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# Introduction to *Academic E-Books*

*Suzanne M. Ward, Robert S. Freeman,  
and Judith M. Nixon*

Academic librarians have planned for, experimented with, and generally been waiting for the e-book revolution as a solution to many library challenges and for the advantages the e-book provides to users. Unlike its print counterpart, an e-book can never be lost, marked-up, or worn out. It does not take up any shelf space, and so saves the overhead on the building. It does not require a staff member (or self-check kiosk) to check it out or to check it back into the library. Student assistants are not needed to reshelve it or to make sure it is on the right shelf and in the right order. Just the savings in the staff time of scanning the bar codes for an inventory and reshelving the misshelved books make e-books very attractive to librarians. Another advantage is that librarians do not even need to buy e-books before users begin to check them out. Instead they can load the records into the online catalog and wait to see which books are borrowed, paying only after there has been demonstrated use. The e-book has great advantages for the users as well. In many cases, an e-book can be checked out by multiple users at the same time and is available wherever and whenever the user needs it. However, perhaps the most valuable advantage is that every single word and phrase in an e-book is searchable. Indexing systems, library online catalogs, and search engines like Google Books now help users find, or discover, the content inside e-books. The reader does not need to know which book has the information needed, instead he can use a search engine and go to the exact page and sentence with a few clicks.

With so many advantages, it seems logical that librarians would be eager to switch from purchasing books in print and embrace the electronic format. However, the transition to e-books in academic libraries has not been a smooth or quick one; the reasons are myriad and complicated. Aware that this is still a time of transition and that there are many issues surrounding the e-book, the editors set out to present the state of e-books in academic libraries today. They invited knowledgeable publishers and librarians to write about the current challenges, successes, and trends. In addition, there is a section that analyzes new data about user interaction with e-books and an essay written by a teaching faculty member who uses e-books and encourages her students to do so as well.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

To set the stage, a literature review is in order to identify the challenges facing the e-book revolution. The major problems can be summed up in two statements: (1) lack of sufficient content and (2) users' stated preference for print books in many cases. Although time will eventually solve the problem of lack of content, librarians still face the issue that many users prefer print books. The reasons for this preference are complicated, but the literature suggests that the primary reason is that in-depth reading of an e-book is difficult, partly because of poor interfaces, but primarily because the e-book is not a print book.

## Background on E-Books and E-Readers

Some writers trace the origins of the e-book back to the 1940s ("E-book," 2014, p. 10), but the current e-book, as we know it today, defined as a book-length publication in digital form that must be read on some computer device, can be traced to Project Gutenberg, founded in 1971 by Michael S. Hart and now a collection of nearly 50,000 books ("Project Gutenberg," 2014, p. 1). E-books did not become an option for library purchase until 1997 with ebrary and 1999 with NetLibrary. Safari, SpringerLink, and Ebook Library (EBL) appeared between 2001 and 2004. In late 2004, Google began digitizing books from the New York Public Library and several major academic libraries. This project, now known as Google Books, provides bibliographic information on copyrighted books and full views and downloads of books no longer protected by copyright laws. For a detailed discussion of this history, see the articles by Connaway and Wicht (2007) and Zeoli (2013).

During these early years, patrons read e-books on their personal computers, but the invention of e-readers sparked a major change. E-books became easier to read. An early but unsuccessful e-reader came on the market in 1998, the Rocket eBook, but the major turning point dates to the introduction of the Sony Librie and the Sony Reader in 2004–2006. The Sony e-readers were followed quickly in 2007 by Amazon’s Kindle and in 2010 by Apple’s iPad, a tablet computer that can be used as an e-reader. With the widespread availability of affordable e-readers and tablets, the sale of e-books, especially on the consumer market, took off. It is estimated that half of U.S. adults own an e-reader or a tablet (Zickurh & Rainie, 2014).

