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The Evolution of E-books and Interlibrary Loan in Academic Libraries

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Abstract

As academic libraries add electronic monographs (e-books) to their collections in increasing numbers, they are frequently losing the ability to lend this portion of their collections via Interlibrary Loan (ILL) due to licensing restrictions. Recently, new options have emerged as alternatives to traditional ILL for e-books. These options introduce new opportunities for collaboration across library departments and within consortia. This article discusses the changing nature of resource sharing as related to e-books, examines e-book lending capabilities as they currently exist, and presents alternative models to traditional ILL, including short-term lending, purchase on demand and print on demand.

Keywords: Interlibrary Loan; Electronic Books; Purchase on Demand

Introduction

The acquisition and adoption of online resources and systems have dramatically changed the nature of Interlibrary Loan (ILL) requests and workflows during the past ten years. Due to the widespread availability of online databases and web-based discovery tools, researchers now have access to many more citations and with that, the expectations that the material can be obtained quickly—and in electronic format. The use of electronic copies of non-returnable items such as journal articles has improved turnaround times dramatically. Improvements to ILL systems have streamlined ILL workflows and allowed requests for non-returnable items to be unmediated, meaning that a patron's request is sent directly to a potential lending library with no staff intervention at the borrowing library. Unfortunately, due to the processing and transit time required for delivering a physical item, ILL departments have generally not been able to offer the same level of service for returnable items, mainly books. E-books, however, offer the potential for ILL departments to provide desktop delivery and a much faster turnaround time, so long as patrons are willing to accept the content in this format.

Most e-books are licensed rather than sold to libraries, and it is common for publishers and vendors to prohibit in their license agreements the use of e-books to fulfill ILL requests. They believe that allowing ILL in this format would facilitate unlimited sharing of the digital copy and discourage libraries from purchasing their own copies, negatively impacting revenue. This qualification has often been considered a non-negotiable "deal breaker," leaving libraries with the option to purchase access to the content with no ILL privileges, or refrain from purchasing the content at all.[1] As a result, libraries have been adding an increasing body of content to their collections for which they may have no ILL privileges.

There has been some speculation in the library literature about the impact e-books may have on resource sharing, and whether it may be possible to lend e-books via the traditional ILL model. This article supplements the literature by synthesizing the alternatives to traditional ILL for e-books and framing the issue in the context of the ILL environment of the past decade. Ways will also be discussed in which those alternatives present new opportunities for library staff involved in ILL, acquisitions and collection development to work collaboratively to benefit patrons by meeting their ever-increasing expectations for fast delivery of the content they desire.

A Decade of Change: A Literature Review

A steady increase in ILL transactions, as evidenced by national and local statistics, is ex-

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plained by several factors discussed in a 2007 ARL white paper on interlibrary loan.[2] These factors include the increase in usage of discovery tools such as Internet search engines, Google Books, and improvements to ILL systems, all of which have made the process of requesting items through ILL more visible and convenient. These improvements have also streamlined workflows by creating a more efficient processes and faster turnaround times. The ability to deliver electronic copies of non-returnables to patrons' desktops has been particularly popular with patrons, and many of these transactions now occur with no staff involvement at the borrowing library. All of these improvements have increased patron expectations and heightened the popularity of ILL services. Furthermore, libraries have increasingly relied on their ILL services due to a changing shift in priority from owning items to providing access to them.[3] E-books theoretically enable libraries to improve turnaround times for book delivery and to offer the convenience of desktop uploading, as has been the case for non-returnables. But the lending of e-books is hampered by restrictions in e-book licenses that prohibit interlibrary lending.[4]

Because of such restrictions, it may be that the traditional ILL model may not be the most appropriate way to deliver e-books to patrons.[5] As Woods and Ireland speculate, it is possible that emerging e-book interlibrary loan models may resemble document supply transactions involving central suppliers or aggregators.[6] Other specific, viable alternatives to traditional ILL are discussed in the literature that present new opportunities to leverage technology to serve patrons in new and hopefully better ways.[7]

Mary E. Jackson's early vision of a "get it" button incorporates the purchase on demand option that many ILL departments are currently implementing permitting items requested through ILL to be purchased and added to the collection.[8] This process requires close collaboration between ILL, acquisitions and collection development staff.[9] It is an option that makes sense when the material falls within the scope of the collecting policies; the content can be purchased in print or electronic formats, according to the patron's and library's preferences. Moreover,

this may be the only option for filling the ILL request in cases where no lender can be found.

