

# eBooks – Costs and Benefits to Academic and Research Libraries

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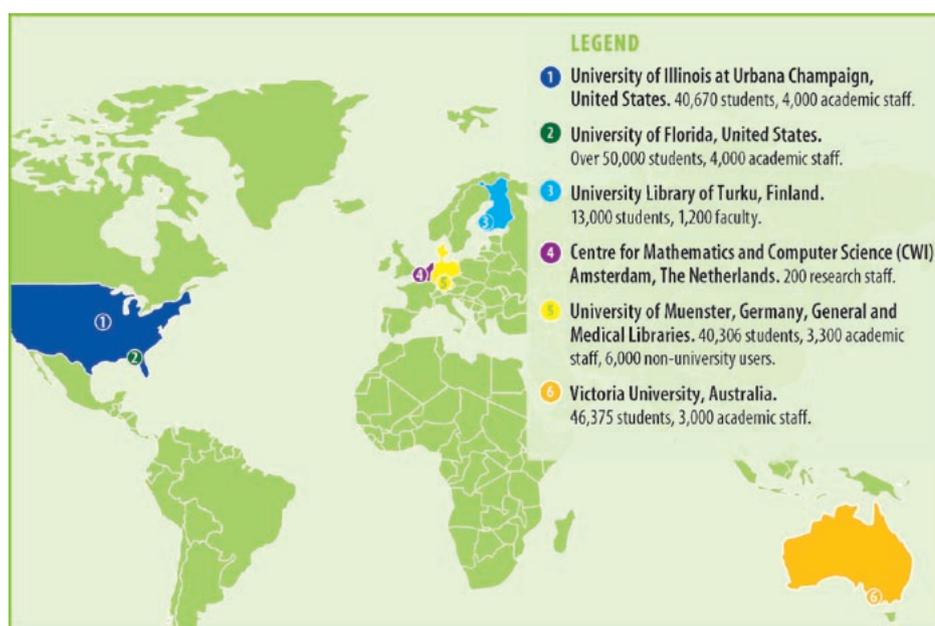


## Executive Summary

As electronic publishing matures, research and academic libraries are beginning to supplement their print holdings with electronic publications. This transition began with scientific journals, and is now advancing into academic and scholarly books, as well. In the past few years, corporate and government libraries have also begun acquiring eBooks along with print holdings.

eBooks provide substantial advantages to libraries and their users. Both parties gain from 24/7 access, simultaneous user access, wider selection, and immediate updates, while libraries also benefit from back-end efficiencies, such as a lack of storage requirements, reduced maintenance costs, and reduced staffing time for physical handling and processing of print books.

An independent study conducted in 2007 by Attfield Dykstra & Partners / Springer surveyed the following libraries about eBook adoption and usage:



- ▶ 1. **University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, United States**  
40,670 students, 4,000 academic staff  
Ms. Wendy Allen Shelburne, Electronic Resources Librarian
- ▶ 2. **University of Florida, United States**  
Over 50,000 students, 4,000 academic staff  
Mr. John Ingram, Interim Director of University Libraries
- ▶ 3. **University Library of Turku, Finland**  
13,000 students, 1,200 faculty  
Mr. Antero Laiho, Head of Collections
- ▶ 4. **Centrum voor Wiskunde en Informatica (CWI)**  
**Centre for Mathematics and Computer Science (CWI) Amsterdam, The Netherlands**  
200 research staff  
Mrs. Ay-Ling Ong, Head of Library and Information Services
- ▶ 5. **University of Muenster, Germany, General and Medical Libraries**  
40,306 students, 3,300 academic staff, 6,000 non-university users  
Dr. Peter te Boekhorst, General Library, Head of Acquisitions  
Mr. Oliver Obst, Head of Medicine Library
- ▶ 6. **Victoria University, Australia**  
46,375 students, 3,000 academic staff  
Ms. Jane Miller, Electronic Information Systems & Services Librarian  
Mr. Philip G Kent, University Librarian  
Mr. Brian Tyrrell, Information Resources Coordinator & Werribee Campus Librarian

# A Library Perspective on eBooks

Many libraries recognize that eBooks offer an ideal opportunity to increase existing collections while enhancing users' research experiences at the same time. Some libraries have adopted significant eBook acquisition programs. However, the interviewed librarians agreed that it is still early days and that the market for eBooks is just developing.

