

Are E-Book Big Deal Bundles Still Valuable?

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Are E-Book Big Deal Bundles Still Valuable?

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Abstract

The academic e-book market has undergone significant change in the last five years. E-book availability has greatly increased as library demand has grown, with an increasing percentage of library acquisitions preferring electronic rather than print format. E-book acquisition models like patron-driven acquisition and short-term loan have now become commonplace and available from a multitude of consortia, publishers, and aggregators. With the wide availability of these models, is there still value in buying e-books through package deals?

To help answer this question, we will present the results of a usage-based analysis of Wiley e-books. Since 2012, Miami University Libraries have purchased Wiley e-book collections through a consortial OhioLINK contract. Previously purchased OhioLINK e-book collections have been accessible to patrons through both OhioLINK's Electronic Book Center platform and the publisher platform. The Wiley e-book purchase deviates from previous practice by being available to patrons only on the publisher platform and our analysis is therefore focused on COUNTER e-book usage reports from the Wiley platform. We also augment the usage data with title-level information, such as subject and book type. This preliminary study focuses on the 2012 Wiley collection and its use over a three-year period (2012-2014) and will include data-driven findings presented in visually useful ways.

Introduction

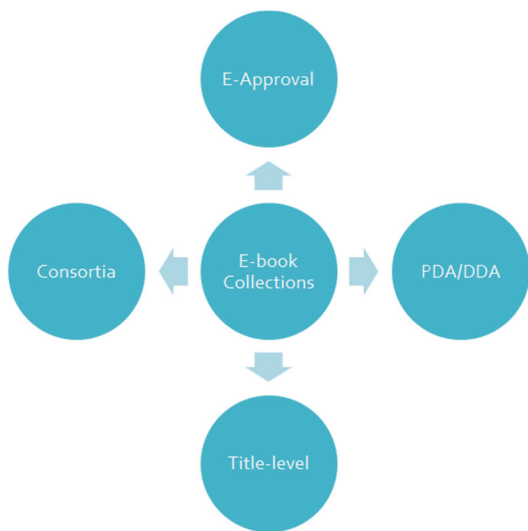


Figure 1. Acquisitions models.

Miami University Libraries have been purchasing e-book packages through the OhioLINK consortium since 2008. In 2010, when the patron-driven acquisition (PDA) model became widely available for e-books, Miami began experimenting with that purchase model locally. Following the

success of PDA purchases, librarians were given the ability to firm order e-books on a title by title basis from ebrary and EBSCOhost. Purchasing models and options continued to expand in early 2014 with the addition of e-book approvals in the science and social science approval plans, as well as the addition of additional e-book platforms to our firm order buying options (JSTOR, Cambridge University Press, and Project Muse).

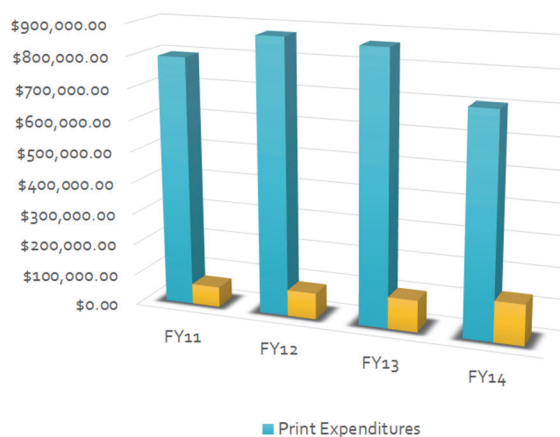


Table 1. Print versus electronic book expenditures.

This graph represents Miami’s expenditures on print and electronic books (local only; not consortial purchases) over four fiscal years. While we have seen an increase in e-book purchases over four years, we only saw a comparable decline in print book purchases in the last two years. The slowness of this change is due in part to waiting for easier and more efficient workflows for e-book purchasing through our third party vendor, YBP.

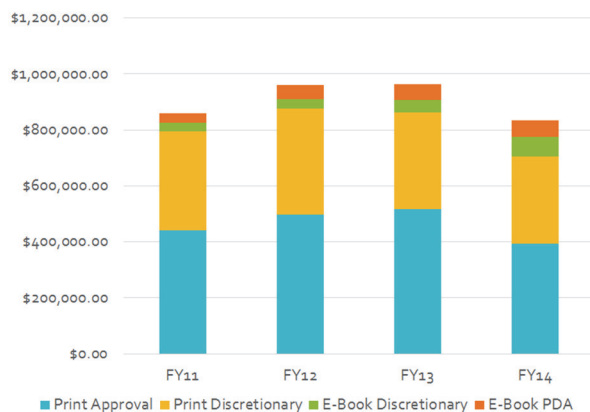


Table 2. Total book expenditures by order type.