Arguably, the most viable alternative to traditional ILL for e-books, short-term e-book lending, was first introduced in 2003 and is just now being offered to academic libraries in the United States by e-book vendors including EBL, ebrary, EBSCO and MyiLibrary.[10] Under short-term lending e-book models currently available to academic libraries in the United States, the borrowing library pays a percentage of the publisher's e-book list price for short-term access to the e-book, the cost being engineered to be competitive with that of a typical ILL transaction for a print book. This provides an alternative to traditional ILL in cases where the book isn't available to borrow or is difficult to obtain, or if the patron wishes to have the material very quickly and finds the e-book format acceptable.

The Current Interlibrary Loan Environment

During the past decade, the ILL landscape has changed significantly due to the adoption of e-resources by libraries and their patrons. Accommodating unmediated ILL has become part of an established workflow in many academic libraries. Turnaround times have improved due to the electronic delivery of articles and electronic documents, and improvements in ILL software have helped to streamline such transactions. These service improvements have in turn increased patrons' expectations. As McHone-Chase states, "Technological innovations have created faster and more efficient ILL operations over the years, while at the same time users' expectations are constantly growing—they want their materials fast, electronically, and free (no matter how rare those materials may be)."[11] While electronic delivery is possible for an increasing number of articles and documents, this is only the case for print books when small sections or chapters, perhaps, can be scanned and delivered, and of course where this falls under "fair use" guidelines. BY comparison, the manual process of requesting, loaning and returning a physical book still involves costly, time-consuming and staff-intensive processing.

E-books have been widely available to libraries via vendors such as netLibrary and ebrary since

1999. Since then, e-books have gradually been adopted by academic libraries as more content has become available from a host of different vendors, as access models have evolved from the one-book, one-user model to a multiple simultaneous use model, and as patron demand has increased.

Noted earlier, the vast majority of e-books currently available to academic libraries are licensed, rather than sold. License agreements can only be negotiated to a certain point. In some cases, they are also revised or renegotiated, as was the case recently when Harper Collins changed its license agreements to limit the number of e-book check-outs before requiring the library to purchase another copy. The "First Sale Doctrine" historically has enabled libraries to use ILL to lend books they have purchased for their collections, but it seems that with e-books, these rights have been somewhat diminished. As Clifford Lynch stated in 2001, "In the print world, and with the doctrine of first sale, libraries could acquire and subsequently circulate and preserve any works that were made available in the consumer marketplace. In a world of digital information, e-book readers, licenses, and rights management systems, libraries have no such automatic capability, and can function only at the pleasure of the publishers."[12]

Even when e-books can be used to fill ILL requests, it is not always easy to do so. For example, the publisher, Springer, allows its e-books to be used to fulfill ILL requests, but there is a caveat. Since Springer provides chapter-level PDFs for each e-book, the process of providing more than one chapter can be laborious and time consuming. Some libraries and/or consortia have created solutions such as a digital dropbox to expedite processing of Springer e-books. It takes time for ILL staff to learn these new procedures and to understand if and how different e-books can be used for ILL.[13] Library staff must honor the ILL privileges for each license signed and its provisions may not be easily accessible or readily understood. Many libraries store this information with other license information in the Electronic Resource Management (ERM) software. ILL staff need to be trained in using this software in order to quickly access

license provisions when loan requests are received.

Due to the relative newness of electronic publishing, most e-book titles available to libraries have been published only in the past ten years, and available only in English language. It is much easier for publishers to obtain electronic rights to and publish "born digital" files than it is to secure electronic rights to previously published material (other than items in the public domain). Thus the preponderance of e-book resources are those recently published. This leads to the realization that traditional ILL may often be the only option for filling older and more obscure book requests.

As publishers generally prove resistant to allowing ILL of their e-books and as more libraries opt to purchase access to e-books rather than purchase outright the print equivalents, ILL staff may encounter an increasing number of instances where no lenders can be found to fulfill book requests. Rather than simply cancelling those requests, they might consider alternatives to the traditional ILL model in offering this content. Some alternatives to traditional ILL are discussed in detail below.

