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Abstract

Streaming videos are a desirable supplement to physical DVDs, but academic libraries may feel intimidated by the cost of adding another format to their collections. However, streaming videos can be surprisingly affordable. In the midst of a budget crunch, the librarians at Western Carolina University were able to start a streaming video program, first by selecting titles à la carte, and later by launching two streaming services, Kanopy (using a demand-driven acquisitions model) and Swank (using a mediated acquisitions model). These streaming videos allow for unlimited simultaneous access by local users as well as distance-education students, and they come with performance rights that help teaching faculty prevent copyright infringement. Despite some limitations with streaming videos, the format has been well received by faculty, students, and staff.

Introduction

Video content that is delivered via a streaming mechanism is a boon to academic libraries. In contrast to physical DVDs, streaming videos offer the possibility of unlimited simultaneous access for students, faculty, and staff, whether they are on campus or remote. They often have generous educational and public performance rights, and in many cases they offer robust accessibility features such as closed captioning and full-text transcripts.

But for libraries of modest means, a survey of the literature about streaming videos can be demoralizing. The professional literature and the discussion at conferences is dominated by large, research-oriented universities with large, research-oriented budgets. The standard for initial investment seems to be a range of \$20,000–\$30,000 (Cross, Fischer, & Rothermel, 2014; Falloon, 2017; Mower et al., 2015). Most of the case studies also point to large allocations of funding after the initial trial period. Librarians who are already struggling with flat budgets and serials creep may be forgiven for assuming that streaming videos are out of their reach.

That was certainly the case at Western Carolina University. The library had discussed the need for some sort of streaming service for a while, but a succession of difficult budgetary years had dampened any real pursuit of new media formats. We regretfully concluded that we could not afford to introduce streaming media to our collections.

We are delighted to report that we were wrong. In this paper we will discuss the events that led us to adopt two streaming video platforms, Kanopy and Swank, and the lessons we learned during our pilot year. We launched our streaming video program with roughly \$12,000, but we are confident that other libraries could explore streaming video on a limited basis with less than \$1,000.

Overview of Streaming Video

Streaming videos are videos that are delivered to viewers via an Internet connection. The concept has been popularized among the general public by popular consumer services such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Video. Within libraries, access to streaming media is generally provided through a third-party platform such as Hoopla or Alexander Street Press. Much less commonly, a library with the technological infrastructure to host its own videos may opt to purchase streaming rights to a film and distribute it from an internal platform; in these cases, the library can be said to truly own the streaming video.

Usually, however, a library will lease a streaming video, not purchase it. This is a crucial distinction. Libraries that subscribe to streaming media platforms offer their patrons unlimited simultaneous access to streaming videos without adding those videos to their permanent collections. This change from owning content to merely providing access is a dramatic philosophic shift from the traditional role

of the library. And, philosophy aside, the practical ramifications are impossible to ignore. Barring physical damage, a DVD need only be purchased once, but when the lease for a streaming video expires, the library must pay again for a new lease or else lose access to the video. Currently, very few vendors offer permanent access to streaming videos.

Leasing a streaming video is considerably more expensive than purchasing a typical DVD. Prices will depend upon factors such as the vendor's acquisitions model, the university's full-time enrollment (FTE), duration of the lease, and discounts available through consortia, if applicable. Libraries should expect to spend in the range of \$100–\$150 or more per title for a one-year license. All of this assumes the film is even available for institutional streaming in the first place.

It is also important to note that films may not be streamed without a strong Internet connection, which in some communities is by no means a given. For all these reasons—cost, title availability, and reliable accessibility—streaming video should be treated as a supplement to a library's DVD collection, not a replacement. With those caveats in mind, streaming media can be an extremely valuable addition that does not need to break the bank to make an impact on service to faculty and students.

Making the Plunge Into Streaming

Located in Cullowhee, North Carolina, Western Carolina University (WCU) is a regional comprehensive institution serving 10,000 FTE students. Prior to the fall semester of 2016, the university's Hunter Library had not deliberately collected streaming videos, though it did have access to some streaming content through North Carolina's statewide consortium, NC LIVE. While there was some interest in developing a more intentional streaming service, it was postponed until such time as their collection development budget increased.