This graph compares total expenditures in four different purchase models over four fiscal years. While e-book purchase models have grown over four years, there is more significant growth in e-book PDA and discretionary purchases between fiscal year 2013 and 2014. Users and librarians are becoming more comfortable with selecting and using e-books, and a greater number of titles are becoming available in electronic and print format simultaneously.

The Big Deal Approach

The OhioLINK consortium has purchased large e-book packages from Springer, Wiley, and Oxford University Press over the last several years. In previous analyses, the presenters have analyzed Springer and Oxford University Press e-book use. Because the Wiley e-book package is the newest of our consortial e-book purchases (2012-2014), analysis of Wiley e-books was on hold until three years of data became available. The question which arises from all three analyses is whether the e-book package is still a viable purchase model. Note that the Wiley e-book platform has no digital rights management (DRM) and is packaged by

section or chapter as PDFs. Wiley e-books are unlimited user. Also note that usage data for Wiley e-books requires some clean-up due to the presence of usage for free content included along with usage for subscribed or owned content.

Methodology

This study presents the results of a usage-based analysis of Wiley e-books. Beginning in 2012, Miami University Libraries have purchased Wiley e-book collections through a consortial OhioLINK contract. Previously purchased OhioLINK e-book collections (e.g., Springer and Oxford University Press) have been accessible to patrons through both OhioLINK’s Electronic Book Center (EBC) platform and the publisher platform. The Wiley e-book purchase deviates from previous practice by being available to users only on the publishers platform. This preliminary study focuses on the 2012 Wiley collection (927 titles) and its use over a three-year period (2012 through July 2014). Usage data are compiled using standard COUNTER BR2 reports. The COUNTER compliant data are merged with a e-book title list available from the Wiley platform. Merging the two data sources together provides us with additional title level information such as subject information and cost. Usage analysis is done using SPSS and Microsoft Excel. Data-driven findings are presented in visually useful ways a variety of tools, including R (a free software programming language) and Adobe Photoshop.

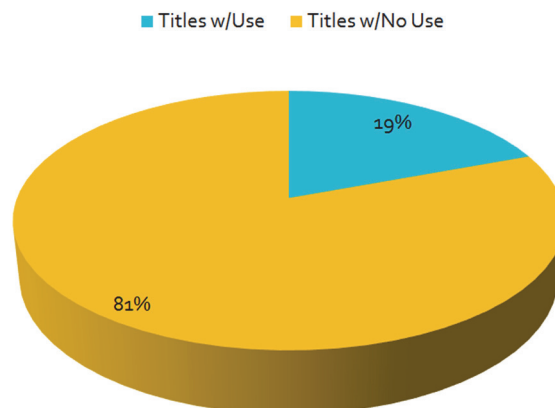


Table 3. Title use 2012-2014.

Findings

Of 927 e-books, 19% had use and 81% had no use.

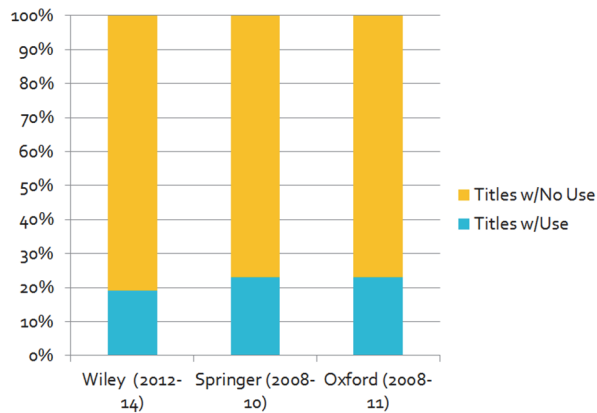


Table 4. Title use comparison.

Analyses of all three consortially purchased e-book packages show very similar usage percentages that hover just above or below the 20% mark.