### **Complication #1: Lack of Content**

#### *Statistics on size of e-book collections in academic libraries indicate lack of content*

Given the advantages of e-books and the high use of them that libraries report, it is not surprising that academic libraries are increasing the percentage of their budget allocated to e-books. (Over 65% of most academic library budgets are spent on journals, with about 25% spent on books.) The *Ithaca S + R Library Survey 2010* asked library directors about their anticipated changes in the book budget allocation: “Respondents predicted a steady shift towards digital materials over the next five years. They reported that 6% of their materials budgets will be shifted from print books to electronic books (bringing book expenditures in five years to 46% digital and 54% print)” (Long & Schonfeld, 2010, p. 28). Other studies show similar increases. The 2012 *Library Journal* survey found that 95% of the academic libraries surveyed carry e-books; this figure has been constant for three years, but the total number of e-books offered increased 41% between 2011 and 2012. In libraries that support graduate programs, this represented an increase from an average of 97,500 to 138,800 e-books per library. Academic spending on e-books increased from 7.5% of the total acquisition budget to 9.6%, and libraries anticipate that this percentage will continue to increase (“2012 Ebook Usage in US Academic Libraries,” 2012, pp. 5–6). These statistics indicate that libraries, with a few rare exceptions,<sup>1</sup> are increasing digital monograph percentages and numbers, but the e-book is not replacing the print book completely.

The vast majority of academic libraries continue to buy both print and electronic books. The balance may be approaching half print and half electronic, but libraries have not yet transitioned to primarily electronic for books as they have for journals. Part of the explanation for slow adoption is because many publishers have been hesitant to produce and then sell libraries the majority of their listings as e-books, especially as unlimited use e-books. Many current titles are either not published in electronic format or the publisher delays the e-book format until the printed version achieves market saturation. Some publishers fear loss of revenue if the printed edition is not the exclusive format available at least for the first few critical months (Hodges, Preston, & Hamilton, 2010, p. 198). Another issue is that publishers are sometimes slow to offer their backlists in e-format. Since librarians cannot afford to buy many titles in both formats, they often feel that they must choose between buying the print version upon publication or making their patrons wait, often for months, before the e-book appears. For a detailed discussion of the issues see William H. Walters' (2013) article.

Just as library budget statistics show this print priority, so do market statistics. YBP handles 85% of English language books sold to academic libraries in the United States and Canada, and is in a position to compile statistics on book sales. In September 2013, Michael Zeoli (2013) of YBP reported that only 15% of YBP's book sales are for e-books, with 85% of the sales still of print books (p. 7). Comparing this statistic with the one in the *Library Journal* survey for the same year indicates that although many of the e-books in libraries come from large publisher or vendor packages and are thus not reflected in the YBP statistic, libraries still buy print books. On an encouraging note, YBP also has seen the simultaneous publication of print and electronic books move to 40%, or nearly 10,000 books per week (Zeoli, 2013, p. 9). Even with this change in the e-book market, Zeoli found that only 25% of the 1,400 publishers that YBP represents make over 10% of their content available in digital format (p. 10). Understanding the state of the e-book market compared to print books explains why libraries continue to buy print books, and why librarians often comment that there is not sufficient e-content available.

### *Users cite lack of content*

In many studies users also identify the problem of lack of content. In the *US Faculty Survey 2012*, users placed the highest need on "access to a wider

range of materials in digital format” (Housewright, Schonfeld, & Wulfson, 2013, p. 33). In a detailed study at Laurentian University over a nine-year period, Lamothe (2013) found a relationship between the size of the e-book collection and its use. He wrote that “The level of usage appeared to be directly proportional to the size of the collection” (p. 44). In other words, increasing the amount of content directly increases the use of the collection. During a study of the circulation of e-readers at the bookless satellite library for Applied Engineering and Technology at the University of Texas at San Antonio Library, the first problem that users cited was limited selection of content. Textbooks in particular were unavailable: “Of the 25 textbooks titles in use by more than 500 engineering students, none was available on an e-reader platform” (Kemp, Lutz, & Nurnberger, 2012, p. 194). The JISC National E-Book Observatory on the perspective of e-book users on e-books, the largest survey conducted with over 20,000 staff and students participating, asked users the advantages of e-books. Clearly these users found online access the most important advantage. However, very low on their list of advantages was wider choice, thereby identifying lack of content as an issue (Jamali, Nicholas, & Rowlands, 2009, p. 39).

