Springer eBooks

Scholarly eBooks:
Best Practices to Encourage High Usage

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With competing demands for new scholarly resources and stretched budgets, academic librarians are continuously finding ways to ensure they are getting the most value and highest usage out of their collections. Marketing and promotional activities are an effective way to educate patrons and drive usage of the library's resources, and are a growing focus for many institutions. These activities are especially important for less familiar formats, such as eBooks, which students and faculty may be unaccustomed to, particularly in a database model. While the amount and complexity of the efforts undertaken can vary substantially between universities, all libraries recognize the importance and the benefit of building an audience of active and engaged users.

Springer and Publishers Communication Group (PCG) have undertaken a study of 16 academic libraries with Springer eBook collections throughout North America. The aim was to uncover the best practices and most innovative ideas for driving usage of library resources. The librarians were first asked about their institutions' histories with eBooks and their basic decision-making and acquisitions procedures. Technical practices were also explored to determine if these have impacted usage statistics, such as delayed loading of MARC records and the use of discovery layers. Finally, the focus of the discussions was then on the marketing and promotional activities the libraries are currently practicing to drive usage at their institutions and the librarian's view of the future for eBooks.

Figure 1:
Participating universities by Carnegie Classification and FTE

Source: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

*Not classified by the Carnegie system but included on the basis of FTE and research intensity

Figure 1: Participating Universities by Carnegie Classification and FTE Source

University	Contributor	Title	FTE	Carnegie Classification
University of California, San Francisco	Susan Boone	Acquisitions Supervisor & E-Resources Specialist	2754	Medical School
City College of NY	Chip Stewart	Chief of Technical Services	12099	Master´s Large
East Carolina University	Patrick Carr	Head of Electronic and Continuing Resource Acquisitions	20771	Doctoral/Research
University of Arkansas at Little Rock	Maureen James-Barnes	Collection Development Librarian	11806	Doctoral/Research
University of Central Florida	Athena Hoeppner	Electronic Resources Librarian	40620	Research-High
Florida International University	Valerie Boulos	Collection Development Officer	33510	Research-High
University of Nevada, Las Vegas	Cory Tucker	Head of Collection Management	27339	Research-High
Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Wendy Shelburne	Electronic Resources Librarian	45599	Research-Very High
University of Colorado Boulder	Yem Fong	Licensing and Negotiation Librarian	32362	Research-Very High
George Mason University	Betsy Appleton	Electronic Resources Librarian	32067	Research-Very High
University of North Texas	Marie Bloechle	Electronic Acquisitions Librarian	31155	Research-Very High
University of Calgary*	Andrew Waller	Licensing and Negotiation/Open Access Librarian	26025	Research-Very High
Iowa State University	Ed Goedeken	Collections Coordinator	23052	Research-Very High
Johns Hopkins University	Liz Mengel	Associate Director of Scholarly Resources and Special Collections	20383	Research-Very High
University of Alabama at Birmingham	Peggy Kain	Electronic Resources Librarian	15120	Research-Very High
Southern Methodist University	Patricia Van Zandt	Assistant Dean for Scholarly Resources and Research Services (now Dean of University Libraries at East Tennessee State University)	10901	Research-Very High

The institutions involved in this study offered a variety of profiles as defined by Carnegie Classifications, though large research institutions were predominantly featured. The categories are included in Figure 1. The chart also includes information on the full-time equivalent (FTE) of the institutions, which ranged from 2,754 to almost 46,000. While the efforts of the library in building usage varied in intensity, the methods of outreach identified in this study were common through nearly all of those involved.

The Growth of eBooks

Most of the librarians interviewed for this paper had been collecting eBooks at their institutions for nearly a decade. Maureen James-Barnes, Collection Development Librarian at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, explained that their library established their eBook collection by purchasing a very broad package through their consortium to gauge the popularity of eBooks at the university. Once they began to see success in terms of high usage, they realized the greater potential in their large collections. The focus has now turned to collecting more focused, subject-specific collections with occasional individual title purchases on request. This is a pattern common with nearly all of the 16 librarians interviewed in this study. Over the years, the methods of acquiring new titles have evolved as both librarians and users become savvier to the uses and benefits of the format. James-Barnes, as the collection development librarian, now works with the subject selectors to make more calculated eBook purchases. "Once the selectors recommend various resources, I look at requests, we'll do trials, consider consortia offers, and a number of other activities to make sure we're adding relevant titles that will be used by our researchers."

eBook advocates

While users are becoming more and more interested in using eBooks in their classes and everyday lives, it is the library that has typically advocated for the growth of electronic resources over print resources. This, of course, is due to a variety of reasons such as space issues, the prevalence of distance education and cost differences between formats. Some schools have official "online-only first" policies, and typically avoid purchasing print if electronic versions of a particular book are available. In other cases, the format purchase ultimately depends on the librarian's choice but will also factor in the willingness of the professor or student and the context of the book usage.

