
E-books and interlibrary loan

An academic centric model for lending

Jens Vigen, CERN and Kari Paulson, eBooks Corporation

Abstract

Ironically, digitally born documents do not fit into existing frameworks of interlibrary lending. In most cases this is because publishers consider them too easy to exchange. In practice, this means that digital documents are often being printed and scanned before being shipped off to a requesting library. This system of circumvention is inefficient - at many levels - and generates a vast pool of activity from which neither authors nor publishers benefit. With the changing paradigm of document delivery, publishers of electronic journals are trying to get their share of the market by offering articles on a 'pay-as-you-go' basis, though at rates many times greater to what is being offered by document delivery services operated by libraries. Instead of joining forces in the digital era, libraries and publishers are fighting a battle which is sometimes described by librarians as the fight between the Good and the Evil. However, new models are emerging which leave room for both library and publisher in the future information chain.

Ebooks are emerging in academic libraries and, with the experiences gained, should get a better birth than electronic journals - hopefully also from the point of view of interlibrary loan. This paper will report on the initial scenarios for integrating electronic books in the interlibrary loan service, taking into account viable business models for all involved parties: authors, publishers, booksellers, libraries and end users.

Introduction

Electronic books are entering the academic arena. However the adoption of ebooks by academic and research libraries has been sluggish. Existing offerings, often aimed primarily at the needs of retail end-users, may not be sufficiently compatible with the expectations of libraries who want to lend ebooks to their patrons. In the hope of building a product that meets the needs and expectations of the academic community, CERN Library is participating in a project with eBooks Corporation to develop an eBook Library (EBL), a lending platform intended for release in 2004.

Thus far, the broad adoption of digital books by academic and research libraries has been retarded by several factors including clumsy technology, unsatisfactory integration with libraries' existing management systems, a lack of accepted standards and, most importantly, the availability of content.

The technology that enables the lending of ebooks is advancing. There is strong evidence of demand for a flexible ebook lending model which can satisfy not only general lending requirements, but also facilitate a more timely, accessible and cost-effective form of interlibrary loan. There is also a strong business case for publishers to make their content available for this medium.

From Books to Journals to Preprints or Vice Versa

Written scientific communication began as correspondence between scientists, an approach that was clearly limited to the circle of people taking part in the communication process. With the introduction of printing, the communication process shifted toward books, a medium that does not easily permit a two-way communication. Two hundred years later the first academic journals

were founded and the written communication process was radically accelerated. Most academic disciplines have continued to utilize this communication pattern. However, over the last three to four decades some communities have also based their rapid communication on preprints.

Looking at how these different communication patterns have mapped into the digital era, the development has been 100% contrary to what was the case in Gutenberg's world: electronic preprints are well established in all the applicable disciplines, electronic journals are well accepted and used across academia, while electronic books are still considered by many scholars as the stuff of science fiction.

Electronic preprints and journals have been around for over a decade. At their inception, it was felt that electronic distribution might fundamentally change the peer review process, bringing in a new, dynamic and interactive review system. Paul Ginsparg put it thus in 1996:

" ... authors are unlikely to accept "electronic clones" of print journals (i.e. electronic versions identical in content, functionality, methodology and appearance, to paper versions), whether transmitted via CD-ROM or via the network. The electronic medium should not be constrained by any former print incarnation and, in particular, easily implemented quality appraisal mechanisms in the electronic realm will be dramatically superior to the binary (i.e. one-time, all-or-nothing) procedure employed by the print medium, which in turn frequently conveys inadequate signal."

But to this day, electronic journals appear as mere digital clones of their printed counterparts, and are little used before having been printed out. When the day comes that the academic community embraces a more disruptive, interactive format for digital discourse, scholarly communication will have made its paradigm shift. Could the electronic book be the required catalyst that brings this about?

Ebooks Step Cautiously Onto the Lending Stage

Like their journal counterparts, electronic books to date have mostly replicated the print paradigm. Most ebook lending systems offer only the same (or in some cases, less) functionality, often allowing only one patron to access a book at a time, allowing limited or no printing, providing no means for interlibrary loan, and integrating only minimally with existing Integrated Library Systems (ILS).

Andrew Pace of North Carolina State University Library sums up existing ebook library offerings, saying: "Solutions to date have done a decent job of replicating how patrons use library books but have failed to replicate how librarians purchase and manage books." Ebook library solutions have not yet fully made their impact in libraries mainly because of a lack of relevant content and a failure to create a library platform which satisfies librarians' needs. Ebook library vendors have also failed to embrace the kinds of new lending models and interactivity that technology makes possible.