*Libraries have many ways to buy e-books,  
but sufficient content is still a problem*

Part of the problem is that purchasing e-books is complicated and time-consuming. Several e-book acquisition models have been tried and adapted over the past 10 or 15 years, yet the industry is still in a state of transition. Libraries have several options available and new methods become available frequently. One method is to buy directly from a publisher, or libraries can purchase through vendors such as YBP or Coutts. Usually the access to these e-books is limited to the students and staff at the institution, although some libraries have successfully acquired e-books available to members of a consortium.<sup>2</sup>

Whether a library buys from a publisher, aggregator, or vendor, it has options such as selecting title-by-title, setting up approval plans (automatic purchasing of whole subject categories), setting up delayed payment plans (patron-driven [PDA] or demand-driven acquisitions [DDA]), or buying bundles. A bundle, or package, of titles usually contains a substantial portion of the publisher’s titles at an extremely advantageous price per title.

Examples of publishers that offer these bundles are Springer, Brill, Elsevier, and Wiley. Similar package options are available from aggregators like JSTOR and Project Muse, both of which offer e-books from many publishers. Other aggregators offer subscription models with thousands of titles from many publishers. The advantage of buying or subscribing to a large e-book package is that the library adds a large corpus of e-books. However, although the per-title price is usually attractive, the total cost of the package may be high, and often only a fairly small percentage of the titles receive significant use.

In addition to these choices, when librarians buy e-books they purchase only the access rights to the titles, and those rights vary by publisher or vendor and by the license that the library signs with the provider. Rights variables include the total number of simultaneous users and the amount of a title that can be downloaded or printed. The digital rights management (DRM) restrictions indicate whether or not a library can provide chapters to resource sharing partners. Until recently, the ability to lend the entire contents of an e-book was impossible.

### **Complication #2: Users Say They Prefer Print Books**

A more complicated issue to solve is users' preference for print. Lack of sufficient content in electronic format is an issue that will be resolved in time as more publishers' attitude to e-books change and as more books are published in e-format, especially earlier in their life cycle. However, user preferences are more difficult to understand and study, and therefore to address and change. Librarians like e-books because they solve many of the library's long-term logistics problems (e.g., shelving, checking in and out, shelf-reading, and replacing lost or worn-out volumes). However, users like print books. This sentiment is clearly stated in Polanka's book *No Shelf Required 2* (2012):

Perhaps most important for this chapter, however, e-books suffer from simply not being print books. People like print books. They like the way they smell and feel, how they give libraries a sense of gravitas, and how they present a physical embodiment of scholarship and creativity. People rally around print books; it is difficult to imagine e-books inspiring the same level of loyalty. When Newport Beach library system in

California announced this March that they were looking into changing one of their branch libraries into a primarily digital space, there was an immediate uproar. (p. 5)

### *User reluctance to use e-books, but statistics show high use*

Users are reluctant to adopt the e-book unilaterally, often telling librarians that they want a “real book.” For example, a large international study done by ebrary and the United Kingdom National E-Books Observatory in 2008 found that one of the reasons for never using e-books was preference for print (ebrary, 2008). The librarians at the University of California conducted a study of Springer books, important in part because of its size. This study found that 49% of those surveyed preferred print books, while 34% preferred e-books, and 17% had no preference. Preference for the electronic book is highest among postdoctoral students, followed by graduate students, then undergraduates, with faculty being the least interested in e-books (Li, Poe, Potter, Quigley, & Wilson, 2011, pp. 4, 11). A recent annual study also confirms this user preference. The “2012 Ebook Usage in U.S. Academic Libraries” (2012) found that the statistic on preference for print was climbing, not declining. In 2010, 40% of those surveyed said they preferred print; in 2012, 50% stated preference for print.

