Promoting your e-Books: Lessons from the UK JISC National e-Book Observatory

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Abstract
Purpose – This paper describes the findings from the qualitative strand of the JISC National e-Book Observatory (2007-2009), relating to the promotion of e-textbooks in UK universities by the library, academics and publishers. A complementary article on the ways in which students and academics locate e-books provided by their library will appear in a future issue.
Design/methodology/approach – Following the provision by the JISC of collections of e-textbooks, the project used deep log analysis, benchmark surveys and focus groups to develop a rich picture of library e-collection management and use by students and academics. Focus groups were undertaken with library staff, academics and students; the dialogues were transcribed and analysed using NVivo7 software.
Findings – The qualitative studies found that libraries were using a range of promotional tools although these were not always finding their targets. Often libraries had no formal promotion strategy for e-resources. Although little in evidence, the value of academic commitment and promotion was emphasised. Promotion by publishers and aggregators is both to libraries and directly to academic staff. Students felt that they were largely unaware of promotion beyond the presence of e-books in the catalogue, and in some cases stated explicitly that they thought more should be done to promote library e-resources to them.
Practical implications – The paper offers pragmatic guidance on promotional methodologies.
Originality/value – The project describes the first major, national usage study of e-books in higher education. This paper contributes significantly to the literature in discussing the importance of promoting e-books to students and staff.

Keywords (6): electronic books; promotion; academic libraries; usage; JISC; NeBO
Category: Research paper

1.   Introduction
In the 12 or so years that e-books have been available and subscribed to by University libraries, there have been no major empirical impact studies. A number of small, institutional studies have taken place (e.g. most recently Rickman *et al,* 2009; Shelbourne, 2009; Abdullah & Gibb, 2008) but there has been no concerted attempt made to determine the degree to which e-books were being used, the way they were being used, or the value placed on them by students and teaching staff.

Following a year-long pilot study based at University College London (UCL) (SuperBook[1]), the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) National e-Books Observatory (NeBO) project set out to determine how e-textbooks are made available and used, by providing 127 UK universities with free online access to 36 course text e-books in the fields of Business and Management Studies, Engineering, Medicine and Media Studies. During the final four months of 2007 the JISC e-books were embedded in the host institutions and their existence promoted. Following this, for a period of 12 months from January 2008, the use and impact of the JISC e-books in the universities was monitored employing deep log analysis (DLA). Supplementing the DLA, benchmarking surveys were carried out by questionnaire in January 2008 and January 2009, and two qualitative studies using focus groups were undertaken: one with librarians (the collection management study), and a second with academics and students (the user study) in late 2008 and early 2009. Full reports for both studies were completed in late 2009 (Armstrong & Lonsdale, 2009a; 2009b). A detailed discussion of the establishment of NeBO, as well as the aims and preliminary results of the quantitative work was offered at the ElPub 2009 conference (Estelle *et al,* 2009).

The overarching aim of the user study was to investigate the attitudes and work patterns of academics and students using the JISC e-books while that of the collection management study was to investigate the attitudes and work of library staff responsible for establishing, managing and promoting the JISC e-books and other e-book collections. Over and above providing access by adding e-books to catalogues, libraries have to promote their use to their various communities, and the reach of this promotion will directly affect the amount of use made of the resource, and an objective of *both* studies was to explore e-textbook promotion. The surveys asked librarians about the nature of promotional strategies, their perceptions of their own promotional programmes and the effectiveness of JISC Collections', the e-book aggregators' and the publishers' promotional activities; and sought users' views on the extent to which such promotional effort had reached them. In the case of students, it was also desirable to learn whether their lecturers had promoted e-books and what strategies had been employed.

The qualitative studies provide an enriched picture of use and attitudes towards e-textbooks and e-books in general. Altogether NeBO monitored and evaluated the behaviour of thousands of UK students, teaching staff and librarians. The DLA and the benchmarking surveys were undertaken by CIBER, a research group based at UCL, while the qualitative focus groups were undertaken by the project partner, Information Automation Limited (IAL).

As both promotion of, and access to, e-books constitute extensive and challenging issues for the library and the user, we have chosen to present

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[1] The SuperBook Project ran under the aegis of the CIBER research group at UCL during the academic year, 2006-7 and acted as a pilot for this study. It was concerned with analysing the use of more than 3,000 e-books contributed by three publishers, Oxford Scholarship Online, Wiley Interscience, and Taylor & Francis and held in the UCL library. It incorporated deep log analysis, collection management focus groups of library staff and student and academic staff user focus groups (Armstrong, Lonsdale & Nicholas, 2006).

these issues as discrete fields in two inter-related articles. This article focuses on the findings relating to the promotion of e-books from the qualitative studies of library staff and of users, while a second article in this journal will explore the ways in which users locate and access e-textbooks made available through the library.

2.   Methodology

The DLA data was used to select eight universities for the collection management study, while fifteen universities were selected as bases for the user study. These comprised the original selection of eight, with the addition of a further seven 'high-use' institutions in order to provide greater scope for setting up focus groups. In the event, five of the fifteen universities were unable to facilitate any user focus groups.

The collection management focus groups included the librarian responsible for the institutional running of the NeBO project, appropriate subject librarians, and, where applicable, the e-resources librarian. Ultimately, some groups also included a systems librarian and cataloguing staff. The size of these ranged from four to eight (median = 6) staff members, selected by the institutional contact.

As the JISC e-textbooks were offered on two platforms (MyiLibrary and Kluwer/Ovid), with respect to the user study the methodology for collecting qualitative data required separate focus groups for students and academics in each institution for each platform. It was planned to run focus groups of approximately eight individuals – students or academics; however, difficulties in attracting individuals (and in a number of cases, failure to turn up for the focus group) resulted in focus groups which ranged from two to six (median = 4) members, and three individual interviews also took place. A total of 61 individuals took part in 24 meetings across the ten institutions. The following breakdown offers the composition of the user focus groups by platform (Table 1). The student population comprised undergraduates and postgraduates. With respect to the MyiLibrary subject fields, there was an even distribution between management and engineering with a slightly smaller number of media studies students.

