E-books and their future in academic libraries

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In this chapter we will take a look at e-books in the context of the academic library, and discuss important issues regarding experiences with use of e-books at the University of Bergen (UiB) and how this affects their procurement. We will also look at how the open access movement influences the e-book market before we end the article with a discussion concerning future directions of e-books as an electronic resource.

A brief history of e-books

The first major efforts in the area of electronic books were started in the 1970s with Project Gutenberg[1] and the Oxford Text Archive[2]. Later in the 1980s and 1990s book vendors recognised the possibilities of providing content in digital form, typically published on CD-ROM or to be used with personal digital assistants (PDAs) (Tedd, 2005). At the beginning of the millennium special e-book reading devices such as the Rocket E-book reader were developed. These readers turned out to be lacking in user friendliness, and this combined with the fact that no standard format managed to break through, the use of e-book readers stagnated. These readers have made the terminology of e-books somewhat confusing, and many people have defined them by the reading appliance rather than the idea of a digital book (Lynch, 2001). An example of this is the definition made by Armstrong, Edwards et al:

> Any piece of electronic text regardless of size or composition (a digital object), but excluding journal publications, made available electronically (or optically) for any device (handheld or desk-bound) that includes a screen (Armstrong et al., 2002).

For an academic library to facilitate distribution of e-books by using e-book readers is quite demanding, partly because of the issues in lending valuable reading devices but also in the problem of lacking format standardization. In the following text we have therefore chosen to use the definition created by the UiB e-book task force in 2003 (The University of Bergen Library, 2003).

[1] www.gutenberg.org/
[2] ota.ahds.ac.uk/

> "Electronic books" in this context is understood as books that may become available over the University networks (Internet) at ordinary computers (PD, Mac, UNIX) without special hardware or software (…).

E-books at the University of Bergen

The e-book project was in 2003 given the mandate to investigate the e-book market, and evaluate the University of Bergen Library's (UBL) future role in the process of acquiring, presenting and utilizing such resources at UiB (The University of Bergen Library, 2003). The backdrop of this mandate was the changing context for Norwegian academic libraries, which after the Quality reform of 2003 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2001) had to shift focus from supporting researchers to facilitating for students in learning centres. As a result of this project, UBL initially purchased access to netLibrary[3] e-books. Later ebrary[4], Gale Virtual Reference Library[5], Safari Tech Books Online[6], Encyclopaedia Britannica[7] and others have been acquired. The experiences of these purchases will be discussed later in this chapter.

How are e-books used?

In this section we will focus on our experiences with e-book use both at the University of Bergen and e-book use in general. As of yet e-books are not as established as e-journals in libraries, there are great variations both in access models and user friendliness of the offered services. Also, e-books tend to be more practical in some contexts, for example for literature research or looking up definitions etc. Still the digital media, mainly because of problems with user friendliness of reading screens, makes it challenging to read longer texts from cover to cover.

The everyday environment of students and researchers is to a great extent digital, and learning and teaching is simplified by making information electronically accessible. Those who are digitally literate are able to utilise the facilities of the digital media and have good chances to succeed with their work. E-books are part of this, assuming one has access to this media, which depends upon many factors:

- Electronic resources are, in general, expensive, and every subscription renewal or new purchase by the library has to be thoroughly discussed. These issues are revisited further in the purchasing section of this chapter.

[3] www.netlibrary.com
[4] www.ebrary.com
[5] www.gale.com/gvrl/
[6] safari.oreilly.com/
[7] www.britannica.com/

- Many vendors only sell access to a limited number of concurrent users, sometimes as few as one at a time. This means that users may be turned away from important resources, which can be frustrating when information is urgent, for example for students who frequently are given assignments with short deadlines.
- Vendors generally control access either by checking that the user belongs to a valid university IP-address. To gain access outside of university campus one has to access the resource by using a proxy server. This can be technically challenging and therefore limits the flexibility of accessing the services outside of campus.
- In the case of Ebrary, readers must install separate reading software. This is free, but requires an extra effort which could be avoided if for example a standard reading software had been used. On campus, the software comes as part of the software suite the university IT-department maintains, but for use outside campus you are obliged to install it yourself.
- For some users the various user interfaces of the e-book services can be confusing and therefore be restraining for their use.