This changed rather abruptly when an urgent request came to us at Hunter Library. Tim Wise, whose work is the basis for the documentary *White Like Me*, was going to be speaking on campus. Teaching faculty wanted to include the film as part of an assignment tied to the appearance, and the library was tasked with getting streaming access to the film with a tight turnaround time (three days).

The process of acquiring streaming access was quick and easy, we were pleasantly surprised to discover. The company that distributes the film offered us two options. We could outright purchase the title, but that was not feasible, since we did not have the infrastructure to host streaming films. Alternatively, we could lease the title from Kanopy, a third-party vendor. We first contacted Kanopy late on a Monday and had unlimited, simultaneous-use access to *White Like Me* on Tuesday.

The speed and ease of the experience convinced us that we could begin acquiring streaming videos on a selective, à la carte basis. However, we still did not feel we could dedicate funding to a streaming video program. Taking out a new subscription to a streaming service, or purchasing a large bundle of streaming videos, was not something we had budgeted for. Moreover, we as a library were going through the painful process of cancelling subscriptions to databases and journal packages. It would have been impolitic to slash beloved resources on one hand while adding movies on the other.

Perhaps we would have remained dilettantes indefinitely, but in the months that followed our initial streaming video acquisition, two factors tipped us into full adoption: our library administration identified streaming video as a priority for growth, and our university counsel sought our help in preventing copyright infractions. They were concerned that our teaching faculty might inadvertently violate copyright law when attempting to give their students access to films via Blackboard. This ultimately became our biggest motivation in acquiring streaming videos. The price tag for a given streaming title is almost invariably higher than the price for a DVD, but that higher price usually includes rights such as public performance rights (PPR), and it can go a long way toward ensuring copyright compliance. The higher price also allows for unlimited simultaneous access.

Acquisitions Models

Having decided to pursue streaming videos with greater intention, we began to investigate the various acquisitions models available to us. We found five models common in academic libraries:

Subscriptions: The library subscribes to a database of streaming videos. This is still a common acquisitions model, but it can be the most expensive.

Packages: The library purchases or leases a package of streaming videos. This is generally more affordable than a database subscription.

À la carte: The library purchases or leases titles from film distributors or from third-party platforms. The cost per title is more expensive than acquiring titles in bulk, but if the library does not acquire many titles, this may be the most affordable model.

Unmediated DDA/PDA (demand-driven acquisitions/patron-driven acquisitions): A third-party host of streaming films opens its entire catalog, or a subset of its catalog, to a library. The library only spends money if and when a library user watches a video often enough to trigger an acquisition. If enough titles are triggered and the library spends its budget for streaming videos, the library must either invest additional money or lose access to the remaining titles in the catalog. This is similar to DDA/PDA models for e-book acquisitions.

Mediated DDA/PDA: The library pledges to lease a certain number of titles from a third-party host. The library acquires those titles as needed, often at the request of teaching faculty. This model of acquisitions is based on the concept of purchasing tokens and then spending them when need arises, although the details and timing of invoices will vary according to the vendor.

Pilot Year: The Technical Services Perspective

At WCU, we investigated our options for streaming videos in the spring of 2017, selected vendors and fine-tuned our workflows over the summer break, and launched our pilot project at the start of the fall semester. Because we had not planned to pilot a streaming video program, we had to get a bit creative with our budget, but by squeezing money from unexpected places, we were able to accommodate two streaming services, Kanopy and Swank.

Kanopy was an obvious choice for us, given the positive experience we'd had with them in the past. We opted for their PDA model, thereby granting our university community access to their entire catalog, which consists of documentaries and other films, such as the Criterion Collection. They offer an extremely generous trigger model, and each video comes with performance rights that allow for free,

unlimited viewings by all members of the university community.

We also wanted to provide access to a wider variety of feature films, so we decided to invest half of our budget with Swank, a nontheatrical distributor that provides streaming access to feature films and documentaries from major Hollywood studios. We committed funds for the purchase of fifty one-year licenses, each of which comes with educational viewing rights. These licenses are available to our teaching faculty on a first-come, first-serve basis, in a process that is mediated by the acquisitions librarian in conjunction with subject liaisons.

