E-books galore at City University London

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Providing an extensive and relevant e-book range for our students has been a challenge. It is not simply a question of securing funds to purchase the required material: with an increasing number of e-book suppliers offering online access to the same e-book titles, the main challenge is identifying the right vendor. The obvious choice is to select the most user-friendly platform, which allows for unlimited numbers of concurrent users, and little or no restriction on printing and downloading. Unfortunately there are other factors that need to be taken into account, so the best option is not necessarily going to be the viable one.

Our long-term position of limited funding and a lack of viable models, suppliers and platform functionality, we knew that we were not offering our students a satisfactory choice of e-books. The feedback from the staff–student liaison committee meetings and the National Student Survey (NSS) highlighted the students' demand for more books. We had to take action.

For the past two years City University London Library has been striving to expand our e-book collection as part of a wider strategic aim to improve and increase all our online resources.

Until May 2013 subject librarians would purchase e-books on a title-by-title basis, via our main print book suppliers Dawson and Coutts and occasionally Ebook Library (EBL). We would only order the titles recommended on reading lists; the deciding factors for purchasing an e-book rather than print were price and concurrent number of users.

In response to the students' request for more books, at the end of 2011 City University London Library started running Patron Driven Acquisition (PDA) trials. Prior to implementing the PDA projects we reviewed the literature to find articles relating to PDA adoption amongst higher education (HE) libraries. We also arranged a visit to King's College London Library, who had already successfully implemented PDA, to get a better understanding of the model and learn from their experience. The meeting proved very useful. It helped to address the technical questions we had already identified and plan the work we had to do before launching the trials.

We also had a further discussion about PDA with colleagues at the University of Derby, who had implemented a PDA trial with Coutts, one of the e-book vendors we had selected for our PDA trial.

Why Dawsons? We had already purchased several individual e-book titles via Dawsonera, therefore some of our students would have already been familiar with the e-book platform, and most importantly it worked well with our authentication system.

The Dawson PDA trial started in December 2011 and lasted for seven weeks. We decided not to advertise the initiative to academic staff and students. The e-book titles had been added to the library catalogue and could be accessed just like any of our online resources. The trial went well.

The PDA titles were added to the library catalogue, so students could easily find and access the online content. We chose not to implement the rental model. For so many years our library budget had been very limited, so we wanted to focus on expanding the book collection and have perpetual access to the online content. It was also interesting to see that the PDA titles were very well used by the students: 46 out our top 100 Dawsonera titles had been selected through PDA.

	Publisher	Platfo	Jan-13	Feb-13	Mar-13	Apr-13	May-13	YTD Total
Total for all titles			3456	2594	2872	3502	2684	15108
Management 5th Edition	Pearson Edu	dawso	302	16	61	51	58	488
Investments	Wiley-Black	dawso	282	3	7	1	2	295
Essential Nursing Skills	Mosby	dawso	0	0	47	152	35	234
Tort Law 8e	Pearson Edu	dawso	58	14	28	44	90	234
Handbook of Exchange	John Wiley	dawso	2	19	29	175	1	226
Equity asset valuation	John Wiley	dawso	21	94	6	21	79	221
Accounting in a nutshell	CIMA Publis	dawso	202	1	7	2	2	214
How to Invest in Structured Products	John Wiley	dawso	5	33	55	67	47	207

Fig 1: Highest usage Dawsonera titles for Jan 2013 through to May 2013

Fig. 1 shows the highest usage titles from Dawsonera, with the PDA selected titles highlighted.

Our e-book collection was finally expanding, but we were conscious that some students were not very satisfied with how the e-books displayed. One student commented that reading a book on Dawsonera 'feels like I am reading pdfs through a ship's port hole'. Students dislike being able to view (and to print) only one page at a time.

A few months later we started to work on implementing the Coutts PDA trial. We chose a different aggregator in order to have access to a wider list of titles and to ensure we could include titles for those subject areas that may not have been well catered for in the first trial. The Coutts PDA trial lasted eleven weeks. We checked other e-book platforms and, having secured more funding for PDA, we started a trial with EBL.

We were still concerned with the lack of e-book availability for many core titles, and the limited functionality offered by the aggregator platforms, which the students had highlighted in their feedback. Coupled with these factors, some publishers had started imposing more restrictions (number of credits / user licence) and had significantly increased prices for e-books purchased via aggregators.