Short-Term Purchase

Short-term purchase (often referred to as "short-term lending" by e-book providers) is a good choice when no lender can be found for a book request and where the book is available in e-book format. It is also ideal when fast access to the content is desired and when a library does not wish to purchase the item for its collection. Rather than borrowing a title from another library, ILL staff purchases short-term access to the e-book in order to fulfill the request. Since this option has been promoted by e-book vendors as an alternative to traditional ILL, the cost generally is comparable to that of a print book ILL transaction. Deciding whether or not this option is viable must be made at the local level where actual local costs are known and can be taken into account.

In 2003, EBL began offering another option called "Short-term Circulation".[14] This has evolved into the company's standard suite of

four short-term purchase options. In this case, pricing is established by individual publishers, so it can vary from title to title, but generally the access periods are priced as follows: 1 day for 5-15% of the e-book list price; 1 week for 10-20% of the list price; 2 weeks for 15-25% of the list price, and 4 weeks for 20-30% of the list price. The entire block of EBL's e-book collection is available for short-term purchase. EBL is currently working with OCLC to be listed as a vendor for OCLC WorldCat Resource Sharing. This will enable ILL staff to discover EBL e-books in the course of their normal workflow and initiate a short-term purchase in the same way a traditional ILL borrowing request occurs, with the borrowing library being charged via the OCLC Fee Management.

In 2007, the e-book vendor, MyiLibrary, partnered with the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (CISTI) to provide an affordable model for lending e-books through ILL.[15] The service was called "eBook Loans," and was available to CISTI customers for a fee of twenty-five dollars. It enjoyed modest success in its first nine months but was hampered by patron dislike of the e-book format, and it was ultimately discontinued after the first year due to funding issues. MyiLibrary recently launched a new short-term purchase option for libraries. The service, available through OCLC WorldCat Resource Sharing, offers a nine-day access period for 15% of the e-book list price. MyiLibrary is now listed, using the symbol IDILL, as a lender in the OCLC WorldCat Resource Sharing system.

ebrary currently offers a short-term purchase option for approximately 125,000 of its e-book titles. When using the patron-driven acquisition option, ebrary provides a 24-hour access period for 10% of the publisher's list price, and a seven day access period for 15% of the publisher's list price. They are currently working with OCLC to become established as a lender in the OCLC WorldCat Resource Sharing system.

The e-book division of EBSCO (now incorporating what was formerly netLibrary) currently is working on short-term purchase options that will be available late in 2011 or early 2012. They plan to offer one, seven, 14 or 28 day access op-

tions and are working with their publishers to make eligible as many of their e-books as possible for short-term purchase.

Short-term purchase is a good choice when no lender can be found to fulfill a book request and the book is available in e-book format. It is also ideal when fast access to the content is desired and when a library does not wish to purchase the item.

Purchase on Demand

A great deal has been written and presented on this topic in recent years. With a purchase on demand model, also commonly referred to as "demand-driven acquisitions" or "patron-driven purchasing," libraries obtain materials for which there is a demonstrated need and at the time the need is demonstrated.[16] This customized approach has been described as a "just-in-time" acquisition, as distinct from traditional, librarian-driven "just-in-case" acquisitions. In a climate of uncertain and often shrinking budgets for materials, and especially for monograph, a dynamic, just-in-time approach to collection development makes a great deal of sense. Many libraries are implementing patron-driven acquisition by adding records to the online catalog for electronic or print books that are not owned by that library. When patrons access one of these titles a certain number of times, or when a patron specifically request that an item be purchased (in the case of print books), the library makes the purchase. While patron driven models can potentially offer cost savings, in making a large un-owned collection available, libraries must also plan carefully and monitor their expenditures closely to avoid quickly spending through their budgets.

When content is available in e-book format and the patron finds this format acceptable, purchasing an e-book to fulfill an ILL request can provide a very fast turnaround time. For this process, an acquisition involves identifying scenarios where traditional ILL cannot be used to obtain a print book, typically when a lender cannot be found or the item is newly published. But when a print book is identified as needed by a patron, a vendor is located, the item is rush ordered, minimally processed and given to the

patron. Upon return, it is fully processed and then added to the collection. Similarly for an e-book, a vendor is located, the item is ordered, and the access link is supplied to the patron.

