harrison, and Nick Luft

Interviewer: Ken Chad

Date 12th October 2012

CONTENTS

Background to ebooks in the University of Hertfordshire	2
Why ebooks-what problems do they solve?	2
Scope of ebooks	3
Scale	3
Student demand-led acquisition (PDA)	3
Other ebook acquisition arrangements	4
How ebooks are discovered and accessed	4
Issues and lessons learnt	5
Workflows	5
Changing business models.....	5
Students can be trusted.....	5
Summary.....	5
Thoughts for the future	6

Background to ebooks in the University of Hertfordshire

Library collections and services at the University of Hertfordshire are fully integrated within its 24/7 Learning Resources Centres (LRCs) and wider portfolio of online services. The University introduced a policy of preference in the late 1990s for the digital library. This rapidly led to almost 100% e-only serials collections with exponential growth in the levels and patterns of usage of the online sources without any reduction in footfall on campus in the University's LRCs. The benefits of this change for students and staff raised the bar on student expectations of the anywhere anytime accessibility and availability offered by the digital library for all information materials including books.

Following the successful adoption of ejournals, the University's vision for the digital library providing a better service for students was frustrated by the slow and apparently separate approach of publishers to ebook development. So an early opportunity in to pioneer ebooks and particularly the selection of ebooks based on student demand through 'Patron Driven Acquisitions' was readily grasped by a visionary librarian through a successful pilot using the EBL service which itself was pioneering this new approach. .

Why ebooks-what problems do they solve?

Students and staff study and work in an internet age with expectations of continuous connectivity and immediate online access to information. This has conditioned student expectations of book availability. Whilst the days of visiting the library to use or borrow a printed book have not disappeared, at the University of Hertfordshire the use of printed books continues to decline significantly year on year. Given the anywhere, anytime immediacy of availability of the ebook combined with multi-user simultaneous access and improved search facilities, this is unsurprising. The opportunity to use the sources you need when you need them as part of your studies or work is surely the goal libraries have always tried to deliver on. It is certainly one the University of Hertfordshire aspires to for an excellent quality of student experience.

Every effort is made to embed full text e-resources within Studynet, the Universities Virtual Learning Environment and intranet, as well as the wider digital environment and online scholarly and social communities and networks. Wherever possible the catalogue, discovery tools and online reading lists are being developed to link directly to the actual object and its content online, or offer a simple alternative fulfilment option.

Whilst the University's LRCs have been open 24/7 since 1997, patterns of study on some courses mean that students are not necessarily on campus everyday or even every week. Students on education and health-related courses for example have frequent embedded placements in hospitals and schools within their courses.

Even though using ebooks may represent a difficult transition for some students to adopting new ways of working, the University has noted that students are increasingly recognising advantages; for example students like the 'find' capability. A recent report from an academic department offered the following positive feedback:

"a fantastic range of ebooks"

"can be linked [to] online"

"lecturers can mix and match and not just stick to one book"

"students can download ebooks for up to 7 days at a time and therefore view the ebook offline"

Scope of ebooks

The success of the digital library ebook provision will depend on ensuring relevant collections of core materials that may currently typically also exist as printed books. The primary aim is to address the need to provide better and immediate access to high demand books.

Scale

Ebooks currently represent about 40% of the total book titles in the University's book collections. Hertfordshire have approx. 500,000 print book titles, and 340,000 ebook titles. The current acquisitions policy continues a policy of preference for the ebook where available.

Allocating resources for ebooks

The information materials budget is held centrally by the Chief Information Officer and planned each year by a team of Information Managers following consultations with the Academic Schools they each support to define costed book investment plans for the year that take account of the collection development requirements to support the current work of the University. The budget profile for the year includes provision for the student demand led purchase of ebooks in addition to book selection by information managers and academic staff.

The focus is on the ability to meet demand for course-related materials for example materials that are on student reading lists. Information Managers also work with academic staff to identify ebooks for inclusion on reading lists with links into course materials for modules on StudyNet for ready access by students.

Student demand-led acquisition (PDA)

From initial inclusion of ebooks in University collections in 2005, the adoption of the student demand led ebook approach in 2007 prompted significant and continuing growth in ebook provision. As well as the EBL platform, the University has also used the DawsonEra service. The University has taken a relatively open approach to what is made available for students in this way. For example most of total ebook offering from EBL and Dawson is presented to users. Minimal profiling (e.g. by publication date) is applied, but not by subject. Evidence from analysis of the acquisitions made through this service shows that the ebooks selected through the demand-led service have a very close alignment to University courses. The analysis of ebook usage also shows that at the top end some titles are used extensively and far in excess of any levels of usage previously seen for individual print book titles. More generally, ebook usage is increasing year on year and print book usage declining.

For the student demand led service, MARC records are loaded into the (Voyager) catalogue for the PDA titles. The Dawson and EBL platforms also 'know' what titles are excluded from scope which means a student will not see 'excluded' titles even if they search the ebook platforms directly (i.e. not using the library catalogue as an intermediary). The Athens authentication informs the platform that the user is an authorised University of Hertfordshire user and therefore only reveals titles in scope.

When the University acquires an ebook from Dawson or EBL it is typically licensed ('credits' are

allocated) for up to 325 or 400 uses (=access online or download) per year depending on service. This is re-set at the beginning of each year. However some publishers have recently started to reduce this number down to 100 credits. For high demand titles and where there are large student cohorts, these credits may be used up very quickly, so the University has put regular monitoring arrangements in place to alert to the need for rapid procurement of additional 'copies' to ensure continuity of access.