	MyiLibrary		Kluwer/Ovid	
	Business & Management Studies, Engineering, Media Studies		*Medicine*	
	Academics	**Students**	**Academics**	**Students**
Focus Groups	6	9	3	6
Participants	15	29	4	13

Table 1: Breakdown of focus groups and participants by platform

For both studies, structured schedules of questions were developed based on the work undertaken during the pilot project, but enhanced and modified to reflect the aim and objectives of the NeBO project. These were sent to participants in advance so that they arrived at the focus groups with an

understanding and knowledge of the issues to be discussed. In designing the instruments certain questions were formulated in order to triangulate either with DLA data, or with data emanating from the other qualitative study.

The focus groups, which on average ran for about 75 minutes, were recorded and subsequently transcribed into Microsoft Word documents for analysis using the NVivo7 software.

While the focus groups concentrated on JISC-supplied e-textbooks, in both studies discussion often moved on to other e-book collections held by the institution or, in the case of users, to e-books located on the Internet; and – because this offered extended insights into the issues surrounding the collection and use of e-textbooks and e-books – little attempt was made to curtail debate. The quotations used in this article deal predominantly with issues raised by the use of the JISC e-books on the MyiLibrary and the Kluwer/Ovid platforms, but not exclusively so.

Quotations from the transcribed material throughout the article are accredited to one of the three populations: 'Librarian', 'Academic' and 'Student'. Due to the small number involved in the studies, complete anonymity is preserved with respect to the identity of individual institutions.

In presenting the findings on the promotion of e-books in academic libraries, this article sets the discussion in the context of the international literature on a subject that, even broadened to the promotion of e-resources, appears minimal.

3.   The role of the library

Ideally, promotional activities for e-resources needs to be framed within a strategic plan, and indeed there is evidence within the literature that university libraries are developing strategies for e-resources (Woods, 2007; Schmidt, 2007; Turner, Wilkie & Rosen, 2004) or, indeed, specifically for e-books (Pan, Byrne & Murphy, 2009). One institution links the success of promotion to their strategy:

> …at Edge Hill, strategic and targeted promotion of specific resources (in this instance e-books) in specific contexts can lead to their very effective usage and become a highly sought after resource. (Appleton, 2005 p.56)

However, little reference is made in the literature to a strategy that extends beyond the library, although the Gold Leaf report commissioned by the JISC does set out a framework which could constitute a strategy (2003, p.128). This framework indicates the major players, which include not only librarians, but academic staff, students, e-book aggregators and publishers, and the potential roles that they take. Since that report's publication, extensive contact with the library profession through training courses facilitated by the authors of this article has confirmed the significance of developing a comprehensive strategy.

Librarians generally perceive the promotion of collections as secondary to the provision of access, and this proved largely to be true in the project libraries, where there was a recognised need for promotion to alert, to increase accesses, to reinforce the importance of e-textbooks and to ensure that students move beyond their initial experiments with the format:

> *I think most [students] are sort of in the intrigued and trying it out stage – I think if you mention it to them, it's oh that's good – they'll go off and have a look – its still a bit of a novelty, I think. I think it's only just starting to penetrate their consciousness. (Librarian)*

3.1   Promotional methods

It is evident from Figure 1 that the librarians surveyed in the collection management study echoed the sentiments expressed in the literature by employing an array of different methods:

> Use word-of-mouth, e-mail, press releases, the library Web site, special events, library instruction, printed advertisements and special events to promote electronic resources. A multi-faceted approach to advertising is the most effective way to ensure your message is heard. (Woods, 2007, p.119)

A variety of largely conventional library promotional approaches was discernable for e-books, although there is some evidence of more innovative techniques, such as blogs and Facebook. Scrutiny of the literature reveals a range of other techniques which have been employed successfully for e-book collections, including the use of dummy print books on shelves, e-book events, and an 'e-book of the month' (Thompson & Sharp, 2009, p.139-140). The authors' experience of conducting training courses internationally with academic librarians provides further suggestions, for example, podcast e-book reviews, library 'goody bags', and 'e-book champions', an idea not dissimilar in concept from the use of peer tutors (Millet & Chamberlain, 2007). In many instances, promotional activities inevitably do not distinguish between e-books and other e-resources.

Institution 1
> Library blog; faculty newsletter; library and department websites; training; e-resource newsletter; handouts; posters

Institution 2
> Newsletter; library website; training; lunchtime briefings; short-loan area notices; trials

Institution 3
> Posters; bookmarks; newsletters; student newspaper; library website; e-mail; training; academic one-to-one discussions; display screens; about to try Facebook

Institution 4
> Training; learning and teaching committee; school boards

Institution 5
> OPAC; library website; training; workshops; e-mail; supplier profiling for academics; supplier gifts

Institution 6
> Workshops; training; posters; flyers; display screens; library website; notice-boards; demonstration handouts; supplier gifts; staff and student portals

Institution 7
> Through committees; e-mail; flyers; newsletters; display screens

Institution 8
> Through committees; library blog + RSS feed; e-mail; word of mouth; training; log-on announcements; VLE (via academics); Facebook; posters

Figure 1: List of promotional activities

The NeBO focus group discussions illuminated issues surrounding some of the current methodologies. Reflecting the literature on both the promotion of e-resources and e-books (e.g. Schmidt, 2007), librarians placed great emphasis on the creation and use of conventional, printed promotional materials. This is interesting in the light of some of the responses from student users discussed later.

