

## **From the library, any e-time**

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***Abstract:***

*One possible model for libraries that are investigating the introduction of eBooks, is the digital distribution of eBooks through library and library users computers, via Internet connection. This paper explores the various models that can be adopted to implement the on-line distribution of eBooks. Issues discussed include content availability, content suitability and benefits to library users of on-line eBooks. Models considered include the established netLibrary and the emerging ebrary. A brief comment on the likely time frame to introduce on-line eBooks models is also included.*

## Background

For sometime libraries have been providing information and content on-line, e.g., journals and databases. Only recently have they been able to include longer texts such as, eBooks, into their collections. The enthusiasm for eBooks is great, with seminars and discussion lists arguing the pros and cons. In 2000, Forrester forecasted slow growth for eBooks however claimed that eBooks would offer more consumers more choice in presentation and delivery. This paper argues that online eBooks should be included in library collections because of those very reasons. eBooks enable libraries to provide 24 X 7 access to information with enhanced content features.

As the title of this paper states, eBooks can be delivered via the internet to library users anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week - even when library doors are closed and locked. Remote library users can access the library's web catalogue, select a title, and read that title on their own PCs. Web access to eBooks can provide library users with a title in around six clicks.

Just as importantly, these titles are more than electronic photocopies of printed works; they offer additional features to access information. The ability to search a complete title by keywords, is just one of the many benefits.

This is possible because of what eBooks are, as electronic/digital files of a written work that can be read using either a hardware or software based eBook device (Belemy. 2001) they can be transferred and viewed electronically.

An eBook collection is one way of taking a small library and making it bigger. There are no issues of shelving/housing. Thus, a library that feels its history collection needs developing but is reluctant to expand the collection physically may consider history eBooks. The collection gains depth with no space issues. Another library, which has a demand for current business books but as this have a tendency to go missing, may consider business eBooks, after all they will never go missing. Yet, another library may not wish to fill its shelves with computer books, which date quickly, and may choose to provide computer books in eBook format. The added benefit of potential shorter loan periods may also lead to higher circulation and greater user satisfaction. Ultimately, the library users will benefit from the collection of greater depth.

Admittedly, selecting and providing eBooks is frustrating for librarians, who are used being able to buy and handle a physical item. eBooks also do not fit into traditional acquisitions, processing or lending systems. eBooks as a product do not physically exist at all, so they must be selected electronically, added electronically and lent electronically.

Libraries are still at the front-line of exposing readers to eBooks. Libraries will need to educate users on the benefits of eBooks. The benefits to libraries, such as no late returns or damage costs are a bonus.

## How will patrons benefit from on-line delivery?

This paper is not evaluating or discussing eBooks on hand-held reading devices. They present their own unique advantages and disadvantages. Hand-held devices do have the benefit of lightweight and portability, qualities also found in printed books. eBooks are becoming available on-line before they are available on dedicated devices or in print.

Yarra Plenty Regional Library purchased a hand-held reading device, a Softbook ([www.ebooksgemstar.com](http://www.ebooksgemstar.com)). It was purchased primarily as an educational tool for the staff. It is also used for demonstrations to the public. It has been loaded mainly with fiction titles and has proved to be popular. From January 2002, it will be used with the Home Services borrowers who desire a greater number of titles in large print. The Softbook like other hand-held devices allows for both backlighting of text and enlarging of the print. The Yarra Plenty web site also has links to many free eBook sites. Investigations are underway to purchase a netLibrary collection during 2002.

### 24 X 7

On-line eBooks offer a library the option of providing quality, referenced information in a book format 24 hours a day, 7 days the week. The traditional role of information delivery available all the time. Providing information 24x7 is not a new concept for libraries, after all we have been doing so for some time. The majority of libraries provide remote access to various electronic databases. eBooks are an extension of this service, offering longer content. In some models, it is possible for the borrowers to download the eBook and read it off-line for a specified length of time. This ability to provide electronic resources does not come without many challenges and changes for libraries. On-line eBooks will bring problems primarily those linked to computer access. There are increased costs associated with download speed and time.

By providing eBooks that can be read on-line, library users do not have to spend money on buying yet another device. This of course assumes many library users do have a PC or laptop connected to the Internet. This would not seem unreasonable, as computer usage increases daily. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2000, 53% of households in Australia had access to a computer at home and 33% of households had home Internet access.

### Enhanced content

Ebooks are a new experience of a book. The content has additional features, movement and depth. For example, Les Standifords, *Opening Day* (2000) is an eBook available from various on-line bookstores including, Barnes and Noble. It is a novella based on the story of American baseball player, Satchel Paige. This book has enhancements beyond just 'searchability', enhancements such as a brief history of the Negro League baseball, an interactive trivia game, a video and sound element. It also has links to a commercial site, to enable the purchase of baseball memorabilia. It has kept traditional book conventions, the two-page spread and original artwork. The eBook version is vibrant, and has a sense of fun. It delivers the reader a superior reading experience.