Publishers Put a Toe in

Ebook content has been slow to grow. Publishers have thus far proceeded into the digital realm with caution. They have watched the plunder of the music industry at the gangly hands of teenagers wildly wielding Napster and other MP3 files sharing software and seen their own potential fate. Many publishers took a 'wait and see' approach. Those that did jump into the electronic age often converted only small selections of their books as a test run.

Ebook vendors have in turn been conservative with their platforms. In order to convince publishers to entrust them with their content, ebook vendors have walked a fairly narrow path. Individual publishers have begun to experiment in various directions with their own content. Safari is an example of non-traditional lending models, trade-in models and weighting prices based on book demand. Taylor and Francis have developed an innovative ebook platform with free online browsing and short term access fees. But ebook aggregators have had a harder time winning content for innovative distribution models.

Including functionality such as traditional interlibrary loan into an ebook lending model would no doubt be hard to sell to publishers. To suggest that making ebooks available for ILL would be like creating a librarian's Napster would certainly be overstating their objection. But publishers do have valid concern about the vulnerability of content in digital format. While publishers may have control over who gets to their content initially, unless a contract governs what the user can do with the content afterwards, they have no control over what happens with the book after that. Without careful consideration of lending permissions, ebooks could threaten to cannibalize the already suffering print book. Publishers do not wish to find that, by making ebooks too accessible, they one day face a market where one ebook serves the need that was once served by ten print books.

Publishers Need to Get a Foot in

Observing the trends of electronic journals and feeling the effects of the electronic medium on the sale of monographs, publishers also recognize that ebooks in libraries, particularly in research libraries, are an inevitable evolution. Many publishers are steadily increasing the number of titles available as ebooks and more publishers are entering the ring. More progressive publishers have worked ebook formats into their production flow and are beginning to release titles simultaneously with their print releases. A day when print books and ebooks are regularly released simultaneously is not unimaginable.

The following statistics sourced from American Research Libraries (ARL) provide insight into ILL expenditure and service trends:¹

- Interlibrary borrowing amongst ARL libraries has increased by a total of 203% since 1986 or by an average of 7.2% per year² While interlibrary loans have slowed or stabilized in ARL libraries in recent years, Mary Jackson hypothesizes that lower ILL rates could be indicative of the beneficial effects of consortial purchases of electronic journals.³ Hans Martin Fagerli similarly reports that although the number of journal copies has dropped in Nordic libraries, the inter-lending of original documents has remained the same.⁴
- Serial expenditure has increased by 227% since 1986 or by an average of 7.7% per year whereas monographs expenditure has increased by 62% since 1986 or by an average of 3.1% per year (below the average CPI of 3.2%)⁵
- In-house use of materials has declined 35% since 1991 or an average of 3.1% per year.⁶
- ARL libraries have purchased an average of .3 % fewer monographs each year since 1986 (this equates to roughly 90,000 monographs in total) but are services an average of 1.1% more students and staff each year.
- 2001/02 expenditures for monographs declined 3% over the last year, while at the same time the monograph unit cost increased 4%.

These trends point to a shift to electronic resources. Fewer patrons are using in-house materials for research and greater numbers are turning to online resources. A greater proportion of library

expenditure is being directed toward electronic resources. Monograph unit sales are falling. Martha Kyrillidou and Mark Young sum this situation up in their summary of the 2001-2002 ARL statistics:

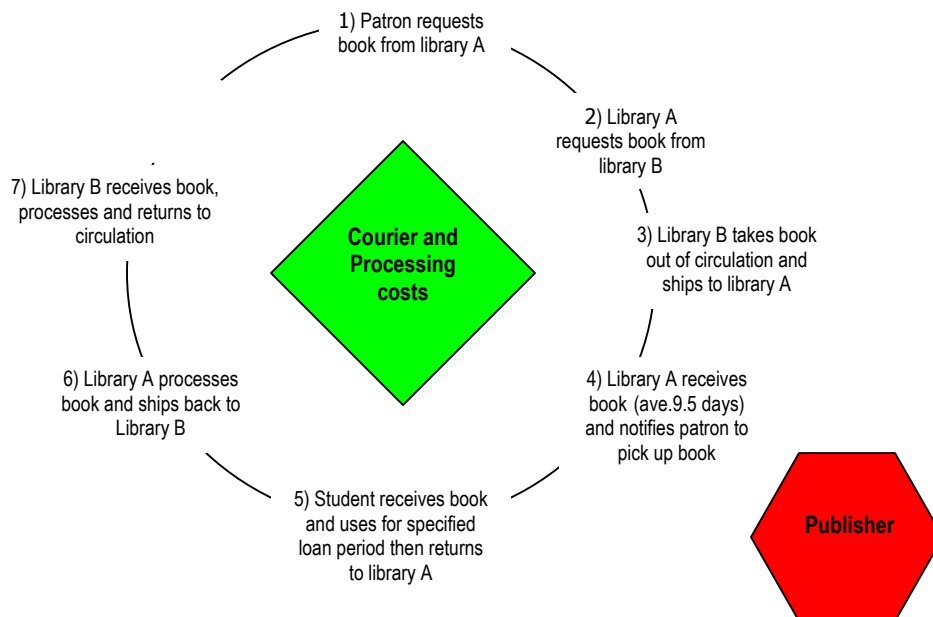
"The story of struggling library budgets has been told in terms of the "serials crisis." Serial unit costs have been increasing at rates that are much larger than inflation for a long period of time - almost two decades of such trends have been documented through the ARL Statistics. Library serial subscriptions exhibit extreme inelasticity of demand (i.e., the demand is very high for continuing a subscription), sometimes to the detriment of other budget lines such as books and salaries."⁷