Training sessions – whether one-to-one or for groups of students and/or academic staff – are common and are frequently manifest as induction or general information skills (IS) courses. They provide an obvious opportunity for promotion, and those libraries reporting in the literature who include an element on e-books signal its effectiveness (Stockton, 2004); as illustrated by the fact that in one institution "40% of students found out about e-books in library lectures or hands-on workshops" (Worden & Collinson, 2009). NeBO librarians were in accord and suggested that training sessions may have greater effect than more passive means:

> *If you get it up on the screen and say, look you can do this and you can do that, and it's handy for your essay, that's a goer. Giving them a bookmark's not going to do it. (Librarian)*

Later in the article the short-comings of induction courses are highlighted by the student users and addressed, however, the following quote reveals that the librarians in one institution are also cognisant of the need to build on the initial experience:

> *And then you've got your inductions, so you've got your basic induction where you mention e-books as a valuable resource. Then you have your follow-up literature searching sessions, and you have things like the graduate workshops. (Librarian)*

Aside from the general induction and IS programmes for students, there was evidence that libraries are, or are contemplating, offering training sessions on e-books for academics through the universities' staff development programmes. It was felt that this will enhance not only their knowledge but their enthusiasm for the format, and in turn, help to generate an awareness and use amongst students through academic championing:

> *I know when we had our research day we had a special e-book session, [under the auspices of] Learning and Teaching (Librarian)*

> *A series of lunch-time sessions … which are introductions to little bits of technology: creating wikis [for the staff development programme]… and I suggested to a member of staff … that I could put on a [session] about e-books. And they could come along – it's very voluntary – but it might be useful for those people who may be wondering what e-books are, and how they might fit into their teaching framework. (Librarian)*

Additionally, some libraries offered *ad hoc* specialist workshops to students and academic staff, which they promoted thoroughly. One-to-one communication and training with academic staff is seen by many libraries as a potent tool, not only for creating awareness of e-textbooks, but also overcoming any negative attitudes that might be held.

Another dimension of training, which can indirectly influence wider promotion, is that provided to library staff. The importance of offering courses on e-books to colleagues was underlined by several libraries:

> *We also carry out user education sessions which are primarily geared at librarians to help them become familiar with the e-books. (Librarian)*

After training, another popular and highly-regarded approach is by directed e-mails to academic staff. As suggested by the literature (Woods, 2007), this is a favoured method by the subject librarians of those institutions surveyed:

> *…but in terms of demand, I think we generate the demand because we get information from the publishers about the actual e-book products they supply and we would then e-mail our … subject teams and they would perhaps e-mail the schools to see if they are interested. (Librarian)*

> *…at the point at which I catalogue the book and I know it's on the system and it's available, I do a quick check to make sure that if anyone has a hold on a print version, I will e-mail them to tell them that it is available online as well – but having said that, I have never yet had a response from anyone to say – unless it's just to say 'thanks, that's great'. (Librarian)*

Agreeing with Woods (2007) on the need to avoid "generic e-mail alerts", some librarians noted a caveat with respect to the efficacy of e-mailing:

I think it's really important to try and target your [e-mail] publicity to the people who need it at the moment they need it – this blanket stuff is just sort of [unhelpful]… (Librarian)

Even the successful use of e-mails may pose challenges, at least in so far as it is likely to cause requests for an explanation!

The more we tell the academic staff – when we find a book we tell them – or we have ordered a multi-user e-book – the academic usually comes back, "What's a multi-user e-book?" You have to explain it all and give them an example and tell them how to find the book in the catalogue, and that's when they come back, "Wow! I'll tell my students about these." We have to be very pro-active. (Librarian)

The use of a library's website as a promotional tool for e-resources is widely articulated in the literature, offering an array of promotional opportunities, including announcements, IS exercises, and short descriptions of content (e.g. Woods, 2007). There is also a reported recognition of the potential of advertising and promoting *e-books* through the library's website – offering statements about the nature and value of e-books proximate to the e-resource portals (e.g. Dinkelman & Stacy-Bates, 2007). As Schmidt notes, "the website is both a source of access and a promotional tool for the library and should be designed and presented as such" (2007, p.344). The responses of the librarians in the NeBO study concurred with the literature and revealed the wide-spread use of their websites for the promotion of e-books. One particular issue that exercised the minds of the librarians concerned the problems which students and academic staff have in understanding what an e-book is, and in distinguishing between different types of e-resource. Indicative a number of librarians' responses, is the following:

I don't think [students] do understand – because, having looked at the results of the survey, there seems to be a lot of confusion between what constitutes an e-book and what constitutes an e-journal – so I don't think they do… I think it's only a worry if they are not finding things that we want them to find. (Librarian)

These views echo directly the findings of the five-year longitudinal JUSTEIS study of the use of e-resources in UK tertiary education, which indicated that students were frequently unable to distinguish between types of e-resource (Banwell, *et al,* 2004). That report recommended that libraries should enhance students' understanding by providing definitions of the various types of e-resource. Whilst this issue is obviously addressed in different training programmes, librarians believed that their library websites would be appropriate places on which to provide definitions of e-resources, including e-books, and in some instances further guidance:

A: There is a page about e-books on the web site – does it have a definition?

B: I think it's going to have – if it doesn't already – I think we've discussed this in various contexts and we think it's a thing that needs to be defined. (Librarians)

I think at the top of our e-books page it does say what we mean by an e-book… contrast it with electronic reference resources where we separate those out onto a separate page – but, yeah, I'm sure the terminology does confuse students… (Librarian)

Several institutions were more innovative in their approaches to promotion, taking advantage of the rise of social networking with subject and format weblogs as well as, in two instances, considering the use of Facebook for promoting e-books:

I've got a general blog for electronic resources and use – and the most recent 5 postings to that blog are fed into the electronic resources web pages so that if people are already using their e-resources then they might notice the new ones getting flagged up there… (Librarian)

…we are trying to look for the new, less-traditional methods to promote e-books because I do feel that the kind of people we should be trying to get to are not necessarily the ones who are reading posters in libraries. And I was thinking of possibly setting up a group in Facebook for example just to see – to try that out and see what happens. (Librarian)

Although use of social networking for promotion appeared in only two of the institutions surveyed, there was a more general awareness of its potential, and a sense that the libraries would be developing such approaches, which is in keeping with sentiments expressed in the literature:

Product placement in the library's physical space is ineffective, given the trend that fewer people are visiting physical libraries, and less often. Word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing [or "viral" marketing] of a digital library's resources is the most promising marketing solution to the challenge of marketing a library's digital holdings in today's information consumer marketplace. Technology-mediated WOM marketing delivers the results libraries have been seeking for so long. (Buczynski, 2007, p.197)