Studies indicate an acceptance of e-books, despite the fact that users state a preference for the print book. Levine-Clark (2006) surveyed University of Denver users in 2005 and, even though more than 60% indicated a preference for print, more than 80% indicated some flexibility between the two formats (p. 292). In a study published in 2009, participants were asked to indicate what book format—electronic or print—they thought they would be using: “Eleven percent indicated that they would mostly be reading electronic books and 26% indicated mostly print; 56% indicated that they believed they would be reading a combination of formats” (Shelburne, 2009, p. 65). For other examples, see the literature review in Smyth’s and Carlin’s (2012) article, “Use and Perception of Ebooks in the University of Ulster: A Case Study.”

Statistical studies indicate extremely high use of the electronic version even when a printed version is available. Examples include the Connaway (2002) study at the University of Pittsburgh using NetLibrary titles. This study showed that e-books were used 3.7 times compared to 1.7 circulations



of the same title in print (p. 22). The Littman and Connaway (2004) study also confirmed heavier use of the e-book compared to its print equivalent; this study compared nearly 8,000 titles available in print and electronic format at Duke University. It found that e-books were used 11% more than the print versions (p. 260). Several other studies report similar findings.

It is difficult to understand users' stated preference for print in light of the statistics that indicate higher use of the electronic versions. Do users say one thing but do something else? Or are they using e-books in other ways? This difference can be partially explained because users like to browse through e-books and use the search feature to pinpoint the page or chapter they need. If the book looks useful, they might obtain a printed copy for in-depth reading. In some cases, if a small portion of the book is sufficient, the e-book may be all that is consulted. In a study of over 1,000 users at the University of Denver, Levine-Clark (2006) found that "56.5 percent read a chapter or article within a book, and 36.4 percent read a single entry or a few pages within a book, but *only 7.1 percent read the entire book*" (p. 292, italics added). One study that demonstrates this dichotomy looked at undergraduates' attitudes toward e-books and found that 66% preferred the print format, yet 89% said they would use an e-book if a printed copy was not available (Gregory, 2008, p. 269). Another important study at the University of Iowa compared use of the same titles in both print and electronic format; the authors concluded that users *demonstrated* a preference for the electronic. This result conflicts with what users state as their preference. This University of Iowa study analyzed 850 e-books purchased through a PDA program. During the study period, the authors realized that 166 of the e-book titles were duplicated in print. They compared the use of the print version with the electronic versions, found a preference for the online version, and concluded "it is very apparent that the circulation of the print copy drops dramatically once the electronic version is available" (Fischer, Wright, Clatanoff, Barton, & Shreeves, 2012, p. 480).

### *Research on use and reading of e-books*

So how are e-books being used? Users are interested in the very features that make it an e-book. For example, Li and colleagues (2011) found that users placed highest value on the search capacities, both within an e-book and across e-books. The ability to download the entire book (something

that can only be done with e-books) was also an important feature valued by these users (pp. 15–16). In the *Ithaka S + R Faculty Survey 2012*, “70% of the respondents reported using scholarly monographs in digital form ‘often’ or ‘occasionally’ during the previous six months” (Housewright et al., 2013, p. 31). Although this high percentage seems in conflict with the stated preference for print, the authors note that this is partially because there are many ways to use an e-book besides reading it: scanning the table of contents, reviewing the tables and figures, searching the citations. Those surveyed indicated a preference for print or electronic depending on the activity (Housewright et al., 2013, p. 32).