As the library acquisition landscape shifts, and monograph sales decline, publishers and ebook vendors need to consider ebook lending models which enable libraries to address the changing ways in which patrons are using materials. Ideally such models can also bring new sources of revenue to publishers to make up for reduced profits from the shift away from monograph sales. New revenue streams create a powerful incentive to convert print books into ebook formats, providing the critical mass of content we are all seeking.

ILL and the Current State of Affairs for Libraries and Publishers

Making ebooks available for ILL may not be appealing to publishers at first glance. However, the publishing industry has much more to gain by introducing an ebook lending model for ILL than by preserving the present situation which favours the courier and leaves the author, the publisher and the librarian out of pocket.

For a print book, the current mediated ILL scenario looks like this:



A study published by the National Library of Australia in 2001 reported that mediated borrowing costs an average of \$32.10AUD (~\$17.00 US) and mediated lending costs an average of \$17.03AUD (~9.00 US). The average turnaround time for mediated returnables and non-returnables was 11.5 calendar days.⁸

In North America, a new study of ARL ILL activity for 2001/2002⁹ shows that mediated borrowing costs an average of \$17.50 and mediated lending costs an average of \$9.28. The average turnaround time for mediated returnables is 9.29 calendar days (Staffing represents the majority of the unit cost. Other costs include network/communication, delivery, photocopy, supplies, equipment/software/maintenance, and borrower fees)

A similar study funded by Nordinfo in 2001 found that across Nordic countries, the average cost of an interlibrary loan of returnables and non-returnables was 12,56 € (~\$11.30 US) for borrowing and 7,24 € (~\$6.50 US) for lending. The average turnaround time was 10.5 days.

Although the processes for ILL are relatively efficient and have improved in all reporting countries since 1996¹⁰, there are drawbacks to this system:

- When the book is sent to library A, it is no longer available to the patrons of library B
- The patron from Library A must wait several days, sometimes weeks, for the requested material to arrive. This can be troublesome when research is being conducted on a timeline.
- Several staff from both libraries must be involved in the ILL in requesting, pulling the book, processing the loan and re-shelving the book.
- There is a risk of the book being damaged or lost.
- The only revenue generated from this activity is going to the courier

The role of libraries and publishers is to facilitate the communication between authors and readers. Libraries and publishers should feel obliged to design the inter-lending process in a way that will facilitate this as far as possible. Such a system can be put in place, taking advantage of already available technology.

The ARL statistics summary for 2001/2002 predicts that "We are still in the early stages of a long transition period where a hybrid model will reign."¹¹ Just what that hybrid model might look like for ebooks is evolving. EBL is proposing a step toward a hybrid model using ebooks as an ILL alternative.

Scenarios for Integrating e-books into Hybrid Libraries

Collection-Building One by One

Developments in recent years have made many librarians feel a loss of control as journal publishers reconfigured the supply model to their extreme advantage. With the introduction of electronic journals, journal publishers enforced their concept of packaging bundled products. Acquisitions librarians are left with a minimum of choice and perceive more and more often their role simply as 'paying librarians'.

With the introduction of electronic books in libraries, someone will still have to pay the bill. However, the philosophy of selling collections, or bundled subject packages, could be developed

into something far more dynamic, actually resulting in a local user driven acquisition policy, carefully guided by librarians.