An almost philosophical series of issues concerning the promotion of e-books as opposed to paper books, or concerning the promotion of one product over another, was highlighted by a number of libraries; thoughts which echoed one of the findings of an earlier JISC report:

At meetings of two large groups of librarians, there was consensus that the librarian's role is to promote awareness of e-books, but not to "plug" the format as superior; and that librarians' main responsibility is to provide access to material required by users in the "most appropriate" format – the implication being that they should use their judgment to decide what that format may be. (Gold Leaf, 2003, p.120)

While it is normal for libraries to promote new e-book titles or even new collections, some institutions saw it as inappropriate to promote (or advertise)

a range of books by means of – or because of – the aggregator or publisher that provided them:

> *…how appropriate would it be to start promoting a particular platform, …you know, a particular group of books… it's not really our place to do that – is it? Whereas if they are available through all the normal channels and it's searchable – then you know it's just the way the libraries are changing – they just could find it in a different way… rather than saying 'get your books from this publisher' – we've never done that with printed books. (Librarian)*

> *…no, we haven't really asked for them [aggregators' promotional material] because I thought it was quite important to promote what we were doing as a service, as a project, rather than individual aggregators, because I didn't want to steer people towards one aggregator or another, and then they wouldn't be aware of what was in the other collection. (Librarian)*

Should e-books be seen as something intrinsically different from printed books? One library pointed out that they were just books delivered differently, and felt that promoting them as 'special' would not make sense to library users:

> *I haven't made any effort to treat them any differently to normal books – and I suppose that is a question that I have: should we market e-books as a being something new and something different? Are they really? (Librarian)*

Reflecting on the array of promotional activities discussed above, it is evident that they focus on the more traditional approaches at present, although some new and innovative methods seem likely to become established in the near future.

3.2 Promotional strategies for e-resources

In the light of the literature discussed earlier, the study sought to determine whether the promotion of e-books was a part of a formal strategy in the library. The responses seemed to reveal that promotion of e-resources is rarely undertaken as a part of long-term, planned approach:

> *We haven't got a strategy – no. [Interviewer: do you think there should be?] Possibly – um – I think ideally – I'm talking off the top of my head here and X might disagree, but it would be nice if there was an overall promotional strategy for electronic resources, in which e-books played a part. (Librarian)*

Those institutions that did have an agreed strategy included e-books as a part of the general strategy for e-resources, which they maintained was equally effective. This conclusion mirrors that of Woods, amongst others, who concludes that, for the effective marketing of e-resources, academic librarians should:

> Develop and maintain an up-to-date marketing plan that is aligned with the library's mission and goals. Solicit input from staff and management. (Woods, 2007, p.119)

Having explored the means by which the libraries promoted e-books to their users, the study sought to investigate the responses of student and academic users.

In spite of the activities reported by the librarians, the first impression that was gleaned from all students was one of little proactive promotion being undertaken specifically for e-books:

> *The librarians have been really good at change-shifting me over to using journals, but very little has been done for e-books. (Student)*

In a recent survey of e-book provision and usage undertaken in the library of University College Dublin, the researchers reached similar conclusions, noting "low awareness and understanding of what e-books have to offer" and quoting, for example, a student who complained, "[I want] more information on what e-books are available. I study Chemistry and didn't know about the RSC e-books." Their report recommended that the library engage in "further awareness raising to promote e-books" (Pan, Byrne & Murphy, 2009, p.S19). However, NeBO students recognised that the library offered more general promotional activities associated with e-resources, and spoke of the following methods.

Inevitably, the predominant form of promotion that students can recall is the initial induction courses, which may or may not include some reference to e-books specifically:

> *[The librarian] mentioned it when she came and did the talk to us as first years. She just mentioned that it was available. I don't think there was anything specific, how do you know how to get into the e-books…I'm sure we got a printed thing …ours was Ovid, I didn't know that the other kinds existed in the library. I only know about…the way to get into the medical books. But, so we were presented on it and told about it, er, I wouldn't say it was promoted as such. (Student)*
>
> *When I joined the university, the library support staff came to the class and they explained to us what all the features available and what sort of ways are available here in the university to search for books – both paper-based as well as online books. They showed me both how to do that, and they gave us a demo, live demo of how to access e-books and e-journals. [It was] very useful for us. It made us to go and look for information through e-books as well as through library catalogues. (Student)*

Throughout a number of the discussion groups, students indicated that they were, at best, hazy about their experiences of the induction courses, and at worst could not recall the experience, as exemplified in the following extract which also offers an interesting insight into how some students perceive learning and teaching styles in higher education:

> *[Interviewer: library induction?]*
> *I don't remember any of that, I have to say – I don't really remember that being very useful, I don't think. I was sort of sitting there thinking*

> *well I'm not going to need the textbook, I'm going to be taught everything I need to learn so, I don't remember e-books being promoted. (Student)*

The longstanding criticism pertaining to the information overload during the period that such induction courses are run was raised by students from a number of institutions:

> *It is only the one hit when we first start. We could perhaps do with refresher courses. It's [medicine] quite a pressurised course. (Student)*

This sentiment was also acknowledged by a number of the librarians, who were endeavoring to develop a programme of supplementary training to complement the induction course. It also reflects a growing practice in the profession, mentioned as early as 2003 in the literature:

> However, students need this [session] less when they arrive than when they are in their second or third years, therefore this academic year there has been a move to have more open sessions. (Quoted in Gold Leaf, 2003, p.125)

There was evidence of a small number of students who had experienced training through workshops and similar sessions *later* in their courses. In one university, there are two major learning resource areas within the library in which sessions on teaching and pedagogy are held. These areas also accommodate *ad hoc* sessions on e-resource instruction:

> *We have drop-in sessions from the e-resources at the learning [resource area] and the biology [resource area] for the students. It is for all users who are there using that particular learning space and they are all undergrads. and postgrads. They're not really specific sessions for e-books, but when we do make the announcements we do mention that you can get help on e-books and on journals. (Student library worker)*