AGENTS OF CHANGE

During academic year 2012–13 significant 'strategic investment' (SI) funding was obtained for the library to enhance many aspects of its service provision, particularly the online collections. This additional SI funding enabled us to identify, assess and acquire new e-book content from beyond the usual suppliers. Our approach with this was twofold in effect.

For a considerable time we had wanted to purchase directly from publishers, because they were offering a wider selection of e-book titles, significantly improved platform functionality, reduced digital rights management (DRM) and increased or unlimited concurrent user options. Moreover, when purchased directly from the publisher the content is typically enabled for downloading and responsive to viewing on any device. Prior to the SI funding this approach had been inhibited by a lack of financial resources coupled with the publishers' purchasing models, which often require a minimum spend or minimum number of titles to be purchased. Also, until recently it seemed that many publishers preferred libraries to purchase via aggregators and were not in a position to provide access to their content or administer the ordering.

To identify particular publishers to approach for direct purchasing we analysed our existing e-book and print book collections to select the publishers whose titles we had purchased most extensively. We then assessed and evaluated the 'top ten' publishers, identifying various factors such as 'own platform', 'individual title purchase availability' and 'reduced DRM'.

We also reviewed and analysed the emerging purchasing models that were currently available, and identified a particular one known as 'evidenced-based selection' (EBS) to pursue. This purchase model allows for a large amount of e-book content from a specific publisher to be discovered and accessed over a set period of time for an agreed investment amount. This model appealed for two specific reasons:

- content was accessible directly from the publishers from whom we wished to start purchasing directly
- it seemed to offer an improved generosity on the existing PDA models in operation.

WHERE WE ARE NOW

We are currently providing access to over 100,000 high-quality e-books via EBS models purchased

with Elsevier, Cambridge University Press (CUP) and Wiley and via temporary trials with Palgrave and Taylor & Francis. Both the Elsevier and CUP offers were made available via JISC Collections. We are also running a PDA model with JSTOR. The three EBS models we have activated are running for twelve -month periods, whilst each e-book trial will be available for 2–3 months.
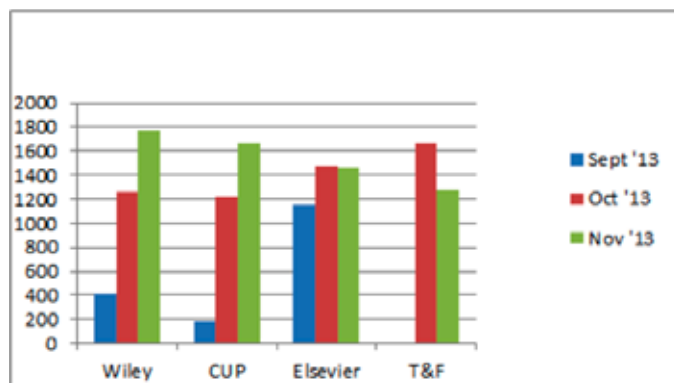

Fig. 2: Showing the BR2 use (or equivalent) of e-books from selected publishers for Sept 2013 to Nov 2013

Prior to beginning these EBS models, we were also able to purchase individual e-book titles or subject collections from several of these publishers using the SI funding. This enabled us to establish good relationships with these publishers, to set up effective workflow procedures, and to assess the platform functionality and usability.

IMPLEMENTATION

Direct ordering from the publishers has created an increased administrative burden on the library, as very few publishers are able to provide online pricing information or an automated ordering service. Where pricing information wasn't readily available we had to contact customer representatives or check spreadsheets supplied by the publisher; however, we found that these weren't always up to date. Managing requests from subject librarians to the acquisitions team, i.e. checking availability with the publisher, pricing and final confirmation to proceed with an order, was and still is a time-consuming process that is heavily reliant on email correspondence and spreadsheets.

The submission and confirmation of orders to the publishers also had to be managed using emails and spreadsheets, which isn't an ideal or efficient system. However, publishers are making progress in this area as Cambridge recently launched Librarian Self Service, Elsevier have myelsevier and Palgrave have the Connect Acquisitions

Portal. These platforms will enable some automation of the ordering process.

Once we had established an account with each publisher we found the setting up of the EBS trials straightforward; once the packages had been selected and our funds deposited, the publishers were ready to proceed.