Cataloguing Resources Not Currently Owned

So far, most library catalogues only include the description of documents that belong to a certain collection or a set of collections. This is probably due to the widespread concept of seeing a library catalogue more as a logistics tool than a portal to information in general. However, as long as information not held by a library can be obtained within a reasonable time frame, one could imagine expanding the catalogue to also include such items if the bibliographic data could be easily imported. The future role of the acquisitions librarian will be to identify sources, individual authors', publishers' or booksellers' catalogues, from which the description of the relevant documents could be extracted on a regular basis and later incorporated in the local library catalogue.

Short-term Circulation - An Alternative to ILL?

Traditionally books not held by the library, have had to be borrowed from fellow libraries, normally including a small cost to cover the shipping and processing expenses. With electronic books the shipping costs and delays are eliminated, leaving room for a new concept of 'inter-lending' provided by aggregators in the information chain. Costs previously associated with traditional interlibrary loan could in this way be used to pay for temporary access to electronic books (renting them). A complete feedback system permitting the librarians to monitor the use of the collection, even interact with readers, could be put in place and be used as guidelines for general acquisition policy. 'Rented items' could possibly later be upgraded to become part of the collection.

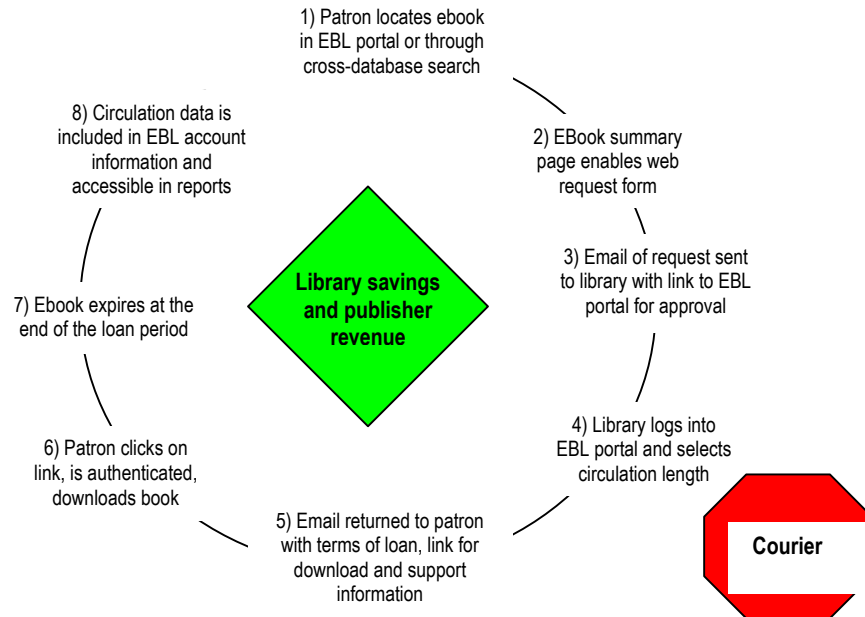
Along with an outright purchase lending model for libraries, EBL is proposing a short term circulation model. This model provides for a rental or a pay-as-you go option where, for a fee consisting of a percentage of the list price, ebooks which are not owned by a library can be made available to a patron for short term usage.

This circulation model can be incorporated in a number of ways:

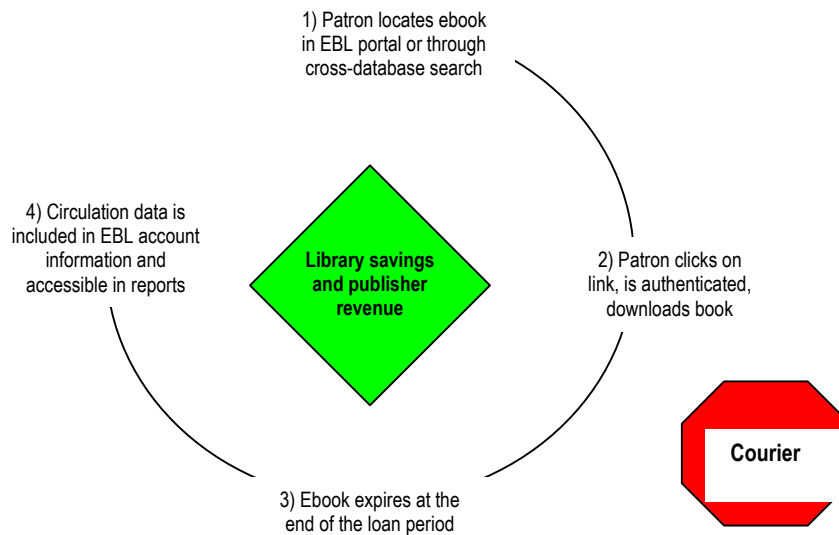
- For libraries subscribing to the EBL platform, libraries can index MARC records for purchased ebooks or for ebooks they wish to make accessible on a short-term circulation basis.
- From the library OPAC, patrons link to the EBL portal to access further ebook information and to access the full text. Libraries can choose to limit the EBL portal to only showing books they have purchased, or they can make all titles or all relevant titles within EBL catalogue available for search.
- Libraries can choose to make non-held ebook titles available either through a mediated or non-mediated short-term request.
- Through the EBL system, libraries can set flags to alert them when a predetermined level of short-term circulation or expenditure is being approached. Flags may be set to alert a library when a title has been borrowed on short term circulation a number of times and give the choice to purchase. The system can also be set to automatically purchase titles after a set number of short term circulation loans have occurred.
- The EBL catalogue can be made available through cross database search tools (for example CERN will make ebook records available through its proprietary linking software, *Go Direct*)