In another study, which used interviewing techniques with eight students at Fu-Jen Catholic University in Taiwan, college students used different strategies when reading academic material as compared to leisure reading. For example, they first evaluate what they need to learn and allot reading time accordingly. They also used more rereading and elaborating, and utilized the e-book features (ChanLin, 2013, p. 340). The author concluded that the presentation and features of a scholarly e-book may need to differ from those of a leisure e-book for the consumer market (p. 342).

Another study conducted in Australia also sheds some light on how users read e-books. This study used exploratory log analysis of e-book use in an academic library and found that “While strictly sequential reading in ebooks is hardly ever seen in this data set, the trend (with the exception of the large jumps back) is generally to begin near the beginning of a book and work forwards” (McKay, 2011, p. 207). Despite this trend, readers moved back and forth through a document when reading closely (p. 207). Corlett-Rivera and Hackman (2014) surveyed liberal arts users at the University of Maryland with the primary goal of understanding the gap between heavy use of e-books and users’ preference for print. One of their major findings was that the majority (52%) indicated they do not download and nearly 75% said they never or rarely print portions of an e-book (Corlett-Rivera & Hackman, 2014, p. 267). Overall e-reader ownership (like the Kindle) had an important effect on preference, 46% compared to 32% (pp. 270–271). Their finding about rarely printing is one that needs more research.

The Shrimplin, Revelle, Hurst, and Messner (2011) study found that users approach books differently depending on personal preferences; these

researchers categorized readers into four different groups: book lovers, who preferred print; technophiles, who preferred electronic formats; pragmatists, who use whatever format best suits their needs at the time; and printers, who print out electronic texts (pp. 185–186). Foasberg (2013) also studied when students prefer print or electronic. She used a diary methodology and found that e-readers and tablets were used for nonacademic reading, while paper printouts were nearly always used for academic reading; “60% of the participants’ reading with a computer was not for class, while 66% of their reading with print books was” (Foasberg, 2013, p. 715).

In sum, readers search, scan, skip around, and reread, but generally they move forward. They are more likely to read an e-book if they have an e-reader or tablet, but they prefer print books for cover-to-cover reading and for academic reading.

*What e-books to purchase? Early subject studies of e-books in academic libraries*

Despite users’ stated preference for print, they consult the e-books purchased by libraries. One of the advantages of e-books is that librarians can scrutinize use data that is far more detailed than circulation figures for print books. Librarians who were early adopters of e-books naturally investigated what subject areas received the most use with the goal of then increasing purchases in high-demand subjects. They anticipated that the answer would be computer science or the broader fields of science and technology, and some early studies confirmed this. Christianson (2005) examined NetLibrary use during the 2002–2003 school year for five academic institutions and found computers and specific sciences to be the most popular (p. 361). In a similar study, Littman and Connaway (2004) at Duke University found that their users favored e-books about computers, medicine, and psychology (p. 260). Dillon (2001) at the University of Texas, Austin conducted one early study of subject analysis of 20,000 titles from three e-book collections. Although he reported heavier use in some subjects (computer science, economics, and business), there was sufficient use of all subjects to continue e-book purchases across all areas (p. 119). Levine-Clark’s (2007) study of humanists’ use of e-books confirms this concept. He found that “humanists tend to use e-books at about the same rate as the rest of the campus community” (p. 12).

A question related to high-use subjects is whether librarians are selecting the books patrons want. One way to study this is to compare books purchased based on patron demand with those selected by librarians. In patron-demand e-book programs—DDA or PDA—librarians load catalog records for books in profiled subjects and delay buying them until patrons make sufficient use of specific titles to warrant a purchase. In these programs, books are “rented” until a predetermined number of uses triggers a purchase. Price and McDonald (2009) compared librarian-selected and patron-selected EBL e-books at five academic libraries from 2005 through 2009. The titles that the users selected were similar to those selected by librarians in four of the five libraries. However, the major finding of this early study of PDA was that the user-selected titles were used twice as often as librarian-selected titles (on average 8.6 times per year vs. 4.3 times per year.) This study was very influential in promoting PDA models (p. 6). Other studies have found similar results; the e-books patrons use repeatedly are those chosen by other users (Fischer & Diaz, 2013; Fischer et al., 2012).