Even the most basic eBooks provide search ability. That is, the library user can search the whole book by keyword quickly and unlike the traditional index page, keywords can be put together to locate that perfect quote. If content can be enhanced, then certain content will be better suited to eBook delivery. The type of content choice is critical in selecting on-line eBook titles. Librarians should consider, what would most benefit library users in this format.

## **Choosing the right eBook**

Reading on-line can be argued is not popular. However, the on-line eBooks which libraries need to be selecting are generally not those titles read for relaxation or read cover-to-cover. Those titles may be better suited to the specific reading devices. Mark Gross of DCL (2001) believes that “the real eBook revolution is not in the bestseller market, but in technical reference manuals and educational materials.” That, eBooks are best suited to reference and non-fiction titles such as study guides to literature, titles which are not always read cover-to-cover.

When considering what books to purchase electronically, some of the following must be given priority. Non-fiction is the most obvious use, particularly, anthologies of poetry and plays. The books greatly benefit from the ability to combine words to locating specific parts in the text. Titles, such as reference texts and dictionaries, which are not read cover-to-cover, but ‘dipped into and out again’ to answer specific questions are also highly suitable. Even cookbooks and manuals, suit the ‘searchability’ function of eBooks. Imagine going to the kitchen, finding it rather bare, and being able to key the few ingredients left in the pantry and fridge into the eBook cookbook and have a selection of recipes located! Further, any material, which requires regular updates, would also be a potential eBook. As data in an electronic form is readily changed and modified, new eBook editions can be both quickly and cheaply produced.

## **Online Models**

Reading books on-line can be done through web browsers or through the various ‘reader’ software packages. Reader software is freely available from various companies, including Microsoft and Adobe, however, they are proprietary, and thus do not allow for transfer of content. Yet, not many of these can be incorporated into a library collection. eBooks in these formats appears to be treated more like computer software, one purchase, and one use model.

However, there are several other models of on-line eBooks for libraries. NetLibrary is the best known as it provides one of the most easy and practical models. NetLibrary provides libraries with a complete package, similar to purchasing of print books; that is, the title is selected, the MARC record added to the catalogue with the appropriate URL link and netLibrary does the rest. NetLibrary is not alone however, and over time new models are developing and will emerge to meet demand.

Many other models do not have the netLibrary catalogue integration, and they are relying on libraries adding their eBooks as an additional database. Libraries are already using multiple databases and resources; unfortunately the public (and even some library staff) do not use or access all of these wonderful resources well. These models are usually subscription based and call for a constant re-investment by the library.

## **NetLibrary [www.netlibrary.com](http://www.netlibrary.com)**

NetLibrary is an American company, based in Boulder, Colorado. It is one of the first eBook aggregators. In November 2001 OCLC Online Computer Library Center announced that it had made an offer to “purchase substantially all the assets of netLibrary” after netLibrary found it was experiencing financial difficulties. It will be interesting to see if the OCLC model netLibrary remains the same.

Prior to November, libraries purchased the titles and the content remained on the netLibrary server, with access for library users through the library web page. Access was limited to the one copy - one use model, although there is interest in having a simultaneous use as an option. Libraries who purchased a netLibrary title would always own that title. However, the access fee may have to be paid to re-access the title, if perpetual access was not initially chosen.

Selection of the eBooks was done electronically through the netLibrary web site, under ‘Title Select’. Titles could be selected individually, or by subject collections. Library’s that have been using netLibrary for some months recommend strongly that the MARC records be also integrated into the catalogue. Library users will have the greatest chance of locating the eBook titles this way. NetLibrary also provides quality reports, essential with electronic resources.

NetLibrary books can be read online, the recommended method, or borrowed by library users. Consortiums often use NetLibrary, although that does restrict the title choice, as some publishers will not sell eBooks to consortiums. The flexible nature of netLibrary consortiums means that libraries can vary the amount they contribute yet share in the total collection of the group.

This was the most common form of purchase of netLibrary in the USA libraries. Libraries tended to find that the titles had limited use for the first few months. The titles which were most popular were the study guides to literature, computer and business titles, and titles relating to employment such as sample test books and books on resume writing.

The cost of a netLibrary collection of 500 titles (the minimum allowed) in Australia would average around \$25,000. This kind of investment justifies promotion and training to aid in its success.