For the remainder of this chapter, issues regarding how to make users use e-books, and their use are investigated: library teaching and marketing, reading abilities and habits, statistics and areas of success.

Teaching and marketing

One important task at the library is teaching digital literacy (see Torras and Skagen this volume). Through making the electronic resources known their use will increase. At UBL we inform our users and train them:

- Courses in information literacy are held by librarians for students at the different faculties. This is a task of growing importance because they fulfil the student's needs in managing to navigate an increasingly complex world of information.
- Online and offline exhibitions on e-books are made, such as the Science Faculty's "Finn våre ebøker[8]" ("Find our e-books").
- When launching newly purchased products, information about this is published at the University news services, such as the library web-site, the student portal and the University online newspaper.
- Information about e-books is disseminated by giving out leaflets; which are put in the printed books when lent out.

[8] www.ub.uib.no/avdeling/matnat/utstilling/eboker/eboker.htm

- The e-books are registered in the library catalogue, Bibsys[9], in which users have the option to limit their search to electronic resources.
- E-books are also made available through the library portal. Currently this has special features for e-journals, but similar functionality for e-books is in development (Bakka this volume).
- The acquisition department arranges seminars on information of databases, where the target group is library staff members.

Reading abilities and habits

The mean time spent in e-book reading sessions is generally between ten to twenty minutes (Rosy, 2002) indicating that users skim through the content rather than read in depth on screen (Woodward and Edwards, 2001). Inadequate screen readability may be one explanation of this; further e-books are often based on their printed counterpart and are therefore not always suited for on screen reading. Hopefully this will change as e-versions of books are adapted to fit the digital media.

Large parts of the UBL collections consist of electronic documents; particularly electronic journals are popular and in many cases available exclusively online. Still it happens that users ask for printed versions both for articles and books. There are several reasons for this: for e-books vendors often limit the flexibility of the digital format by restricting the user's copying and printing options. Access and using the resources are made cumbersome by supplying each page of a book as a separate digital document compelling the user to "turn" the pages rather than for example scrolling. Also, if the digital version is made from a printed original, the document quality can decrease. For example the quality of figures and pictures of digitised documents are in many cases low compared to the original, or they are separated from the original, forcing the users to access these on separate pages, which is inconvenient. Because of this printed copies of popular e-books is purchased, thereby limiting the versatility of the library collections.

Throughout the years there have been various efforts on producing hand held devices for reading e-books. So far these have not been successful for a broad market; technology is improving and more user-friendly products will be developed, but as for today cannot replace the printed material. From the environmental point of view it would have been a step forward if we could tackle digital information more exclusively without making printed copies for thorough study. Until then students and researchers prefer to acquire their own printed copies for note-taking, underlining and reading, and being accessible at any time (Mercieca, 2004).

[9] ask.bibsys.no

Statistics

E-book user statistics at the UBL are, until now, inadequate. The data material is sparse, considering short time series and types of statistics offered by the vendors. Unfortunately, vendors measure different parameters such as number and length of sessions, queries, documents viewed, pages viewed, copied, or printed etc., which makes it difficult to compare services and usage. A potential strategy could be to perform surveys in collaboration with vendors; these combined with usability tests and focus group studies could serve to develop strategies for strengthening the library's collections.

Still, according to the statistic findings, there is no doubt that the use of e-books at UBL has increased continuously and is still increasing due to actions as listed above, and due to more frequent writing of assignments, where students are advised to use the library services. Increased usage of e-books is in accordance with international surveys. A five year survey carried out by Bailey, T. P (2006) shows a steady increase across several subject areas at Auburn University Montgomery Library. The usage of the printed collection, on the other hand, has declined during the same period, indicating that the electronic format is increasing in acceptance and popularity. De Rosa et al. (2005) confirm that college students show a high level of awareness of library electronic resources across all geographic regions examined.

Areas where e-books are a success

There are some fields where e-books seem to excel, partly because they fit the activity at hand, or because their content is easier to access in a digital context. Important areas that we will discuss in this section are literature research, textbooks, reference works and grey literature.