Although the potential of the library's website to promote e-books is deemed significant by both NeBO librarians and the literature (e.g. Woods, 2007), there was only a scant awareness of such a promotional approach amongst students. This apparent ignorance of the potential of the library website has been reported elsewhere in the literature, and is an issue worthy of attention by the profession:

> Recently, OCLC's *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources* study confirmed that digital libraries have a limited or nonexistent role in people's lives today. .. Of those queried, 84% of the respondents began their search process by accessing a Web search engine, compared to 1% that began with the library's Web site. The library's resources are increasingly less visible to today's information consumers… 33% did not know the library had a Web site (Buczynski, 2007, p.195)

In the same article, Buczynski indicates that within his university "[t]he focus of campaigns has been on building awareness about a library's Website, the

library's "place," so to speak, in today's online information universe" (p.196), and offers suggestions for promoting the website.

There seemed to be a widespread belief that the only way students (and some academic staff) had become aware of e-textbooks was by encountering them as sources flagged up in the library's OPAC**.** The literature endorses the importance of adding e-book titles to the catalogue (e.g. Beall, 2009; Springer, 2008; Belanger, 2007). Whilst the authors would argue that this is 'access' rather than *bone fide* promotion, for many students this constitutes what they perceived to be the only way they have been made aware of e-books as a resource:

> *The most obvious way they promote the use of e-libraries is put a link under the listing of a particular item in the catalogue saying that there's an electronic alternative there. (Student)*
>
> *I haven't seen the library promoting them. Only when I search for a particular book will the system tell me it is available in e-format. (Student)*

Interestingly, the comments of students are also mirrored in the responses of academic staff:

> *The way I found out whether there's an e-book or not, you know there's the little icon that appears when you search some books, if the little icon appears it means there's an e-book available as electronic. This is how I know. It's in the OPAC. (Academic)*

With respect to both groups of users, it is evident that these views are not limited to the NeBO study, but are reported in other surveys:

> I don't know anything about [e-books] – I just happened to come across one on the catalogue… [and] accessed the e-book because it was easily accessible. (Pan, Byrne & Murphy, 2009, p.S19).

In Figure 1 (above), it is apparent that printed promotional material (flyers, posters, handouts, etc) is widely used within libraries, including promotional literature or posters pertaining to the NeBO e-textbooks. However, students often appear to have little awareness of it, and whilst many were extremely appreciative of the support they get from the library, the following typical response indicates that they were critical of the lack of advertising material:

> *From a student's point of view, I think that the help we get from the library is fantastic, but the advertising of the particular resources isn't quite… (Student)*

<mark>3.4 *Responses of the academic staff*</mark>

There was marginally more awareness by academic staff of the role of the library in promoting e-books. However, the array of responses that indicated that academic staff were unaware of, or had seen no, promotional activity was surprisingly high.

A number of staff acknowledged the significance of the role of the subject librarian as an invaluable source of information about new e-textbook and e-book titles, and participants cited the conventional promotional activities of distributing lists of titles, in particular the use of e-mail – a method which is highly regarded and effective:

> *I mean, we had lists sent round by our subject librarian, and if I've got the time I go through them. I do not engage as much with my subject librarian as I should. (Academic)*

> *Tend to get an email from the subject librarian coming around if there's a new collection out, something like that. (Academic)*

The assertion by Torio, "By human nature, people praise products that work for them. In essence, conversation is used as a marketing tool" (Buczynski, 2007, p.197), introduces another promotional approach. Word-of-mouth marketing of e-resources as an established approach has been widely reported in the literature for students (Millet & Chamberlain, 2007) and for both students and academic staff (Buczynski, 2007). The NeBO study also revealed that informal one-to-one requests for information and support constitute an important mode of promotion, something that was also commented on by the postgraduate and research students:

> *I asked one of the librarians for help with research and I was pointed in the direction of an e-book. (Academic)*

Some of the librarians articulated a difficulty in getting academic staff to respond to their promotional advances, and it is fair to say that some academic staff admitted that they did not always respond and offered insights into their motives. Such reasons centred not only on the pressures of time, but also on issues surrounding the confluence of established print sources and new technologies, as exemplified in the following quotation:

> *…even if it's advertised as a, "come and learn about e-books", I don't think I'd go, because it's not high enough [on my agenda]…I suppose I was a bit like that with electronic journals. While I could access the journals by hand, then that was what I was comfortable with. When I discovered there were some journals that I couldn't access, you know that had to be accessed electronically, then I learnt how to do it. It's a bit like that with e-books, you know, while there are printed books I'm happy with those… (Academic)*

Another traditional approach which libraries provide, often in conjunction with the e-publisher or aggregator, is e-book trials. The value of this was generally recognised by those academic staff who had experience of trials, but it was rarely mentioned:

> *A: Well they do if they are special offers of, you know, free access for a certain length of time. They tend to email you and say, have a look at this and let us know what you think.*
> *B: [They get preview copies] on a month's trial. (Academics)*

4. The role of academics and their departments

Implicit in the literature is the suggestion that a comprehensive promotional strategy should extend beyond the library. There was a consensus view by the librarians in the collection management study that there is a critical and complementary role for academics in the promotion of e-textbooks. Academics or academic departments can champion e-books in a variety of ways, for example, by linking from VLE modules and reading lists, and through verbal recommendations:

> But those books have been embedded within their course… and they're in WebCT as well – and their championed by the academics… (Librarian)

> …because the students will listen to what the academics say in regard to what they are recommending – if they are recommended to look at en e-book they will go there, I think. (Librarian)

That academics can significantly influence the take up of e-resources in general is well-established in the literature, and the findings of an earlier five-year JISC project into the use of e-resources in UK tertiary libraries amassed considerable evidence to show how influential academic staff can be in promoting the effective use of e-resources (Urquhart *et al,* 2003, p.176). More recently the SuperBook pilot study for NeBO underlined the fact that "all disciplines emphasised the significant role of academic staff in promoting or publicising an awareness of e-books" (Armstrong & Lonsdale, 2005, p.43). There is also growing evidence from other university libraries of the effective role which academics may play in enhancing the use of e-books:

> The link with lecturers has been the most successful way to promote the e-books. (Taylor, 2007, p.225)

> Promotion by academic staff has also been instrumental in improving take-up. (Wilkins, 2007, p.252)

These findings are borne out by evidence coming from students in the NeBO user survey, who felt that academic staff must share the responsibility to promote awareness and knowledge of how to exploit e-books. The following quote is indicative of several responses:

> …some contribution from academics, as well, in terms of advertising it … from the departments themselves, and not just being left to the library and expect students to go and find them on their own. Because once [students] are aware that such things exists and once they are aware that they have all this facility… they can take care of themselves. Get them hooked on, but they have to go there first. (Student)

The study also offered insights into the perceptions of the students as to why e-books were being promoted over print books. There was a large body of opinion that academic staff promote the electronic version of the textbook as an alternative to the print when there may be difficulties of access due to the limited number of print copies:

> Stating it as an alternative to a key textbook, which makes sense since they wouldn't want students complaining there aren't enough [printed] textbooks in the library…students feel "e-books are handy as a back-up, but should NEVER replace print copies." (Student)

> *There are some books that are not available in the library for some of our courses and then they ask you to go somewhere and find it, an e-copy of it. (Student)*

In several institutions, academic staff felt the need to promote e-textbooks because cost is a seen to be driving factor:

> *[Interviewer: What about the academics, do they promote e-books?] Only when books are expensive, they recommend them. (Student)*
>
> *A: It's not about convenience for my students: cost is what drives them.*
> *B: Because the hard copy is actually limited you know ..I have …*
> *A: [Interrupts] Yes. Because there are a limited number of physical copies, my students would then tend to go and buy it. £35-£40 a book, they'd rather access it online free. And at Master's level, I'm only teaching one module for four weeks in an academic year. I wouldn't have the gall to suggest that a student spend between £35-£50 on a book that I'm then going to tell them is only background reading, I wouldn't do it. This is going to make them read more [e-books]. (Academics)*

4.1   Reasons for lack of promotion

Although it is clear that the role of academics was seen as crucial, and that there are good reasons for academic promotion, the two studies revealed that across all the survey institutions academic staff rarely actively promote e-books. Indeed, academic staff themselves admitted to undertaking little proactive promotion of the use of e-textbooks.

The responses of staff and students regarding promotion correlate with those from another question which sought to discover the degree to which academic departments offered instruction in the use of e-books. The overwhelming response was that academic departments are offering little instruction in the use of e-books; indeed, in six institutions students across a range of disciplines indicated that their courses did not have any provision for integrated instruction.

The reasons given for the lack of promotion tended to concern the irrelevancy of existing e-book titles to the curriculum and the teaching needs of staff, but also reflect the perceived advantages of the printed textbook:

> *I'm not that proactive – I'm not saying that that is the way to go – I just let them explore. Again, myself not being very enthusiastic about the e-books for the reason I said before, if a student comes to me and says, "What shall I use?" – I say use whatever you feel comfortable with, but I would recommend the sturdiness and the flexibility of the print version versus the quirkiness of the [electronic], and the façade of ease of use of the e-books. So, I wouldn't recommend; I wouldn't sort of say, "Oh never touch them because they are not very good" but I would say between the two of them I would recommend the printed [version]… (Academic)*

An extension of the sentiments expressed in the above response can be found in the discussion surrounding an important issue on the reading and use of e-textbooks, which was identified in the user study. In exploring how students use e-textbooks, a major finding suggests that a primary reason for use is the easy and immediate access to factual information. One consequence of this is the perception held by some academics that an e-textbook might lead students to focus on a narrow range of information, dissuading them from exploring related aspects of the topic (Armstrong & Lonsdale, 2009b). This was cited by some academic staff as a potential reason for not proactively promoting the e-textbook:

> *You see, there is another issue which we addressed earlier in the discussion. I think that the difference between the print and the e-book, and I think the students will go – given a choice they will go more towards the e-book; but in the current format I think it's their disadvantage going for the e-books for the simple reason that they… are much more focused. They know what they want – they want an answer to a particular question … they are not necessarily there to have the perspective, the large perspective. With an e-book you'd have the chance of just going focussed, because it's a small piece of text … as opposed to in a [printed] textbook where, if nothing else, if you are marginally curious you'll have a chance of just skating a little bit on that particular page if nothing else, instead of having only two paragraphs, you'll have maybe a figure here, a figure here, and you'll kind of orient yourself. (Academic)*

Another reason why academics may not promote e-books was articulated by students as the expectation on the part of the academic staff (and sometimes the students themselves) that they should use their own initiative to find out how to use e-resources:

> *What I've found is that some lecturers, certainly at postgraduate level, say, you're big boys and girls now so go off and find your own basically. Go and do your research! (Student)*

Academic staff themselves also admit that they offer guidance about e-resources rather than e-books *per se*, because they do not believe they have the expertise, or the ability to keep abreast of e-publishing developments:

> *No. To be honest, I talk about a range of resources. I do a kind of a sheet, and talk to students about the range of resources. You know…there's a sentence about, you know, "you can get electronic journals, e-books de dah de dah", but I will tend to signpost people to the library. Partly because I don't feel I'm an expert at that… you know, things are changing so quickly that I feel that it's easier if they [the librarians] provide that kind of access. (Academic)*

> *Within the first year methods course [in psychology] there's a number of systematic sessions. But I find students nowadays know more than we do, they know how to use these e-resources… Maybe not with e-books, but they find their way around pretty quickly. In practical classes you see them with their mobile phones, the computer, having a*

conversation, doing all these things, and interleaving them very skillfully. They can teach us!! (Academic)

4.2 Methods of promotion by academics

Although the incidence of promotion by academic staff appears limited, a variety of ways of promotion was identified. These were largely conventional, with no innovatory approaches, and amongst the most successful are the inclusion of titles in course reading lists and VLEs, and recommendations through lectures. With respect to reading lists, librarians observed their importance:

> *… [the NeBO textbooks] that we got for medicine were on our reading lists so – and they're very driven by their reading lists. (Librarian)*

The significance of this approach – albeit conventional – is echoed in the literature by one university librarian who maintains that "…now that e-books feature on reading lists we feel that [academics] are truly "on board"" (Wilkins, 2007, p.252). However, the assumption that reading lists are entirely the domain of the lecturer has to be questioned. In several institutions the proactive role of the subject librarian who scrutinised the reading lists of academic staff and added the links to e-books was acknowledged. A 2003 JISC report made the same point:

> …on contacting the librarians concerned, most said that information from academics came from within the context of the library checking reading lists to match against e-book lists: it was not initiated by the academics. (Gold Leaf, 2003)

The significance of VLEs as a conduit for access to e-resources, and increasingly e-books, has been well documented in the literature:

> VLEs have challenged this concept of library and information resources as being separate to the actions of teaching and learning, and have gradually brought the two together. (Appleton, 2005, p.55)

Access to e-books through VLEs constitutes a part of our second article in this journal, but it must be recognised that availability within the VLE itself offers a means of promotion akin to our earlier discussions on the OPAC and the library website. Indeed, although the use of VLEs as a means of promoting e-books was limited, responses from both university librarians and users suggest that it is a powerful means of promotion:

> *But those books have been embedded within their course – that's what they use… so it's incredibly high use for what is quite a small course – of course, and they're in WebCT as well – and they're championed by the academics… (Librarian)*

> *Because ours is an e-learning course, and also part-time, it tends to be taught very much from Blackboard VLE. And when a module is launched on us, then you will find there will be a reading list [on the VLE] and there'll be links to various e-books or journals or whatever. (Student)*

> *[Libraries] don't [promote e-books]. I would say that the only, if you could regard it as promotion, the only thing that promotes e-books really is basically links that lecturers have put on our area of Blackboard to various books. I would not know about the* Research Methods in Education *book had my tutor not made a link to the e-book copy in the library. (Student)*

> *A: By placing links on the module home page.*
> *B: Yes, I do the same, I place a book or a part of a book. (Academics)*

Finally, students' awareness of e-books was clearly heightened by references in lectures and seminars, as this representative quote reveals:
> *By mentioning them in reading lists, seminars, lectures and setting assignments which depend upon the use of them. (Student)*

There is an important caveat with respect to the findings on academic involvement. Although there was little promotional activity by academics evident at the time of this research, the NeBO quantitative benchmarking web surveys of 2008 and 2009 (which extended beyond the populations being discussed here) revealed a gradual increase in their involvement. In terms of the subject areas covered by the JISC collections, "the proportion of university teachers that *do not* recommend or actively encourage their students to use e-book resources seems to be falling away rapidly" (Estelle, *et al,* 2009).

Despite the clear significance of promotion by academics, there was also a persistent belief present in the views of both students and staff (as implied in some of the earlier responses) that it is the *library* that should and does take the responsibility for instruction and promotion:
> *It was the library mostly, but we were taught during orientation some people from the library came and taught us. They tell us how to find it in the catalogue. [It was included in the induction] for engineering students. (Student)*

> *…and also I think the library actually tends to spearhead in these things. (Student)*

5.   The role of publishers and aggregators
In discussing a strategic approach to marketing e-books, a number of authors have underlined the involvement of a third stakeholder: the publishers and aggregators (Gethin, 2005; Schmidt, 2007; Thompson & Sharp, 2009). Librarians identified two obvious areas in which the publishers and aggregators can contribute to promotional activities within the institution, both to the library and to academic departments.

One traditional form of promotion is associated with trials of e-textbooks. In several instances the libraries invited academic staff from the appropriate departments to participate in the scrutiny of the new titles and platform:
> *…a publisher that has got a good bundle of basic medical texts, which I thought would be good for the foundation year and the undergrads, and certainly I showed it to one – or I indicated it to one of the tutors who*

thought certainly that the books contained content that they would be interested in… I did flag it up with her when we had a small trial. (Librarian)

However, there was some slight evidence suggesting, that although aggregators may offer e-textbook demonstrations, librarians may have difficulties in attracting academics to the sessions:

But strangely enough a lot of the academics aren't that interested in having things demonstrated – they might read a flyer and pass it on …but when… you're trying to organise a session, they're always far too busy – it's quite disappointing really. (Librarian)

Publishers and aggregators produce a range of physical material: posters, leaflets, mouse mats and bookmarks, at the very least; and earlier research has shown that "several aggregators were of the opinion that libraries might make greater use of their promotional products" (Lonsdale and Armstrong, 2008). More recently the authors have identified a number of companies that are producing web resources for libraries to use to support promotion and training. However, although such publicity material may be useful, and used, in some circumstances by libraries, at least four institutions had reservations. In addition to the qualms related to promoting one format or one platform discussed earlier, other reasons were identified: because of timing, because of their inability to use it, because it was too general and pointed users to the wrong (non-institution-friendly) URL, or because it was not sufficiently dynamic:

I remember last year when I was struggling for material and we had a couple of e-book trials going on and one of the publishers rang me out of the blue and just said, 'Oh we're going to send you all this promotional material' and it was really – it was just a huge amount of material and it was like, 'Well where am I going to put it' – we are very short of space, and appropriate forums and … (Librarian)

…but the problem with all these things is, you know, they'll often have a link to the resource and we don't link to it at that URL, because we embed EZProxy in our links, so these things are often like – 'If you'd asked us for our information, and then you could have put it into a tailored poster and then sent it to us, that would have been great' – but just to receive unsolicited posters and things like that, and materials – it's just – bin! (Librarian)

We're not really encouraged to put posters up or have branded [i.e. non-institutional branded] leaflets – they are quite strict about the branding and everything and things – it's unlikely that we'll put up a poster – for MyiLibrary or something… (Librarian)

Giving them a bookmark's not going to do it. (Librarian)

5.1   Student and academic responses

Unsurprisingly, there was scant awareness by students or academics of the library employing publisher's marketing material to promote e-textbooks.