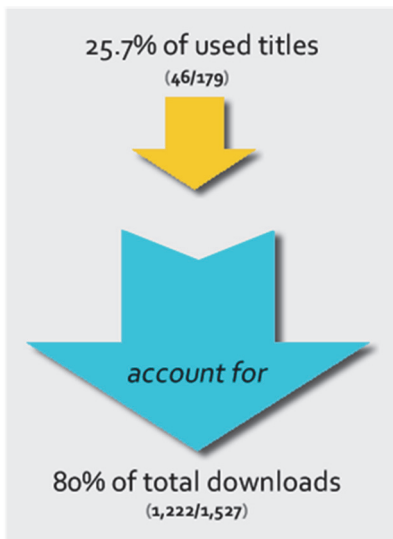


Figure 2. Pareto Principle.

Of the total titles that saw use in the Wiley e-book package (179), 46 of them (or 25.7%) accounted for 80% of the total downloads. This 80/20 split, also known as the Pareto Principle, is evident across packages, and across different analyses.

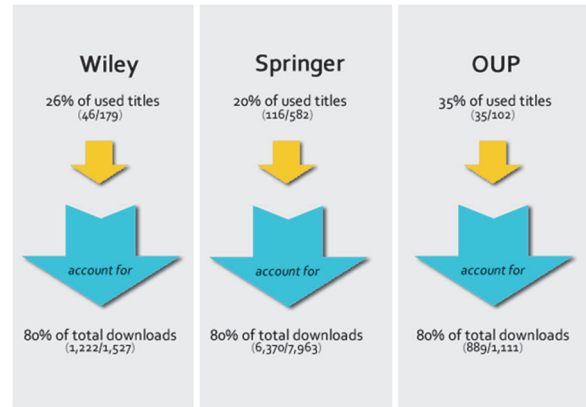


Figure 3. Pareto comparison.

Springer e-books (and to a lesser extent, Oxford University Press e-books), also showed an adherence to the Pareto Principle when examining how many e-books accounted for total downloads.

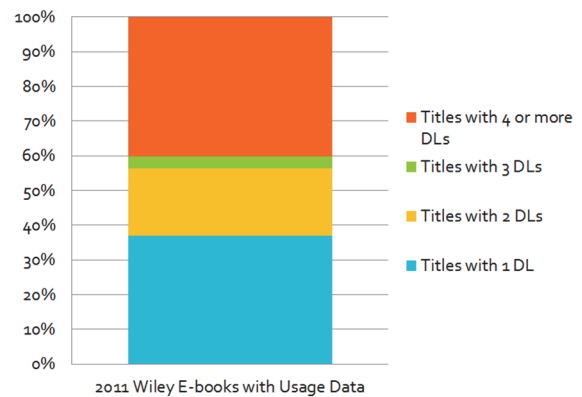


Table 5. Long tail.

Wiley e-books with a publication date of 2011 showed a few high-use titles as well as a long tail of titles that only had 1 download.

17.1% of total downloads come from three titles

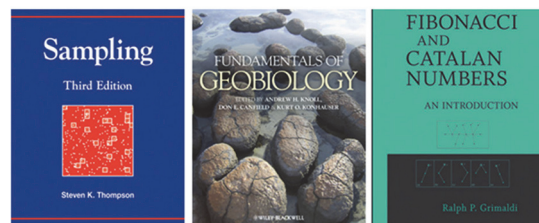


Figure 4. Few high-use titles dominate.

Like previous findings (Springer e-books, in particular), several of the highest use titles are clearly textbooks or textbook-like in nature. Given the high cost of textbooks, this high usage is expected, and it's possible that publishers will find a way to capitalize on the use of books like this within packages.

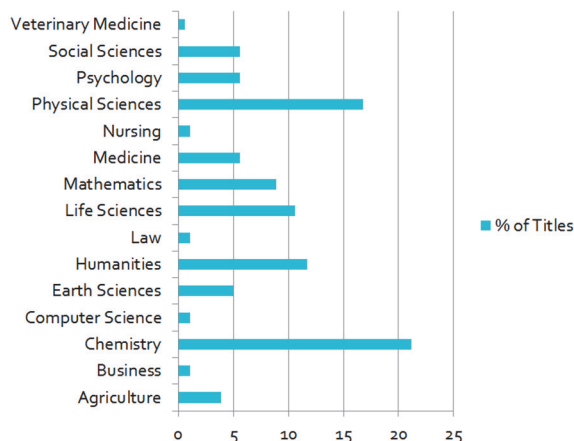


Table 6. Titles with usage by subject.

Titles with usage by subject correlates both to subject areas that are very highly represented in Wiley (STEM) as well as the disciplines that are very research-intensive at Miami University (social sciences, psychology, physical sciences, life sciences, chemistry).