It is common to use the library catalogue and databases as tools to retrieve information in situations where a student or researcher need a complete overview of a field. Many of these tools are difficult to use for non-librarians, and the thresholds of using them have made many users find alternative sources of information, or to manage with incomplete source material. Some of these problems have been solved with the access of full text documents because the users can now search the main source directly. The fact that full text is available on screen may save the researcher from reading long passages to evaluate quality and relevance of the source, but this depends on the amount of hits and the ability of the search technology to rate the results in a relevant manner.

Until now, only few textbooks used by faculty staff at the University of Bergen are available electronically. There are several reasons for this, the main one being that a large part of literature used at the University is not available in

electronic form yet. Particularly for subjects such as arts, humanities, law and social science many of the sources are written in Norwegian; and so far Norwegian publishers have chosen not to publish their books in an electronic format. For literature in science or medicine the literature is generally in English, however these textbooks are only rarely represented in electronic form and therefore few of these are available in the UBL collections. A possible explanation for this is that it is difficult for the librarians to get an overview of which e-book titles the various vendors offer. If a textbook is available online, it is also very often only available as part of e-book packages which are both expensive and where the majority of titles are of little interest.

Reference works are in many cases difficult to use, particularly in print form. This is due to the nature of these publications which often consist of alphabetically ordered overviews of topics or information organised by certain rules. The user has to figure out how to access the information before she can look it up. To search an electronic version of a reference work is in many cases more effective and this therefore makes them popular. By accessing the online version the user will also receive updated information since the publisher can easily revise the information with new material if relevant.

To get a more complete picture of the total amount of electronic literature available at UBL, also online material such as reports, manuals and journals should be mentioned. E-journals have long been established and are in many cases replacing the printed version. Students and researchers are becoming used to downloading articles at their own computers and are starting to show reluctance to visit the library to copy a printed article if the journal is not available online. In opposition to the practise for e-books, e-journal publishers set no limits for printing articles, and therefore make it easy to utilize the text as one prefers. The use of grey material such as reports, manuals and theses has recently increased. The main reason for this is the increased accessibility that the digital media allows by making a document available on the internet. Traditionally finding documents of this type is difficult even for trained librarians, but by depositing these on the internet, and making them available in search engines such as Google[10] or Yahoo[11], the availability and hence the usability of these increases dramatically.

Extra material and services

When discussing e-books, one issue that cannot be omitted is the extra functionality included for the users when accessing e-books. This can be various services or functionality such as the opportunity to:

[10] www.google.com
[11] www.yahoo.com

- Look up references listed in a document
- Look up a word unfamiliar to you in a dictionary
- Translate selected phrases, if you do not understand the language used in the text
- Search an encyclopaedia for more information
- Access related maps or other multimedia materials containing background information
- Make notes or mark relevant text passages
- Add bookmarks
- Find related bibliographies and addresses to evaluate the author
- Cross search the library catalogue to find relevant additional sources
- Search the web to find more information about the subject
- Export references and citations to reference handling tools

These functionalities are included to give users some of the same options as they have when reading a printed book. Some of these are useful, involve the reader and make the research process more effective. The vendors seem to forget, though, that for users who face many different web-sites with information each day, storing notes etc. at various vendor web-sites is difficult to maintain and therefore impractical.

Issues concerning e-book procurement

In this section we will discuss issues concerning the procurement of e-books based on experiences from UBL and also consortia collaboration on a national level. We will also look into free e-book alternatives such as are made available in institutional repositories, online reference services and other open access services currently available.

When the first e-book resources were purchased in 2003 the following factors were decisive for the purchase (The University of Bergen Library, 2003):

- Content and updates
- Price and opportunities for consortia collaboration
- User interfaces and search options
- Adaptability to library catalogue, import functions etc.
- Available statistics
- Technical requirements

It was decided to focus purchases on reference works and textbooks because these document types are as described above more user friendly in digital format than for example fiction literature (Woodward and Edwards, 2001). When it comes to pricing, the situation for e-books is similar to the situation for e-

journals, and buying access either perpetually or only for a period is expensive. As described above, e-book publishers are very restrictive when it comes to use, something which is unsatisfactory considering what they force libraries to pay for the content. Some e-book services require the user to install reader software on the users' computers and others require the user to login with username and password. Both of these involve overhead when it comes to administration and should therefore be avoided if possible.