## **Ebrary [www.ebrary.com](http://www.ebrary.com)**

Ebrary provides eBooks in a PDF format. Ebrary describes itself as a 24-hour, online photocopier. In November 2001, ebrary was only providing a beta site. It was still in the process of acquiring and adding content. The initial impression from this site is that ebrary has an attractive, easy to use interface. However, ebrary users can only access the eBooks after downloading a small piece of software, onto their PC or laptop.

Like all good eBook sites, it offers the ability to search by keywords and Boolean options. Every word is a link/portal in the text, and in the future, ebrary claims these will be able to be highlighted to offer further searching on Google, or potentially Britannica. The pages are deliberately slow to download to discourage users from reading a title cover to cover. There are several ways a library will be able to use ebrary.

The library may choose to:

- Set up an account with the password, e.g. library card number, and the library pays all costs of copying.
- Set up an account with the password, e.g. library card number, and the library limits each user to a certain amount of copying.
- Provide a link to ebrary and pays nothing. Library users pay for their own copying using personal credit cards. The library can either give its users a discount of 5% on any transactions, or receive 5% of the transaction as commission.

Libraries will be just one channel or access point for users to access ebrary. Ebrary plans to target many channels, e.g. Yahoo. From a review of the beta site, content appears to be current, non-fiction of particular interest to undergraduates or late high school students. The original publisher determines the cost of the copying (either printing or cut and paste). There is also the option of linking to Amazon or Barnes and Noble and purchasing the hardcopy.

## **books24x7.com**

This is an eBook site, which specialises in technical computer books. It offers a subscription model to access approximately 300 recently released computer titles. It is open to consortiums to purchase.

## **Questia [www.questia.com](http://www.questia.com)**

Like ebrary, Questia is providing a range of econtent, not just eBooks, for reading online. Their product is primarily aimed directly at students in the Liberal Arts Colleges of USA. The content is focused on the humanities. It is a subscription service to over 40,000 items, with various pricing alternatives.

## **Tumblebooks [www.tumblebooks.com](http://www.tumblebooks.com)**

Tumblebooks do not fit into any of the previous categories of eBooks previously discussed. They provide children's picture books as eBooks. During 2002, Tumblebooks are continuing discussions with Australian public libraries about access to their titles. Late in 2001, Richmond Public Library in Canada (<http://www.yourlibrary.ca>) began a Tumblebooks subscription.

## **Library suppliers**

Although details are scant about proposed library supplier models, Ingrams, and Baker and Taylor for example, appear to be investigating and developing the eBook database model. Libraries would purchase certain eBook titles, which would be listed not in the library catalogue but under an eBook database. Library users would have to be authenticated and then be able to click through to the library suppliers web site. Here they could search for a title, select it and download it onto their PC. With the eBook would come a 'time-bomb' e.g. three weeks, thus after three weeks the eBook would vanish. The library would be charged 'points' (e.g. US\$1) for each loan, based on the retail price of the print book. This would require some budgeting limitations, and a library may need to apply limits applied prior to adding the title to the library collection.

## **Publishers and Reference Portals**

Some publishers have entered the eBook field using their established name to lead to sales, for example, the Oxford dictionary, Groves and Britannica. Other sites have collected content from various sources and put it together in one area. Some samples include:

### **ABC-Clio [www.abc-clio.com](http://www.abc-clio.com)**

ABC-Clio is recognised as a providing quality reference works, a significant number of their titles are available as eBooks. It would appear, at this stage that access to these eBooks is through netLibrary. There are risks and costs for publishers entering the eBook market and linking with netLibrary would appear to be the easier option for ABC-Clio. The pricing structure is interesting including a substantial discount if both the print and eBook versions of a title are purchased. For example, The Encyclopedia of the American Civil War (2001) can be purchased as an eBook for US\$587, the print for US\$425 or both for US \$680.00. How this links with netLibrary's purchasing costs, is not explained. The ABC-Clio site claims the eBook version provides unlimited simultaneous use. This may be difficult if netLibrary has a one book, one use model.

### **National Academy Press [www.nap.edu](http://www.nap.edu)**

The National Academy Press publishes scholarly reports and books from a wide range of topics in science, engineering and health. It does not discourage libraries from linking to its site.

### **History ebook Project [www.historyebook.org](http://www.historyebook.org)**

This project plans to convert 500 backlist titles of major importance to historical studies and publish 85 new electronic titles as eBooks over 5 years. Libraries can individually, or as a consortium, subscribe to these titles. Libraries will need to use some form of library user authentication so users can access titles both within the library or remotely. One of the aims of this project is to encourage scholars to see eBooks as a legitimate tool, whilst streamlining production and dissemination of scholarly books.