- ▶ *The users must be gradually brought to accept them. That was our idea with the Springer offering, to take a big leap forward with the eBooks and try to make clear to the people what possibilities eBooks offer* ▶ University of Muenster
- ▶ *They won't go away this time; this time they're here to stay. Between publishers, agents and librarians, we all have a lot to learn and a lot of changes to make*
  - ▶ University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

eBooks offer numerous advantages to libraries, including the following:

## Expanded Offerings

Digital delivery enables publishers to create large, cost-effective packages. These packages allow libraries to significantly increase the number of titles they can purchase and extend them to remote branches. During her interview, Mrs. Ay-Ling Ong of CWI Amsterdam stated that electronic bundling enabled the library to purchase more than three times the number of electronic Springer titles as it would have in print.

All of the librarians surveyed believed eBooks provided the potential to offer better availability and a wider range of content to users, with journals being the logical first step in developing electronic collections. Increasingly, journal collections at several libraries are approaching electronic-only status.

## Expanded Usage

Since any number of users can access the same eBook simultaneously, librarians cited simultaneous access as a major factor in eBook acquisitions, particularly in multi-site institutions. Increased likelihood of usage was another common benefit. As the University of Florida's John Ingram explained, "I think virtual books will be used more, either by virtue of accident or intentionally, than books on a shelf. Lots of times, books are purchased and put on a shelf but no one checks them out." Librarians also cited 24/7 access as a usage driver for facilities with limited hours or geographically dispersed users.

## Reduced personnel requirements

By eliminating physical handling and shelving of printed books as well as simplifying user searches, eBooks allow librarians to reduce administrative overhead and focus their efforts elsewhere.

## Reduced maintenance costs

eBooks nearly eliminate damage, loss, and security concerns.

## Enhanced functionality

eBooks simplify and enhance the research process by allowing users to search within documents, across specified groups of documents, and across entire catalogs within seconds.

## Usage statistics

In the print world, only rudimentary usage statistics typically exist. Properly-designed eBook collections allow librarians to monitor the usage of these books in much greater detail, and at the same time support the decision-making about collection development and budgets.

## Experience of Early Adopters

The 2007 study interviewed librarians at six institutions, gathering in-depth opinions and data as well as structured ratings of eBook benefits and drawbacks. Its findings are summarized below:

### Perceived benefits of eBooks to the users

Participants agreed that the immediate, permanent, 24/7, simultaneous access to up-to-date content represented the most important user benefit offered by eBooks. A 2007 study published by the University of London concurs, with eBook users citing availability, convenience, content freshness, and navigation and search capabilities as the format's most important advantages. As Jane Miller of Victoria University explains, "The eBook is accessible from the catalogue, so there is no need to search physically for it. Once the title is located in the catalogue, a simple click on the link takes the user to the full-text book." Another benefit important to users was the increased functionality of eBooks, such as multimedia additions, hyperlinking, and searching within or among documents.

As the University of Turku's Antero Laiho observed, reference-gearred material is ideally suited to electronic formats, and often becomes the entry point into a larger eBook acquisition strategy. "For reference works, the benefit is in updating the material, e.g. handbooks and encyclopaedias and so on, and that's where electronic is a very good idea. You can use the reference works from your home, from your office, and you don't have to come to the library any more. So we first started subscribing to some reference works and I found that we got good feedback – what a wonderful idea that I can search for a concept or fact when I'm working at home in the evening – and so gradually I got more and more accustomed to the idea of buying eBooks as well."

## Rating of benefits of eBooks

The participants rated 11 potential eBook benefits on a scale of one to seven. Enhanced user access, enhanced functionality, and access to greater amounts of content areas all scored highly as areas in which eBooks provided clear advantages over print publications to all participants.