After our initial purchase of 100 netLibrary titles and the finalizing of the Project Learning Centre 2003 (more about this in Tonning, this volume), e-books were treated as any other electronic resource. We continued to purchase single titles from netLibrary on a small scale, but it turned out that the administrative overhead of this combined with netLibrarys adding fees per purchase made it unpractical and expensive to keep up. Because of this the purchasing of e-books at UBL has mainly consisted of purchasing packages in collaboration with other institutions in consortia.

Consortia strategies in Norway

According to Bostick (2001) several factors are important when libraries decide to collaborate in consortia. The most important is the possibility of sharing resources, both when it comes to access to the purchased literature, but also for administration and training. By allowing consortia staff to specialise on training and administrating the agreements, the local libraries are free to use their often limited resources to other suitable investments. By combining the buying power of several institutions, the consortia will be stronger when negotiating purchases from vendors.

Consortia work in Norway started in 1995 with the National office for research documentation, academic and professional libraries as the main facilitator. In the beginning only academic or research libraries were allowed to participate and the main goal was to cut costs. In 2003 the National office for research documentation, academic and professional libraries merged with the Norwegian directorate for public and school libraries together with other archiving and museum organizations into the Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority (ABM). During this period the focus of what is necessary to purchase has changed from buying access to database services to purchasing full text resources such as e-journals and also more recently e-books (Sundby and Karlsen, 2005). In addition to the ABM consortium, Norwegian libraries also participate in other consortia such as the National Health library and PrioInfos Nord-i-KON offer.

Currently ABM has several e-book agreements; the most important of these

being on Safari Tech Books Online and netLibrary. In addition ABM facilitates several packages of reference works. Particularly the netLibrary consortium has been successful since the members by sharing their own books get access to everybody else's. Unfortunately the conditions for this consortium have changed, with publishers optioning to change sharing terms for consortia. As of January 1st 2006 netLibrary set a prerequisite for consortia that the libraries have to buy multiple copies of any document to be shared (Cook, 2005). The background for this is publishers concerns regarding the sales model where all libraries in a consortium are able to share the purchase of a single title. The amount of copies each member has to purchase depends upon the size of the consortium in question. The Norwegian netLibrary consortium for example consists of four institutions, and will therefore have to buy two copies of each title that should be included in the shared collection. For other larger netLibrary consortia this number can be six titles or higher and if we look at the average e-book cost which in addition to the initial print costs also includes a 50 % e-fee we realise that the costs of shared e-book collections are changing rapidly. As a reaction to this, the Norwegian netLibrary consortium has decided to freeze purchasing in the consortium until further notice.

ABM also facilitated the purchase of Safari Tech Books Online. Safari is sold on very different terms than netLibrary with each participant buying "points" which then can be traded into access to titles. The biggest advantage of purchasing access to Safari e-books as a consortium was the possibility of keeping down the amount of points that each library had to purchase initially. This gave each library the opportunity to test how such an access model would work, and evaluate use etc. without spending more money than necessary. Locally the advantage of Safari is that the books can be exchanged whenever necessary, so that the library is able to maintain its e-collections to be current and of interest to the library users. However the Safari exchange option makes it more challenging to administrate, particularly in regard to making it available in the library OPAC.

Finally the Nord-i-KON Ebrary consortium ought to be mentioned. Ebrary is sold in large packages with multiple user access and is currently only available in Scandinavia through the Swedish agent PrioInfo. This consortium, although very similar to a buying club[12], currently has over 70 members throughout Scandinavia and the Baltic states.

[12] A buying club is here defined as a group of libraries purchasing resources from the same vendor like a consortia, but without the consortia benefits of common negotiations and administration, and potential shared access to the resources.

Pricing and licensing

According to Bosch (Bosch, 2005) the pricing of scholarly communication through e-journal access is generally based on what the market will bear rather than the actual value of the commodity. One of the reasons for this is the publishers having monopoly on selling access to important titles and therefore chose to charge whatever they wish knowing that their customers are dependent of having access to the resource. The e-book market is less clear for purchasers because there are a big number of actors selling access, some being publishers others aggregators. Because of this the same titles can be available through different packages, or sold as single titles. For single titles the different vendors pricing practice varies a lot, with some vendors selling the e-version of a book cheaper than the print, while others add extra e-fees as high as 50 % of the print price.