A common scenario especially suited for patron-driven acquisitions occurs when monographs are too new to be available to borrow from another library. These titles can often be found in electronic or print format through one or more online vendors and quickly purchased. Although improving over time, many e-books are not being published simultaneously with their print counterparts. Publishers are still refining their electronic and print publishing processes. In order for purchase on demand to be a viable purchasing method for e-books, the publication time must be predictable.

ILL, acquisitions and collection development staff need to work together to establish and fine-tune a workflow that allows the library to purchase books on demand in a more automated and efficient fashion. In the process of determining the workflow for this type of purchase, staff can also set criteria such as format and price that help broadly to define which items are appropriate for purchase. Patron input into these decisions can also be solicited through customization of the patron request screens. For instance, the request form could pose questions such as "Do you think it is appropriate to purchase this item for the collection?" and "Would it be acceptable to receive this content in e-book format?" The Get it System Toolkit (GIST), open source software that works in conjunction with the ILLiad Interlibrary Loan management software, has been developed at SUNY Geneseo to help manage the workflow related to purchase on demand originating with an ILL patron request.[17] The software was designed to integrate ILL and acquisitions into one workflow, and to record data about these requests that inform decision making by ILL, acquisitions and collection development staff.

Print on Demand

Book printing machines such as the Espresso Book Machine have been purchased by some libraries to print books on an as-needed basis. The Espresso Book Machine can print a soft-bound book in a matter of minutes. Like purchase on demand, this model is appealing because it allows libraries to provide books on a just-in-time, rather than just-in-case basis. However, a major issue with print on demand is that libraries must have not only a digital file to print from, but also the rights to do so. Although the Espresso Book Machine's EspressNet database contains more than three million titles, many of those were published prior to 1932 and mostly beyond copyright, and generally are of less interest to borrowers. Thus far, publishers have been slow to add new titles.[18] There is an opportunity here for other entities to collaborate to digitize titles that could be made available to print on demand, but no such initiatives currently exist.

As Suzanne Wilson-Higgins states, "POD is probably not the 'new interlibrary loan' heralded two years ago but books printed on demand and associated services will play a key role in helping librarians address patron needs."[19] Unless a critical mass of relevant content becomes available for printing, this technology is unlikely to gain traction in academic libraries.

Consortium Level Purchasing

Consortial e-book purchasing has played a major role in gaining broader access to e-books for libraries and their patrons.[20] Purchasing as a group generally enables the participating libraries to get a better price and/or more content than they would be able to get when purchasing on their own. As long as content is relevant to patrons' needs, it will satisfy some percentage of potential ILL requests. With the increased purchasing power of a consortium comes increased negotiating power permitting libraries, perhaps, to negotiate ILL privileges or shared access across the consortium.

Initiating a consortia-wide purchase of e-books can be an extremely time-consuming process involving the evaluation and selection of both vendors and content. Some consortia such as the Colorado Alliance and the Orbis Cascade Alliance have e-book teams in place that work to develop and implement such purchases. The Orbis Cascade Alliance has implemented a pur-

chase plan through YBP Library Services and EBL whereby all e-book titles purchased by individual libraries can be shared across the Alliance. The Colorado Alliance will conduct a pilot plan in early 2012 through YBP Library Services utilizing both EBL and ebrary and a select set of publishers. The pilot will consider both short term loans and purchases that may be shared among participating members of the consortium.[21]

Conclusion

ILL departments in academic libraries are operating in a time of major change that presents new opportunities to expand and redefine services in ways that best serve evolving patron needs. E-books introduce a new opportunity to provide faster turnaround times and desktop delivery for books requested. In cases where a suitable lender cannot be found and the library wishes to get the content more quickly, viable alternatives are now available for obtaining both e-books and print books, such as purchase on demand, short-term lending and print on demand. Each of these options has pros and cons that must be carefully considered in light of the unique circumstances of each library. Evaluating and implementing these new processes require close collaboration among ILL, acquisitions and collection development departments but the payoffs in working together this way ultimately will result in faster, more responsive and satisfying service to patrons.

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