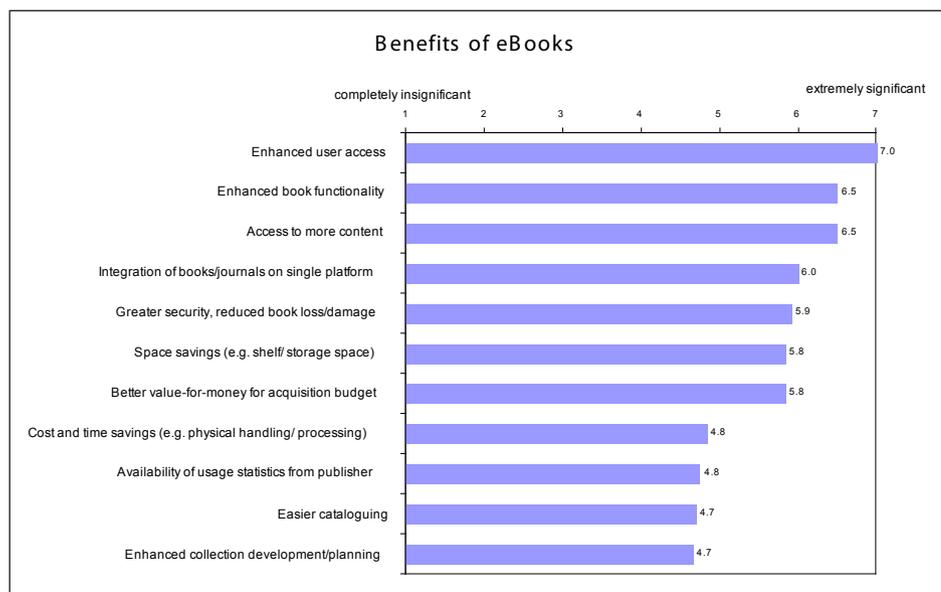


Figure 2: Access and functionality offered clear advantages over traditional print media

## User behavior and feedback

Surveyed librarians reported on the adoption and usage of eBooks in their libraries, with a great deal of consensus on the following topics:

### Speed of adoption

Electronic journal collections have paved the way for other eBook holdings. eJournal users have become comfortable with electronic delivery in a very short period of time. According to University of Muenster's Oliver Obst, "We no longer have any journals that are only available in print. This means that the scientists are accustomed to getting everything from us electronically. The eBooks will fit into this very well."

### Heavier, more efficient use

Search functionality reduces time spent on each title and increases the number of titles reviewed for a given project.

### Decline in the use of printed books

In the longer term, the increase in eBook usage may be accompanied by a decline in the use of the printed versions, although in some cases online usage may stimulate usage of the print title, too, through a kind of 'promotional' effect.

### Book type, discipline determines usage

The librarians stressed that, in principle, researchers and students from all disciplines are ready to use eBooks. Adoption of the e-format may be fastest in rapidly-changing science disciplines, for example computer science and medicine, where books must be updated quickly and frequently. As the University of Illinois' Wendy Shelburne explains, "... on some levels, all disciplines are ready to make the conversion from printed material to eBooks."

## eBook management

Most libraries surveyed followed similar procedures for managing eBooks. For example, none of the respondents employ personnel dedicated to eBook holdings, but jointly manage eBooks and print collections. Surveyed libraries integrate eBooks through the OPAC, which flags content as electronic or print. As Turku's Antero Laiho explains, proper MARC information is critical for the OPAC importation process. "It is essential for us to get MARC records from the publisher because that is one of the big money savers, the fact that we don't have to do it manually. It is very slow and expensive work to do the cataloguing manually."

## Library policy towards eBooks

eBook acquisition continues to increase, though most libraries agree that it will be many years, if ever, before their collections become electronic-only. Two of the six surveyed libraries have committed to a long-term electronic-only goal. Toward that end, they do not acquire print copies parallel to the electronic versions, except in cases where users explicitly demand print copies. Others are proceeding more conservatively. As CWI Amsterdam explains, "The current Springer eBook package is a kind of test balloon. It is the library's first experience with eBooks, and it will be used as the basis for assessing the future policy towards adoption of eBooks."

## Costs of eBooks vs. print books

Surveyed librarians rated the significance of individual cost items.