Overall, most librarians felt that enthusiasm for eBooks among the faculty members at their schools varies, but is generally supportive. The occasional technology-averse individual requires an extra nudge to explore online options, but these situations are quickly becoming the exception. Anecdotal evidence from our interviewees indicates that the most eager eBooks users tend to be working within science and technology fields. When asked why this might be, some felt that it may be due to more prevalent eBook availability in the hard sciences, while some thought perhaps it was the style and context of research conducted in a particular subject area. However, the popularity of eBooks in general is on the rise and is expected to continue growing in the future. This can be seen in Figure 2, which depicts the total usage of eJournals versus eBooks on SpringerLink from 2005-2011 (in millions of downloads). The eBook usage, although trailing the eJournal format, has continued to increase year after year.

Figure 2:
eBook usage on SpringerLink has increased over the last 6 years to about 68.5 million downloads in 2011 and will likely continue rapid growth over the next few years

Source: SpringerLink Data 2011

Figure 2: SpringerLink Total Usage 2005-11: Journals vs. eBooks (in millions)
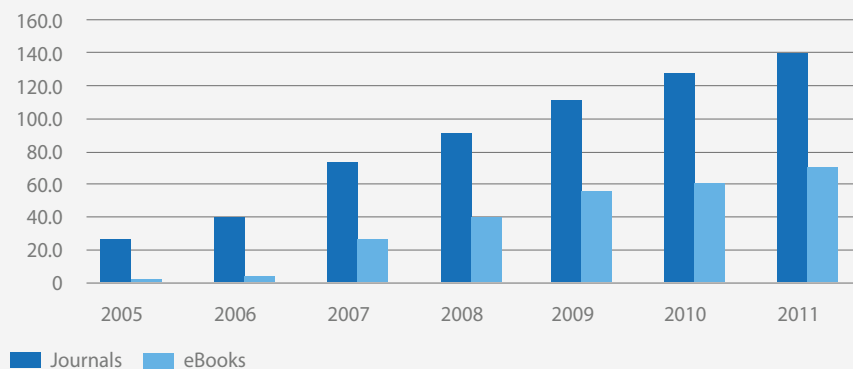
My philosophy: we try to offer as many points of access as we can to make it easier to find a doorway to our resources.

Marketing Strategies

The following section outlines the various marketing activities deployed by the interviewees to communicate with patrons as much as possible in support of library resources, specifically focusing on driving usage of eBooks. As Peggy Kain, Electronic Resources Librarian of the University of Alabama at Birmingham explains, "My philosophy: we try to offer as many points of access as we can to make it easier to find a doorway to our resources."

Email campaigns

A standard procedure for initial communications to library patrons after the purchase of a major resource has become apparent in this study. Firstly, the appropriate subject liaisons are alerted to the acquisition, typically by the head librarian or collection development librarian, and provided with details about the content. They then are responsible for communicating this to the faculty members within their subject areas, generally by email. Marie Bloechle, Electronic Acquisitions Librarian of the University of North Texas, explained the process that occurs after they've purchased and activated a new package: "I'll send out a message to the subject liaisons and library staff that explains that this resource is now available. It details the size, what's included, appropriate links, relevant subject areas, and potentially includes a relevant image." Typically, the subject librarians will then use this information to promote to the faculty and researchers of the relevant departments.

"Targeted marketing, providing the right information to the right people really helps to drive use," explained Betsy Appleton, Electronic Resources Librarian at George Mason University. It is important to only communicate relevant information, since frequent mass emails that may or may not be applicable to a particular department can lead to faculty members simply ignoring any outreach from the library. By providing information to faculty members that relates directly to their discipline, the message is likely to have much more impact.