Access to EBL's short term circulation is not limited only to libraries subscribing to the EBL platform, but can be widely accessed by all libraries. One can imagine the possibility of eventually integrating ebook databases into existing ILL systems to facilitate streamlined searching.

Through EBL, a patron initiated request with a mediated loan would look something like this:



Or going a bit more boldly where no library has gone before (at least with ebooks), consider the potential time and money savings of a non-mediated ebook loan:



This hybrid model does not necessarily fit into the traditional notion of interlibrary loan in terms of sharing of materials between libraries nor does it fit conventional library budget delineation. However, an ebook ILL hybrid model does have many benefits.

- **Timeliness** - Non-mediated loans could occur within minutes, with little or no friction to the patron. Mediated loans would most likely occur within 24 hours. Ebooks are always available from the EBL central repository.
- **Cost** – User generated requests and automated fulfillment leads to minimal or no staff costs, elimination of photocopy and supplies costs, and no shipping fees. Of course, electronic books can't be damaged or go missing in the post nor can they be returned late.
- **Patron Satisfaction** - Using the browsing functionality of EBL, patrons can 'try before they buy'.
- **Lending Library Costs** – In addition to the savings in lending costs in terms of staff, supplies and postage, lending libraries get to keep books available on their own shelves. Ebooks never have to be unavailable to the lending library as a print book does.

Considering the time and cost implications of international ILL requests, this model becomes doubly appealing in terms of time and cost savings for materials that would normally have to be requested from an overseas library.

Publishers benefit along with libraries. It is unlikely that a book that is provided via interlibrary loan would ever have been bought by the borrowing library. A hybrid alternative to physical interlibrary lending has the potential of allowing authors and publishers to share in the revenue that once went to couriers and photocopiers. EBL provides publishers with valuable statistics on the ways that patrons use their material. The potential of new revenue and more usage statistics encourages publishers to make a greater selection of books available in digital format. Ultimately, the revenue generated by publishers goes to authors and editors and provides greater budgets for a larger repertoire of new publications.

While libraries and publishers could no doubt benefit from an ebook model for ILL, the patrons benefit the most by having easier access to greater range of information.

Conclusion

"Does ILL have a future or is it too ill to survive?" It was Graham P. Cornish, former director of the Copyright Office at the British Library, who posed this question at the 5th Nordic Interlending Conference in 2002 at Reykjavik. Depending on how much one is willing to twist the meaning of the concept of ILL itself, this question still remains open and will probably be so for several years to come. However, our working habits have already changed and interlibrary loan, as we have known it for the last 40 years, is in free fall. For several years there has not been a need to obtain reports via the interlibrary loan office, as often these reports can simply be downloaded from the net - sometimes even via the library catalogue itself. There is no longer a need to obtain journal articles via the interlibrary loan office as increasingly, even for very old articles, they can be easily downloaded from publishers' web sites – sometimes even via the library catalogue itself. This trend is now also about to spread to books. There will be less and less need to obtain books via the interlibrary loan office as the books will soon all be just one click away from your library catalogue.

The challenge for librarians is not to optimize the speed of various shipping processes, but to prepare the ground in advance so that their users can be pointed to a digital copy of the

document they are looking for. Successful librarians will abandon the "just-in-time" principle that has been the slogan for effective physical fulfillment, and embrace the view that "just in-case" is what really counts.

Endnotes

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- ⁷ Kyrillidou. "ARL Statistics 2001-02: Research Library Trends". (June 2003)
- ⁸ National Library of Australia - National Resource Sharing Workgroup. *Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery*. p. 3. [Online] Available :<http://www.nla.gov.au/initiatives/nrswg/benchmarking.html>. [September 2003] (This study included data from National/State, University, Special and Public Libraries.)
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- ¹¹ Kyrillidou. "ARL Statistics 2001-02: Research Library Trends". (June 2003)