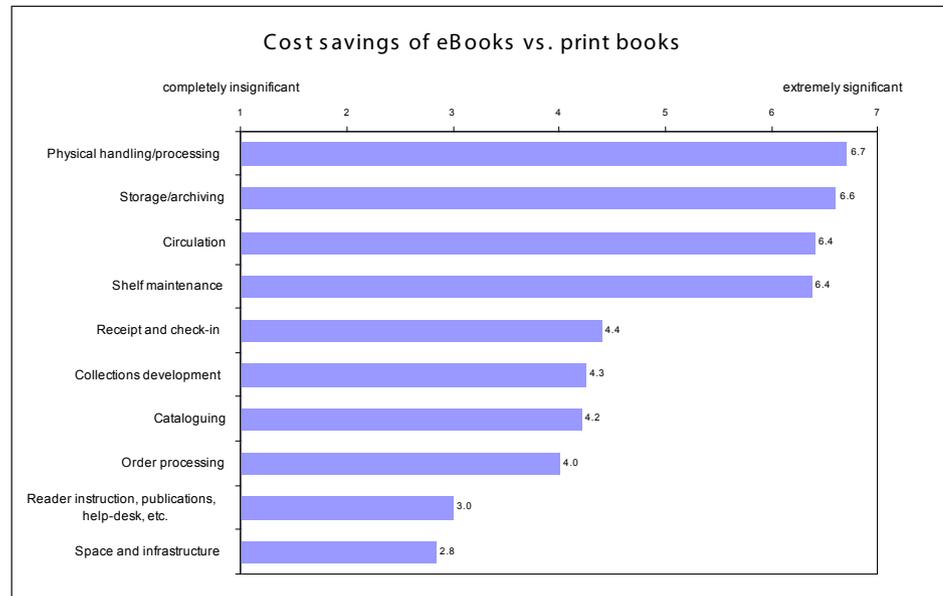


Figure 3: eBooks provided clear advantages over print publications in costs associated with physical handling/processing and storage/archiving.

The most significant area for cost savings of eBooks over print was in physical handling and processing – binding, labeling, transport, and repair. According to the University of Muenster, “This is an area that largely disappears with the transition from print to eBooks. What is not yet entirely clear, however, is whether it will entirely disappear or whether eBook management will continue to involve some form of physical handling, e.g. going online periodically to check that titles can still be accessed on the host platform, provision and maintenance of PC terminals, installation and updating of Acrobat Reader, provision of printing facilities.”

Storage and archiving always represents an issue as well as a cost factor for libraries. This is another area where librarians expect significant cost advantages from eBooks, assuming that publishers handle online archiving. Other processes where eBooks have significant cost advantages are circulation and shelf maintenance. According to CWI Amsterdam, “[With eBooks] the whole loan process would no longer be required, involving chasing users for returns, etc. This aspect can be very time-consuming.” “Victoria University Melbourne recognized shelving and reshelving costs as an opportunity for savings, as well, estimating that shifting from print to entirely electronic holdings would save A\$350,000 annually in salaries to reshelving personnel at its 12 libraries. Long term savings in space are also desirable at Victoria University Melbourne in order to create more student places to enhance the student learning experience“

While the following tasks may differ for eBooks and print books, librarians rated near-term costs as roughly equal, with potential long-term cost savings:

### Collections development

A publisher’s packaging determines the degree of economic benefit libraries receive. If a package contains a large number of titles the library would have purchased individually, eBooks can provide substantial benefits. However, some librarians felt that the cost differences will be negligible, since expenses will be shifted to pricing and licensing negotiations.

### Order processing

Some libraries, such as CWI Amsterdam, reported that eBook packaging made bulk ordering more efficient. Others cited inefficient and varied order processes on different publisher Web sites as reasons that ordering eBooks was more complicated and time-consuming than print. All participants agreed that eBook ordering would become more efficient over time.

## Receipt and check-in

Every survey participant rated the cost of processing acquired print and electronic books roughly equal. According to the University of Muenster, “With eBooks, I don’t have to stick a label on it anymore – I’ve saved on that – but stock-taking procedures are more or less the same, so that the book enters the library’s holding list.”

## Reader instruction and helpdesk

In the long term, librarians have high hopes that eBooks will reduce support costs. As Peter te Boekhorst of the University of Muenster notes, “I don’t need to spend a long time explaining to users how to use a PDF file, but I have to explain to 35 people every day where to find 3F or 3H, etc. This problem of finding your way around the library would disappear.”

In the short term, however, libraries must spend their time and budget acclimating users to new technology and advertising eBook availability, negating any substantial cost savings. Mr. Antero Laiho believes this phase is inevitable. “The resources are very expensive so when we buy them we want them to be used as much as possible. So it is the library’s responsibility as well to promote these new acquisitions.”