A direct comparison between print and electronic versions is not completely viable though, because a printed book is inaccessible when in use, while an e-book is generally used for a shorter period, or if the license allows it, can be accessed by multiple users concurrently (Cox, 2004). Also the properties of the digital media allows for more flexibility in that the available full text is easier to navigate through searching possibilities, and also many vendors add extra functionality such as concurrent dictionary access. To navigate such a market is challenging because it is difficult to get an overview of available titles from different vendors and then to calculate the correct price.

Besides e-book vendors operating with a number of pricing options, they also have a number of different ways of organising the licence. The most common being site access for multiple users (Ebrary) or access to a fixed number of titles for a fixed number of concurrent users (netLibrary, Safari). The vendors also vary as to whether they sell the digital document (perpetual access) or whether they just lease you a right to access their online material. For perpetual access collections the library also has to deal with what happens if the vendor's web-site is shut down, or the library chose not to use this any more, in which case the library may have a digital copy containing the e-book text but no user friendly, long term storage solution to make it available to its users.

Future development

In this section we will discuss various topics that will influence the e-book market in the coming years. An important trend is the development of free e-content. The open access movement for example organises free access to types of material which in many ways are competing with e-books, such as the Gutenberg

project[13], Wikipedia[14] and other wikis, and the development of open repositories. Simultaneously Google, Amazon[15] and others are experimenting with the digitisation of books and possible new ways to utilise these.

As described in Jones (this volume) the so-called "Journals Crisis" has created large budgetary problems for the libraries. As a reaction to this, the open access movement evolved starting with the Budapest Open Access Initiative[16] in 2001 (Bailey, C. W., 2006) which defined open access as:

> […]By "open access" to this literature, we mean its free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself […].

An important part of the open access movement is the development of open repositories, for example institutional repositories; in the Bergen case the institutional repository is the Bergen Open Research Archive (BORA)[17]. Here the institution itself takes charge of publications produced locally and by making these available online contributes to again attain the primary goal of scholarly communication which is to disseminate research results. As time goes by, and the institutional repository is accepted as the main archive for publications at the university, we see that many types of material which in many ways are parallel to e-books finds its way into the archive. The primary example is masters theses and PhD theses, but also other document types such as working papers, books (for example this one), are to be found in institutional repositories.

Another important development within the open access movement is Wikipedia and other types of wikis[18]. Wikipedia is a free online encyclopaedia that bases its existence on users creating the content. Any interested user can create new entries for a topic or edit existing texts. Changes and updates are thoroughly recorded, leaving each text with a traceable history which allows users to track changes and look at earlier versions of a text. Because of this critics claim that the content cannot be trusted in the same way as for example Encyclopaedia Britannica. This was disputed in 2005 by an investigation carried out by Nature were it was found that Wikipedia and Encyclopaedia Britannica contain about

[13] www.gutenberg.org/
[14] www.wikipedia.org/
[15] www.amazon.com
[16] www.soros.org/openaccess/
[17] bora.uib.no
[18] en.wikipedia.org

the same amount inaccuracies (Giles, 2005). Wikibooks[19] is a sister project to Wikipedia where authors can write textbooks either together or by themselves.

Simultaneous with the open access movement another trend is emerging involving large companies such as Google, Amazon and even Microsoft creating and disseminating free digital content. Google, which mainly is known for its search solutions, is the main player in a new venture in collaboration with important American research libraries and also commercial publishers (Quint, 2004). The goal of the project is to digitise books both in copyright and in the public domain with the intention of making them available for both searching and in some cases in full text. Another similar initiative that were started right after Google as a collaboration project between Yahoo! , the Open Content Alliance[20] and later also MSN aiming to digitising public domain books (Dye, 2006). The planned models for giving access varies from only allowing users to see text snippets, to allow the user to access the whole or parts of texts either for free or for a fee. In the context of an academic library plans on allowing access to books that are currently out of print is appealing. However many copyright issues arises, for example Google's strategy of forcing publishers and authors to actively inform Google that they want to reserve their books from the planned scanning are questioned since this requires the copyright holders to actively protect their legal rights (Band, 2006).