LibGuides

LibGuides, the popular site from Springshare hosting "librarian created portals to high quality research information", can be a powerful tool for promoting library resources. A LibGuide site can be used to point researchers in the right direction with study guides by subject, lists of recommended databases, provide information about how to connect with the appropriate subject liaison, and more. Often those who have LibGuides even have a specific eBook page listing resources. Many publishers now supply informational pages that can be uploaded

directly to a library's site for a simple way to guide users to the available resources. "We use LibGuides to send users to the titles that we'd like to see receiving more use," Ed Goedeken, Collections Coordinator of the University of Iowa stated. Marie Bloechle, Electronic Acquisitions Librarian of the University of North Texas explained that her library is currently implementing LibGuides and they are excited about the changes: "We have an eBooks page on our existing site, but we'll be moving the information into LibGuides to provide a more interactive experience for our users."

Print advertisements

Although a more traditional activity, displaying posters, pamphlets and publisher branded giveaways throughout the library and high-traffic areas on campus such as lecture halls is still a common method of communicating with potential eBook users. Some librarians questioned whether this really is effective in driving usage for their resources, but it is a method of reaching out to a patron who may not frequent the website or explore online resources often.

One way to upgrade this method is the promotion of new resources via monitors throughout the library. Announcements about library events, training sessions, advertisements promoting new resources and other information are shown on the screens, generally in the research areas, acting as a more eye-catching method of advertising within the library itself. Another creative way to attract patrons to the electronic resources is used at the University of North Texas. QR codes are put on the posters and advertisements that can be scanned by smart phones or tablets. Once scanned, the electronic resource is pulled up on their mobile device and patrons can begin reviewing the content and using the information.

Valerie Boulos, Collection Development Officer of Florida International University, explained that her library also uses shelf tags within the library stacks that guide patrons from print to online materials. If a researcher is looking for a particular book or resource, the tag will inform them that it is also available in the electronic format and direct them to the information desk (as shown in Figure 3). Boulos hopes this will lead patrons who may not think to consider this format first to begin exploring their options.

Social media

In addition to the shelf tags, Florida International University also makes use of Facebook and Twitter to connect with users. A sample of the @fiulibrarian Twitter feed can be seen in Figure 4. The account responds to users seeking advice on resources, alerts users to free trials, and provides other news relevant to the library.

While the use of social media is still being explored in many libraries, there is a growing interest in this type of marketing and it is proving effective when properly maintained. As shown with the FIU example, Twitter can be used for solving technical problems, assisting in specific research issues, alerting patrons to library events, or casually interacting with library users. Facebook pages can also complement library promotion efforts, as patrons can "Like" the library's page and then receive news updates on events, new resources, and other communications directly on their main page (the "newsfeed", in Facebook terminology). Because of the popularity of social media among university students, it is likely that social media will grow in popularity as a tool for libraries as the best methods develop over time.

In order to be effective, these tools do require consistent attention from staff members. Users should be encouraged to begin following the library at any training or orientation events and the accounts should be publicized on every advertisement. Frequent posting of relevant information that engages users will build Twitter followers for a library's account, and timely responses to questions and comments will help to maintain that audience. Libraries looking to improve their social media efforts should be sure to involve several staff members to guar-

Figure 3:
Shelf tag directing patrons to online resources at Florida International University

Source: Valerie Boulos, Collection Development Officer

Figure 4:
A sample from the twitter feed of @fiulibrarian, the Florida International University library account

Source: https://twitter.com/fiulibrarian

antee frequent interaction with users and the production of relevant, varied content.

Library events

Quite a few libraries have tried educational events with faculty or students, with varied success. Again, a targeted message is important; the more relevant the message of the event to the participant, the greater the success. Patricia Van Zendt, formerly the Director of Scholarly Resources and Research Services at Southern Methodist University, explained that targeted graduate student workshops have been effective for the SMU library. They use electronic invitations to communicate with all potential attendees in certain disciplines which feed directly into their online calendars. Using this method, the library is able to track how many students have accepted the meeting into their calendar and determine the likely attendance for the event.

Cory Tucker, Head of Collection Management of the University of Nevada in Las Vegas, explained that in the past their library has done a "vendor of the month" program. Different training activities take place during the month to promote the publisher's resources to which the library has access, including publisher representative-led training sessions and a special feature table with posters and pamphlets in a high-traffic area in the library. It provides a good opportunity to connect with users and highlight larger resources that the library would like to see used heavily. Many publishers , including Springer, offer in-person and virtual training opportunities with library staff and end-users.