However, in addition to publishers and aggregators marketing their products to the library, responses showed that they are now promoting directly to academic departments:

> *Recently – I think it was in health – where somebody had had some direct marketing to a school to buy some particular e-books and… (Librarian)*

> *I was going to mention as well that our two main book suppliers do have methods of promoting new, or about to be published, material in print format and they're at different stages but just about to do the equivalent for e-books as well. Lecturers will be able to sign up... They just enter their subject areas of interest and they'd be able to automatically get e-mail directly or from aggregators. (Librarian)*

On some occasions, this may happen without the library's knowledge or involvement.

> *A: They <u>do</u> do direct marketing, I think, by e-mail…*
> *B: A lot of time we wouldn't have known. (Librarians)*

Some academic staff understood the potential of publishers linking and working directly with academic departments to provide information about new e-textbook titles:

> *Information about new e-book titles in the field is best, probably, directly from the publishers to the various lecturers rather than to the librarians – because, you see, there is a danger: I wouldn't want on the one hand to overwork the librarians, but also I wouldn't want them to make the choices on behalf of us [2nd academic agrees]…So, for the publisher, don't bother with the librarians, just send it directly to us because we will be the user, not the librarians and it is for us to assert a certain end, after that sell to the students. (Academics)*

However, there were also suggestions that publishers are not marketing their e-books sufficiently:

> *I receive and I'm sure you {to colleague} receive from the publishers all sorts of information about textbooks appearing and new editions, and so on and so forth… all of them will be classical textbooks, which may be the sort that small print says there is an electronic version of it… but I never received anything from the e-books publishers… and I think… if they want to make it work, they should be much more aggressive in sort of sending the information out and sort of enticing people. (Academic)*

> *[Interviewer: In certain disciplines, the e-publishers themselves will contact academic staff – is this happening?]*
> *A: Not that I'm aware of. (Academic)*

Where marketing fails to develop an awareness of e-books in academic staff, awareness of e-books may not permeate the student body:

> The academic is only imperfectly in receipt, or not in receipt at all, of information on e-books from his or her accustomed channels . . . The student is therefore unlikely to get information about e-books from the

reading list, despite the fact that this, according to previous research, has the greatest single influence on student reading. (Gold Leaf, 2003, p. 20)

6.   Role of JISC

With respect to the place of JISC in supporting university library promotional endeavours, aside from the marketing of JISC's "subsidised deals", NeBO was seen as a marketing opportunity by some institutions – indeed, one mentioned the added kudos for e-books brought about by an academic study:

I think in a way they have given us the opportunity to promote these collections as a part of a national research study which gives the whole e-book provision a slightly different flavour, which would obviously be interesting to academics as a piece of research work – so it enables us to up the profile of the whole service. (Librarian)

…you know it's not just a whim of a few librarians in [town] – it is actually a national project. It's something that's quite serious, and the publishers are interested and so on. So it kind of gives us a bit of extra validity and a bit of extra profile. (Librarian)

During the initial phase of the project, JISC distributed a considerable amount of marketing materials to participating libraries, and several institutions acknowledged a specific debt to the project with regard to promotion:

…the outcomes of the project will help us in terms of collection development, in terms of promoting our resources. (Librarian)

*A: It probably has helped with promotion because we did e-mail out to …
B: So I think it's probably given us another kick to our e-book promotion, which is a good thing. (Librarians)*

Given that the JISC e-Book Working Group produced promotional materials for libraries and users some years ago, and that NeBO is drawing to its conclusion, a question can be posed as to the role that JISC might have in supporting the ongoing take-up of e-books.

7.   Conclusions

In keeping with the literature, the findings of the qualitative studies reveal that a number of stakeholders is involved in promotion of e-books in universities; however this research has suggested that the library predominates. A range of approaches is offered, but at present these appear to be largely conventional, with some evidence of the use of more innovatory methods. A primary mode of promotion of e-resources to students is by means of the induction course, however there is dissatisfaction about the timing of such courses, and students recognise a need for supplementing induction with additional training later in their studies. It is important to alert librarians to the fact that the need for training is not associated solely with the student body; academic staff and library staff have similar needs. While it is inevitable that much of the training embraces e-resources in general, there was an underlying feeling that more emphasis needs to be placed on the awareness and use of the e-book.

Whilst acknowledging the approaches being undertaken by the library, the research suggests that there is little awareness among the student body of this activity for e-books, although students do recognise that the library offers promotion in the broader sphere of e-resources. Students often perceive e-book entries in the OPAC as a form of promotion, and fail to distinguish between pro-active promotion and access. Unlike students, members of the academic staff were more aware of promotional activities of the library and recognised the value of the subject librarians' alerting services in particular.

Librarians, and even students, considered that academic staff must share the responsibility to promote an awareness and knowledge of how to exploit e-books. In spite of the potential of academic staff to influence students' take-up of e-textbooks, there is little evidence of this, although there is some degree of training in the area of e-resources in general. The reasons for this are complex but focus on a lack of understanding about e-books, sometimes brought about by their isolation from the e-book trade.

With respect to the other significant potential contributor to promotion, publishers or aggregators, there was virtually no awareness of their role in promotion and marketing directly to academic staff and students. A case could be made for publishers and aggregators to enhance their marketing strategies for e-books, not only to libraries but more specifically targeted at academic staff. However it is important for them to be cognisant of the issues surrounding the non-use of their material in libraries. Their greater involvement would enable academics to develop an awareness of e-books and expertise in using this format and, as importantly, to promote the use of e-books to students.

Ideally, promotional activities for e-resources need to be framed within a strategic plan, which targets the promotion of specific resources such as e-books. This strategy should indicate the major players and the potential roles that they may take. Seven years on from the conclusions of the Gold Leaf report it would appear that – at least in so far as the libraries surveyed in NeBO – they are still only moving slowly towards the formulation of such strategies.

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