### **Xrefer.com**

This is a new site offering free access to over 50 reference titles, from just under ten publishers, including Oxford, Macmillan and Penguin. The site is cross-referenced for easy searching, thus searching is possible within a range of titles. The site is extremely easy to use. There is also a subscription model for access to a broader range of reference titles (xreferplus).

### **Macmillan [www.macmillan.com.au](http://www.macmillan.com.au)**

Macmillan offers various academic and reference titles (e.g. Groves Music and Art) to libraries with an online subscription model. The price varies depending on the number of libraries and type of access required. It is open to consortium purchase. Access is via URL or IP range and remote access can be possible after user authentication.

## **Ebooks as Marketing Tools**

Ebooks are being offered free of charge from various publishers, as a marketing tool. The eBook, in this case, is rather like a trailer for a film, and is used to attract the reader to the printed form. Publishers use eBooks to test the market, trial new authors and link to Print On Demand (POD). Seth Godin who wrote *Unleashing the idea virus* (2000) is one who believes that eBooks are primarily a promotional device for authors. This title is available free from his site. The feedback he was given by his readers was that they enjoyed the book but wanted it in print format. He released his free eBook in a souvenir print edition at US\$40 and it made exceptional sales on Amazon.

He is not alone; the University of California Press ([www.uc.press.edu](http://www.uc.press.edu)) offers 60 titles free on-line; full text books of its print books. Sales of the print books have increased not decreased since undertaking this approach. Electronic editions of selected UC press books in International Studies, History, Anthropology, Politics and Religious Studies are available for browsing free of charge.

This provides its own issues for libraries, how do we include these in our collections? Can we include them? Does the small print (license agreements) allow the links to be made? Even if the resource is free, we do not need unnecessary information filling our catalogues. Ideally, publishers could offer the eBook version free with every print title purchased. Systems such as netLibrary would still be required to generate user reports and manage digital rights.

## **Free Books**

It is possible for libraries to use the online resources of Project Gutenberg ([www.prom.net.au](http://www.prom.net.au)) and Bartleby (<http://bartleby.com>), where titles out of copyright have been reproduced online.

There is a small amount of uniquely Australian scholarly electronic texts available from the University of Sydney, SETIS project (<http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au>). It includes Australian Federation and legal texts. There is some provision to make direct links to material on this site from other library sites.

## **Options for Australian libraries?**

Most eBook models need some funding. Even if access is free, there are staffing costs in providing the links to the web pages. All models require some level of co-ordination, training and selection. Most libraries have introduced eBooks after receiving seeding funding.

For those who believe there is, and will be no demand, it is interesting that illegal copies of eBooks are available on the Internet. According to Envisional, (2001) an internet monitoring company, pirated electronic copies of books by popular authors is increasing and causing significant loss of revenues for the authors of the pirated titles and their publishers. These copies are being distributed through download over the Internet. J.K. Rowling and J.R.R. Tolkien are the best-selling authors most likely to be copied.



Now is the time for Australian libraries to at least be watching and experimenting with the free eBooks currently available. Those libraries that are experimenting with eBook models need to share their findings about content use and user problems or issues. It is vital to know who is using the eBooks, when are they using them, for how long, and most importantly which content are they accessing in this format.

In November 2001, several Australian public libraries are involved in the development of a national netLibrary consortium. By the end of 2002, valuable information should be available from this trial. Other libraries will be encouraged to join in the following two years. A CAVAL consortium of academic libraries has been testing netLibrary during 2001. By 2005, all public libraries with web page access to their catalogues should have some access to eBooks for their users.

## Conclusion

Libraries should not dismiss eBooks. Why? Ebooks have the potential to be a valuable reference tool. Ebook content is still heavily American, and this does restrict relevant content for Australia. As Australian demand increases so to will Australian content. Admittedly, access to that content is not cheap or always easy to use but it does mean information can be available almost anytime and with the previously discussed benefits of enhanced content.

Ebooks are not alone in providing information 24x7 and with enhanced benefits, and the line between eBooks and other electronic content will blur. In the future, it may be eContent librarians discuss, rather than eJournals and eBooks.

However, as Cha (2001) states “the biggest challenge may be getting people to use (eBooks) them in the first place.” It would appear that libraries are evolving as one of the best places to do just that. Whilst they continue in their role of providing credible quality information access.

Collections are going to continue to become hybrids, with print, audio, and electronic. Collection librarians will need to decide not only which titles are best suited to their users but which format is also best for particular content. This is already happening, with most libraries optioning for electronic forms of encyclopedias and journals as well as some print editions.

In this emerging eBook market, new providers may emerge at anytime and libraries will need to be constantly evaluating and open to change.

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