Overall the publishers' customer representatives have been helpful, which made setting up so many accounts and EBS trials at the same time a much easier process than anticipated. However, we did experience some difficulties loading the MARC records for titles we had purchased and the records for our EBS trials in a timely manner.

We found that many of the publishers have partnered with OCLC for the delivery of MARC records. An order form for each publisher had to be completed to receive MARC records from OCLC, and as we are non-WorldCat contributors we found some of the terminology unfamiliar. This led to some delay in obtaining the records, and in some cases led to our not receiving records for all the titles we had subscribed to. OCLC offered some degree of customisation before MARC record delivery; for example, only a limited number of changes were possible to URLs, and notes could be inserted but only up to a limited number of characters. Completing the order forms and requesting the customisation we required, necessitated a lot of email correspondence between OCLC and ourselves.

Once records were loaded, we found that some contained more than one URL, which we fixed manually. In a few cases it was also found that some links in our CUP EBS trial did not work; in such cases the publisher implemented a fix and resent the records.

As automatic purchases do not happen during EBS trials, we were not too concerned about removing titles that were already part of our collection. We shall be able to analyse usage at the end of the set period of access and can then check for duplication and not purchase at that point if need be. At the end of each trial, MARC records for titles that have been purchased through EBS will need to be marked up manually, and the MARC records for titles which are not to be purchased deleted. Checks then need to be made to ensure that the number of MARC records on

the system tally with the number of purchases we have made.

Looking ahead, there is the question of managing user expectations; this is not new to EBS as it was also a concern with PDA. Users will have used and accessed titles that may no longer be available at the end of any EBS project or trial.

MARKETING AND USER GUIDES

The library had decided we wouldn't promote the PDA trials run through Coutts, Dawson and EBL. We had added all the PDA titles to the library catalogue, so staff and students could easily discover and access the new material, and trigger the automatic purchase if the item was accessed twice or if it was used for longer than five minutes.

However, this academic year (2013–14) we heavily promoted the new EBS trials to library users even if the majority of the new content was easily discoverable via the library catalogue. We marketed the new resources via the website, emails, posters and Twitter to maximise use and enhance the users' perception of both e-books in general and the library as a service. To attract students' attention we also prepared a short quiz (http://lib-guides.city.ac.uk/librarylovese-books) on e-books, offering Amazon vouchers to the winner.

Our aim was to ensure that our users were fully aware of the content recently made available. We also wanted to emphasise how user friendly the new e-book platforms are, and to reach all those students who had been left dissatisfied and very critical after the experience with Dawsonera and MyiLibrary.

With the increased number of providers and platforms we were also noticing more quirks specific to each provider. These were very made sense to those of us involved in setting up and testing the new content, but we soon realised that we had to make this information easily available to our colleagues in the library and to our users. We have created e-book libguides (http://libguides.city. ac.uk/ebooks), which are still being developed, to provide guidance to both the library staff and our users. A speedy response to user queries is an essential part of our services, as is enabling users to identify what publishers allow, such as how much can be printed or downloaded or whether the content can be downloaded to mobiles, etc.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Although we are only at the beginning of this new increased provision of e-books, we have already had some very favourable comments and feedback from our users. Recent comments include 'I am glad you have a lot of e-books' and 'the library services, especially for e-books, has really improved since the last academic year'.

The library staff are very pleased with the new e-book titles purchased directly from the publishers; in particular they are pleased with how quickly the new platforms enable access to the content and browsing. Most content is now very easy to download to any device and we are not limited by number of concurrent users. Some of our library users have noticed the improvement, and would like to replace the e-books titles we have already purchased via Coutts and Dawson; one comments: 'we have e-book access to the main text... one can only view one page at a time… This is too painful... Can anything be done? By contrast [title] is very easy to access, with no limits on how much you can see at a time.'

Our students are still demanding more and more e-books. What they really mean is more key textbooks in e-book format, something we haven't specifically addressed with these improvements, because those titles are not usually available as e-books. The next step is to analyse the options on offer from the aggregator that have core textbook content to purchase, such as 'coursesmart' and 'kortext'. Although these suppliers usually go directly to students or to academic departments, and the costs are beyond the library budget, we hope that we shall be able to make some progress in this area aided by changes in the market.