A recent development by some publishers to limit the number of concurrent users for some e-textbooks flies in the face of the advantages of ebooks for students by posing barriers to anytime on demand access and an unworkable licensing model. The University is looking at this with publishers and aggregators to ensure student experience is not compromised by this incongruous model.

Other ebook acquisition arrangements

In addition to the PDA approach, collection development is informed by Information Managers working with Academic Schools to ensure relevant collections to support the current work of the University. This will include the selection and purchase of ebooks for University collections in addition to those acquired through the PDA service.

The University also subscribes to ebook collections. In most cases these comprise titles that are not available individually through the EBL and Dawson platforms. The acquisition decisions for these collections are based on a robust business case for each including criteria relating to the relevance of materials to current courses and value for money considerations.

Therefore these collections will tend to have a strong subject focus. Collections currently licensed include:

- Safari technical books online (computer and business studies---about 4K -5k titles)
- BizEd from Cengage (core business and management books –small collection of about 50)
- Oxford handbooks online (subset covering business and management)
- EEBO

Marc records for collections are loaded into the library catalogue where the records are provided at no extra cost as part of the package. Where collections charge extra for MARC records, these Marc records may not be taken and loaded into the catalogue, but access provided through subject 'toolkits' on StudyNet with just a collection level record on Voyager as an asset record. .

How ebooks are discovered and accessed

The main discovery route to information for students is through StudyNet. For the discovery of specific books (whether ebooks or print) StudyNet links through to the Voyager library catalogue search screen for students to search by subject, author or title. The catalogue record provides a direct link to the full text ebook. In addition Information Managers and Academic Staff add links to ebooks from the relevant course and module sites in StudyNet. The University uses StudyNet as the main discovery route to information rather than employing a separate library discovery service such as Primo or Summon. Investigations have confirmed that for many subject disciplines, Google Scholar and Google Books provide good search results for students carrying out a subject based information search. Google Scholar is linked to licensed resources via the Serials Solutions link

resolver and Google Books via the OCLC World Cat books service

The University also does not employ a separate library 'Reading List' module such as Talis Aspire. Reading lists are created and embedded with courses and modules on StudyNet and increasingly with links to the actual online material. Studynet provides 'single sign on' to electronic resources by embedding Athens with the student login to their personal portal on StudyNet. Athens authentication is independent of browser or device, and access by mobile devices is dependent on the ebook or ejournal platform.

Issues and lessons learnt

Workflows

Print processing is very streamlined-much of the activity has been outsourced. For example Hertfordshire use the Dawsons Fastraq service, which was developed jointly in the early 1990s by Dawsons and Hertfordshire. It has been challenging to establish new streamlined workflows for PDA. The current generation of library management systems are not geared to PDA. The concept of delegating acquisitions to users i.e. the library doesn't know what is being purchased till it is bought (from the ebook platform provider) is not a workflow amenable to LMS workflow. As PDA is so fundamental now any replacement for the LMS would be required to have capabilities for the management of PDA.

The workflow for weeding the printed book collections has changed with the advent of more and more ebooks. As new additions of print books arrived and were shelved the staff would automatically 'bump' old editions off the shelf. Ebooks are not shelved so as a new e-edition is added a workflow has had to be put in place to check for a remove old print editions.

Changing business models

There is a variety of ebook models and these are still evolving. Each ebook platform provider has a different offering in terms of how it licences the content and the features that are available to users. This means the library needs to remain flexible and open minded to changes, including cataloguing, discovery and delivery arrangements and using third party services where appropriate to ensure added value from internal small scale and valuable staff expertise. Hertfordshire has used external classification and cataloguing records services where possible for over 15 years to focus the activities of its small internal team on adding value to the discovery and delivery of information sources as quickly and easily as possible for the user.

Students can be trusted

Experience has now repeatedly shown us that our users make sensible choices that meet their specific learning needs, and don't make frivolous acquisitions. This has justified the decision not to spend staff resource on excessive pre-profiling on what is made available via PDA.

Summary

At the moment some of the key curation challenges are:

- Managing the complexity, variety and changing nature of license agreements
- The ebook platforms themselves are still evolving rapidly so it hard to keep track/pace
- The current inability to provide the flexibility and extent of access we would like to etextbooks.

- challenge of mobile devices-providing access to content that works well on a mobile device
- the barriers to providing students with 'personal digital libraries' for their course

Thoughts for the future

There are many related changes going on around elearning, textbooks, reading lists and mobile devices. There is a move to formats that are more flexible than PDF. E-textbooks are encompassing some elearning attributes. Some content providers are increasingly looking to market directly to academics, and are making some textbooks unavailable through licensing models. In these newly merging models materials can be downloaded (e.g. to iPad) for the duration of the course, and licensing is based on individual logins set up by the publisher rather than through a recognised route such as Athens or Shibboleth. Within this rapidly changing ebook environment universities and the JISC together need to drive forward practical approaches to ebook provision for students with publishers and aggregators to ensure consistency and ease of access, ready availability of information anytime anywhere, and value for money. Increasingly the vision is to provide a personal 'library' for students related directly to their courses and tailored to their individual requirements.