Another interesting organization planning to allow access to e-books online is Amazon. Amazon has been digitising books since 2001 for its "Look inside the book" and later "Search inside the book" programs and therefore already holds large amounts of full text in storage. Amazon is also trying out publishing with their service Amazon shorts[21], where they publish short literary works for $ 0.49 each. This development will be extended with various sales models for selling access to e-books and Amazon are currently in the process of making arrangements with publishers. Amazon Pages are planned to allow full purchase of online access to all or portions of books, and Amazon Upgrade will allow customers who buy a printed book to add online access for a set fee. Currently Amazon are not planning to facilitate institutional access though, so it may yet be some time where for example academic libraries can add to their collections from Amazon (Quint, 2005).

As for UBLs regular book vendors, these have also started to look into the e-book market. The vendor Dawson books[22] for example, offer books in a number of different ways. In addition to selling print books, they are collaborating

[19] en.wikibooks.org
[20] www.opencontentalliance.org/
[21] www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/browse/-/13993911/104-6954373-1206305
[22] www.dawsonbooks.co.uk/

with eBook Corporation [23] offering eBook Library (EBL), a platform for lending or buying e-books depending on the institutions need. Other vendors such as Delbanco[24] and Starkmann Library Services[25] are also in the process of establishing services for selling e-books.

In his article from 2001 Lynch states:

> "Digital books are as yet only dimly defined, and will be a continued focus for the creativity and ingenuity of present and future generations of authors, teachers and scholars" (Lynch, 2001).

Five years later we believe that this is still the case, but would like to add that the publishers, at least for now, seem to influence the way that e-books are developing. Currently the publishers are caught between their wish to create good products for their customers and not loosing any of their perceived potential of revenue. Because of this most e-book services currently available are either impractical both to use and administrate, or they are so expensive that a potential purchase needs to be carefully considered. For some reason book publishers have very different views on digital dissemination of publications than journal publishers have, which allows users flexibility both when it comes to access models, and printing and copying options. The background for this could be the book publishers seeing an opportunity of selling both versions to their customers with increased revenue. The e-journal market has moved beyond this discussion as the institutions are starting to opt for e-only strategies. Such decisions are partly made based on the characteristics of the journals, mainly these are short to read and simple to print, and storing printed versions of these are not particularly cost-efficient seen from a library point of view.

Whether these arguments should be used for e-books is still open for discussion, the technological development may also affect this. As of yet we operate in a market where there are no reading devices available that are good enough to replace the user friendliness of paper, but according to Dick Brass, formerly a Microsoft executive, a book reading device of equal popularity to the iPod will in the future replace paper as we know it as the main medium for books (McCrum, 2006). If, or when, this happens the whole use pattern of books at least in an academic context will change, and maybe for the first time we'll see the paper free library. This can only happen when one issue is dealt with though, and that is the question of preservation. As mentioned in Jones (this volume) many institutions around the world are currently working with preservation issues,

[23] www.eblib.com/
[24] www.delbanco.de/
[25] www.starkmann.com/

many of which remain unsolved however, and therefore the printed material is probably safe a while longer.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have described how users find e-books challenging to read because of inconvenient user interfaces, use restrictions and uncomfortable reading devices. Simultaneously libraries are challenged by the fact that e-books are expensive, complex to administrate and with access rules and sales models continually changing. Also many of the use models that are offered today should be avoided, because they undermine the possibilities the digital media allows, for example to let several users access a resource at once. Nevertheless e-books are becoming increasingly popular and institutions such as UBL continue to purchase them. An explanation for this can be that even though the services are inconvenient, the advantages of being able to access these digitally outweigh the problems. In other words e-books are in the process of becoming an important information asset for libraries. It is therefore important that libraries around the world take charge and collaborate in developing strategies for e-book purchasing in the future.

Some of these issues may solve themselves however, as the open access movement and the wiki-concepts become more influential and actors such as Google and Amazon enter the field. Traditionally Google and Amazon are known to have policies that are less restrictive when it comes to what their users are allowed to do, and if they chose to apply these also for e-books, the consequence could be an increase in use flexibility for e-books in general.

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