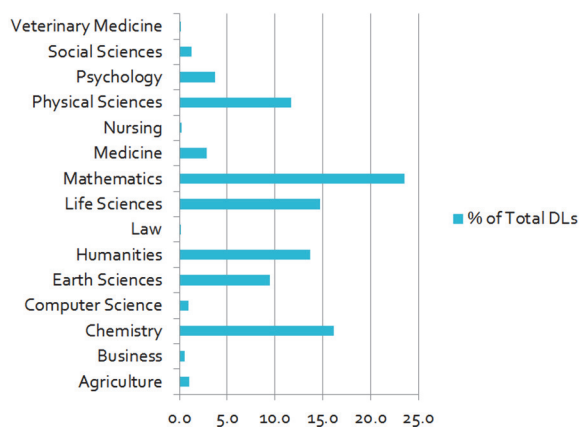


Table 7. Percentage of total downloads by subject.

The percentage of total downloads by subject correlates somewhat with research-intensive subject areas at Miami University, and perhaps also with the subjects that rely more heavily on monographs than on journals (mathematics).

Value Proposition

The cost of the Wiley e-book package for Miami University is not commensurate with the usage. However, like other e-book packages, the bundle of titles enjoys a better value over time. Owning this e-book content in perpetuity means we are prepared for the "just-in-case" usage scenario over many years. However, it has become more difficult to justify this type of reasoning as budgets remain flat or shrink, and package costs rise.

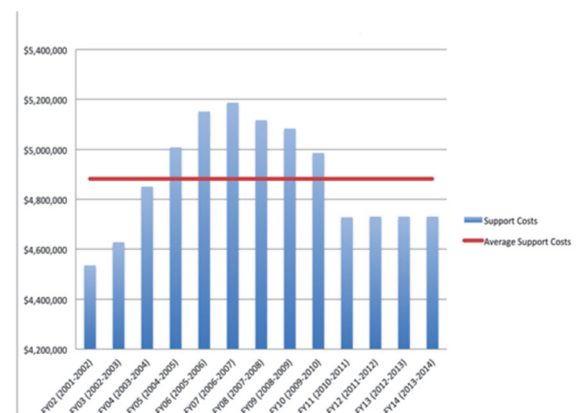


Table 8. Miami University Libraries budget.

Miami University Libraries have had a flat budget since FY11 and remain below a thirteen year average.

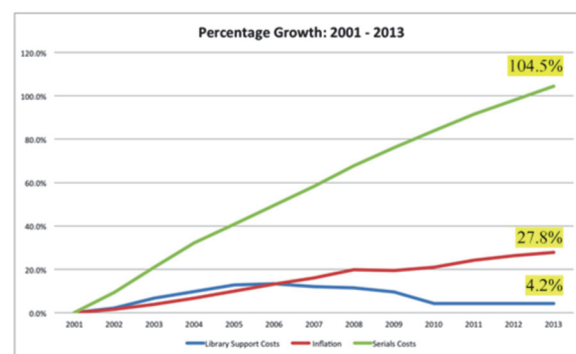


Table 9. Percentage growth.

The rapid rise of serials costs along with nearly flat library budgets year after year result in a significant erosion of purchasing power.

Cost per download for these e-books is very high, at approximately \$30 per download. High-use titles that are textbooks or used as textbooks obviously have a better value than other

monographs in the collection, but their high-use does not give a lot of additional value to the package as a whole. If Miami University were to purchase the 179 titles with use at list price (approximately \$29,588), we would still be further ahead than we are in purchasing the package.

Conclusion

Milton Friedman was found of saying “what is unsustainable will not be sustained.” Our analysis of 927 Wiley e-books over a two-and-a-half-year time frame finds 81% of the titles were not used by library patrons. Of those titles that were used, 25.7% account for 80% of all downloads. We also find that a few high-use titles dominate usage and

the long tail accounts for a very small percentage of the total downloads. Miami University is known for its exceptional undergraduate teaching and learning, so it makes that textbooks or books used as textbooks are in high demand relative to other titles available in the 2012 Wiley e-book collection. Demand does vary across subject areas, allowing for the possibility to preference some subject areas over others in future negotiations. Preliminary results of this study suggest that e-book collections do underperform as an asset class. Flat budgets and rising serials costs contribute to an erosion of purchasing power. This “new normal” has made it more difficult to justify the acquisition of e-books that demonstrate little to no use.