Technical Practices to Improve Usage

Beyond marketing efforts, there are also some technical activities that can help to improve the usage of eBooks in the library.

Once an eBook has been purchased, the next step is to make it accessible to patrons. In most cases, this means ensuring that the MARC record is uploaded into the library catalog. Several librarians contacted for this study explained that this process, at times, has proven to be difficult. Heavy editing for records that did not work with their systems caused a lot of delays and required substantial staff time to rectify. However, it seems that in most cases this is starting to become less of an issue. Improvements to MARC records by Springer, such as the addition of table of contents data for eBooks, should improve the discovery process and increase usage.

Cory Tucker, Head of Collection Management at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas, described one situation that his library had faced in the past, in which they realized that records for one of their large Springer collections had not been loaded into their catalogue. As Tucker explained, "once that was rectified – there was an explosion in usage for Springer eBooks and it caused us to change our workflow to prevent future delays in this process." The majority of libraries in this study now try to keep the turn-around time from around a week to a month from the time they receive a MARC record to the time it is uploaded to the catalog.

The use of discovery services in the library is also prevalent among those included in this white paper. 11 of the 16 libraries interviewed were using some type of discovery service while 3 libraries are working on a plan for implementation. However, nearly all of the librarians who currently have a discovery layer in place mentioned that they are still working to develop these systems so that they may be used to their full potential.

Looking to the future

When asked to discuss the future of eBooks at their respective libraries, everyone felt that they would certainly continue to expand their collections. Acquisitions will likely become more and more focused on certain subject areas and topics, but there was no question about growth of the format in general. Some librarians, in fact, felt that print resources would become nearly obsolete fairly rapidly over the next decade.

The concerns about eBooks were more centered on finding the best way to supply them to their users and to ensure that the resources are relevant. Education will continue to be important for this, as it's imperative for users (and library staff) to understand how to gain access and manipulate the content to ensure that they are getting the most out of their eBook holdings. Communication between users and librarians, as well as librarians and publishers, will continue to be critical as eBooks continue to grow. As Andrew Waller, Licensing and Negotiation/Open Access Librarian at the University of Calgary, stated, "With eBooks, we're in a real time of flux from all perspectives. We all need to decide what we really want from all of this, and we need to be willing to try new things. Collaboration is very important."

5 Recommendations for Promoting eBook Usage

Through these interviews, Springer and PCG have developed the following "best practices" recommendations for establishing high usage for eBooks.

Additionally, the list below shows ways in which Springer and other publishers can help with this process.

1. Communicate new resources quickly:
Make new resources accessible to your patrons as quickly as possible by timely uploading of MARC records and new LibGuides for your users to explore. Also be sure to communicate new resources promptly to subject liaisons and academic departments to kick start usage.

- Springer can provide ready-to-use LibGuides for your library to directly upload after a new purchase. To request a Springer LibGuide for your library please contact your Account Development representative.

2. Understand your users
Using surveys, focus groups and feedback forms, learn about your patrons to understand who is more enthusiastic about eBooks and who is less-inclined to use them often. Use this to guide new acquisitions decisions for this format, or determine who should be targeted for further education efforts.

- Springer has many purchasing options for eBooks, whether subject-specific collections or a broad range of titles would better fit your patrons' needs. Explore all of these options at http://www.springer.com/librarians/e-content/ebooks.

3. Use targeted messages
Keep users informed, but don't overwhelm them with general information that may not apply to their discipline. For most libraries, the role of liaison librarians is an important factor in this and they should be "plugged-in" with faculty needs.

- Springer offers many kinds of promotional materials to simplify this process, including marketing collateral and email templates through www.springer.com/@yourlibrary.

4. Think creatively
Innovation is important in marketing to keep your patrons engaged and your eBooks accessed

consistently. Think about incorporating new ideas for communicating with students that may catch their attention more than a standard poster, such as using QR codes patrons can scan to access online resources or working through Facebook to deliver library news.

- QR Codes and shelf tags to direct users to online resources are now available from Springer. Please contact your Account Development representative at libraryrelations@springer.com to learn more.

5. Share ideas

Most libraries are facing the same questions and challenges as yours. By sharing ideas with colleagues and peers, you can identify new ways for the library to reach users and learn from the experience of others.

- Check out other Springer white papers at http://www.springer.com/librarians to see more information on how to improve marketing and build value for your e-resources based on research from institutions around the world.

Author: Kate Lara, Research Manager of Publishers Communication Group

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