Regardless of vendor, if you decide to incorporate streaming media, we recommend editing your MARC records to include information about viewing rights. Incorporating this information into the MARC records for streaming videos is an extension of a project already in place to add this information to our DVD records. We use standardized language in the 730 field to indicate how the film may be legally shown. Adding this information is a huge improvement over digging through invoices to find answers to often time-sensitive questions about viewing rights.

Pilot Year: The Public Services Perspective

Preceding the official launch of our new streaming service, we discussed our options for marketing to the university. Our challenge was to publicize it enough to get buy-in and use from faculty, but not so much that we burned through our initial investment in a matter of weeks. Ultimately, we settled on a combination of word-of-mouth marketing, low-key publicity on the library website and in the faculty commons newsletter, and targeted e-mails to teaching faculty.

We created a LibGuide to serve as a teaching tool, a reference source for those assisting faculty, and a promotional resource for the subject liaisons (<http://researchguides.wcu.edu/streaming-video>). The guide contains a flowchart to help faculty determine if a film they need is available through our current vendors. Because of our decision to preload Kanopy's collection into our catalog, we are able to route our faculty through a resource they are familiar with before sending them to external sites, like Swank Digital Campus. We created a form for faculty to use

when requesting a title from Swank and embedded that in the guide as well.

Our LibGuide introduced our new program to our colleagues and partners and described our workflow. Though everyone received an overview of the program, we spent extra time with our partners in the faculty commons, who assist faculty with Blackboard and could promote the service while helping faculty develop their courses. We also offered more detailed information and behind-the-scenes access to our Scholarly Communications Librarian. This was especially important, given her close working relationship with our university's legal counsel.

Our Scholarly Communications Librarian and the staff of our faculty commons have generated enthusiasm for streaming videos among our teaching faculty. They have worked to educate instructors on identifying videos for classroom use, incorporating them into their courses, and understanding the legalities surrounding film in an educational setting.

Lessons Learned

During our pilot year, we learned a number of lessons about streaming videos. Several of those lessons concern the limitations of the format:

Ownership vs. access. This bears repeating. With most acquisitions models, libraries lease or subscribe to streaming videos, instead of purchasing them outright. Make sure that all stakeholders understand this distinction and appreciate the ongoing cost of maintaining access.

Availability. A great deal of content is unavailable in streaming format. This is particularly noticeable with regard to foreign films, where issues of distribution and ownership often preclude access, but many domestic films are unavailable, too.

Technological limitations. A strong, reliable Internet connection is required to stream videos, and even dependable Internet connections can still suffer glitches.

Disparate vendors. Currently, there is no option for locating one title across multiple library vendors.

Our experience during our pilot year also left us with several takeaways about the process of getting streaming videos up and running:

Publicize, publicize, publicize. Though you may burn through your budget faster than you'd like, publicize your streaming services. It's better to have too much demand for a new service than too little. If you are able to demonstrate need, you could potentially receive better funding and support in future budget years.

Communicate with stakeholders. Err on the side of too much communication. Make sure that librarians, collaborators, and teaching faculty know about the progress as you plan and implement your streaming videos program. Without good communication, things get muddled along the way.

Start early. At WCU, we did not begin widely promoting our streaming services until the summer, by which point it was too late for most teaching faculty to update their fall courses. Give them as much advance notice as possible.

Identify a copyright point person. Find someone who has a good working understanding of copyright as it pertains to viewing rights. Ideally, this person will be good at sharing this knowledge with teaching faculty.

Be flexible. You can't plan for every eventuality. Stay open-minded and adjust as you go along.

Conclusions

The initial year of the streaming video program at Western Carolina University's Hunter Library was a success. Even though we had not budgeted for the acquisition of streaming videos, we were able to fund a modest launch of two streaming services, Kanopy and Swank. We invested approximately \$12,000 between the two services, and we believe we could have managed with even less money.

We judge the program to be a success for several reasons. Because of the viewing rights that Kanopy and Swank provide, we have taken active steps to avoid unlawful copyright infringements. Our streaming videos offer unlimited simultaneous access to everyone in our university community, including our distance education students; this is a level of access that is impossible with DVDs. And demand for our streaming services has been growing steadily, driven both by teaching faculty and by students.

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