## STEPPING UP TO THE CHALLENGE

The editors believe that the library and scholarly publishing worlds stand at the crossroads for two major reasons: first, the increase in the size of e-book collections, and second, the widespread ownership of e-readers and tablets, devices that make online reading a better experience. More books than ever are being published simultaneously in print and electronic formats, and publishers and aggregators offer new bundles (or packages of thousands of titles) to libraries at advantageous per-title prices. Both of these events increase the availability of e-books. However, the major influence on the number of e-books available at any library is the PDA or DDA acquisitions model. Via PDA, librarians can offer an extremely large corpus of books, far more than they could with either title-by-title selection or bundling, and then only buy the titles that patrons use.

Students’ and researchers’ widespread use of e-readers and tablets may slowly change users’ attitudes toward e-books; people who enjoy leisure reading on their devices will eventually make the transition to reading professional and scholarly works on them as well. In the past, there was little information or research on how scholars read. New research indicates that scholars scan, skim, skip around, and reread. In many cases,

they do not read a book from cover to cover, but rather skim or skip to find relevant sections. E-readers and tablets are ideal for this kind of perusal. Recent research indicates that scholars do not print chapters as librarians had thought; they read on screen, more and more frequently on hand-held devices (Corlett-Rivera & Hackman, 2014). Finally, e-books, especially on e-readers or tablets, are very convenient; scholars and students may prefer print, but for convenience they use e-format.

So why this collection of essays about a product that, while no longer in its infancy, is clearly still some distance from maturity? In as few as five years the landscape may look very different. It is precisely for this reason that the editors gathered this collection of essays about e-books at this stage in their development. This book provides a snapshot of both the e-book reality and its promise in the mid-2010s. The editors specifically excluded consideration of e-textbooks since this particular topic introduces many specialized considerations beyond the scope of this book.

Further, the editors wanted to capture the viewpoints of all three major players for e-books in libraries: the producers and vendors, the libraries, and the users. Much of the library literature about e-books to date has focused on the topic as it affects librarians and their users, but seldom addresses the publishers' and vendors' perspective (except to complain about perceived shortcomings). The editors invited each of the chapter authors to write their essays, carefully balancing contributions between all three perspectives. For the case studies, the editors issued a call for papers and selected seven of the 20 resulting proposals to represent the wide range of interesting projects that librarians are undertaking amongst the burgeoning array of collection development opportunities that e-books offer.

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## NOTES

1. However there are a few academic libraries that have switched fully (or almost fully) to digital only. The University of California Merced campus is the prime example. It opened in September of 2005 with only ten print journal subscriptions compared to 15,000 online journals and the *History E-Book Collection* (now the

Humanities E-Book Collection), ebrary, and NetLibrary. It started a PDA program with Ebook Library (EBL) and also added Coutts/MyiLibrary and several publisher packages. Overall 83% of their collection was electronic in 2007 (Dooley, 2007, p. 24). By 2010 the library had 800,000 records in the catalog, approximately 88% were electronic (Dooley, 2011, p. 118). Another bookless satellite library opened in 2010 at the University of Texas at San Antonio, the Applied Engineering and Technology Library (Kemp, Lutz, & Nurnberger, 2012).

2. One example is the Scholars Portal Books, the locally built platform for university libraries in Ontario, Canada (Horava, 2013). Other examples include California State University Library Consortia (Shepherd & Langston, 2013); Triangle Research Libraries Network, which includes Duke, North Carolina Central, North Carolina State and University of North Carolina (Lippincott et al., 2012); and Orbis Cascade Alliance, a consortium of thirty-six academic libraries in Oregon and Washington (Hinken & McElroy, 2011).

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