## Library infrastructure

While eBooks save shelf space, surveyed librarians did not agree that this will provide any significant short-term cost-savings.

# Future prospects for eBooks

All of the librarians involved in the study see a future for eBooks in the academic realm and all believe that there will be a far-reaching transition to electronic books. However, numerous challenges remain, such as licensing agreements and access arrangements. Most of the interviewees agreed that the evolution of users away from print toward electronic books will take at least another 5-10 years, although researchers in some disciplines (e.g., STM) and younger users may make this transition more rapidly.

► *eBooks are now a serious option. ... In 2 years definitely all university libraries will be much more comfortable buying eBooks. In 5 years print and eBooks purchase will be equal and eBooks will be universally accepted by users. In 10 years eBooks will be the norm ... in science and business* ► Victoria University Melbourne

The printed book will never cease to exist. According to the University of Illinois’ Ms. Shelburne, “I can’t see certain types of print going away for a very long time.” Still, libraries of the future may well look different, with electronic resources accounting for a greater percentage of total holdings. While print resources will occupy shelves, library patrons will access eBooks and other electronic resources via computer terminals or from remote locations.

While printed books will always coexist with eBooks, all of the survey participants see the print / electronic balance shifting. Some librarians believe eBook ubiquity will cause a complete paradigm shift in library function:

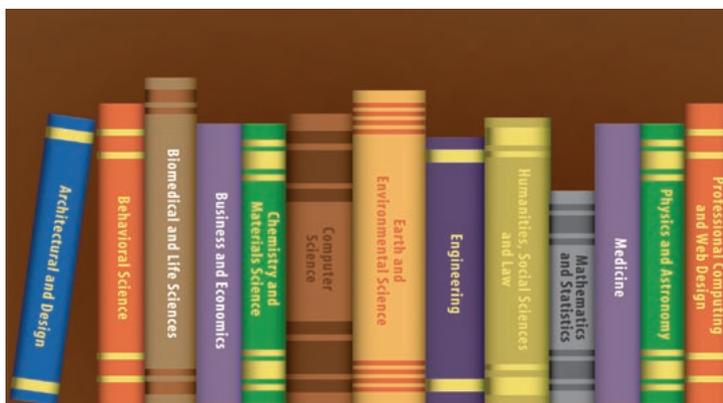
► *I can see it as an option, at least for the big book packages, that we get a big reservoir of electronic books – maybe tens or hundreds of thousands of books – and we don’t have the printed versions of these books, so when the reader is looking for a particular subject he can find something interesting in these big packages, and then perhaps it would be possible to have the book maybe on a print-on-demand basis, to have a printout for himself* ► Mr. Antero Laiho, University Library of Turku

## Springer Product Offering

Springer introduced its eBook offering in August 2006. As of May 2007, the Springer eBook offering includes 17,000 titles, with plans to add 4,000 titles per year. Springer integrates its eBook and eJournal offerings through [www.springerlink.com](http://www.springerlink.com), which provides a single search interface for all subscribers. Springerlink.com also provides a simple mechanism to allow librarians to import MARC records for all Springer titles into OPAC.

Springer's eBook packages provide a comprehensive library, with subject collections including:

- ▶ Architecture and Design
- ▶ Behavioral Science
- ▶ Biomedical and Life Sciences
- ▶ Business and Economics
- ▶ Chemistry and Materials Science
- ▶ Computer Science
- ▶ Earth and Environmental Science
- ▶ Engineering
- ▶ Humanities, Social Sciences and Law
- ▶ Mathematics and Statistics
- ▶ Medicine
- ▶ Physics and Astronomy
- ▶ Professional Computing and Web Design



By providing its entire catalog in its eBook offering, Springer has taken the lead in electronic publishing:

▶ *The Springer initiative is certainly extraordinary, one must say. And it has generated a lot of furore, that such a publisher with its very traditional outlook, and with its very unique image, should do something like this. ... Certainly not so many libraries would have purchased it if it had been a different publisher....* ▶ **Peter te Boekhorst**, University of Muenster

## References

- ▶ *What Do Faculty and Students Really Think About eBooks?* ▶ **Ian Rowlands**, David Nicholas, Hamid R. Jamali and Paul Huntington, 2007

## About Springer

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