

The cataloguing of e-books at the University of Surrey

Many libraries are investing more and more in e-books, yet the bibliographic implications for managing these resources are only just becoming apparent. This case-study focuses on the experience of the University of Surrey after the decision was taken to import and create MARC records for e-books. It explores the relationship between electronic resources and 'core' holdings, and the role of the library catalogue as the primary source of information. Further, it examines the practical challenges faced by staff when cataloguing electronic material, including whether to create 'hybrid' or separate records for print and electronic copies, and considerations surrounding the content and granularity of records. Cataloguing e-books can be an effective way of helping users to discover these new resources. However, it is becoming clear that libraries will need to re-evaluate traditional procedures as they examine the new priorities of these unique resources.



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Introduction

The electronic book (e-book) is still in its early stages of integration into academic libraries and because of this the implications for managing electronic collections are only just beginning to be explored. Whether e-resources are somehow distinct from printed collections and should be treated as such, or whether libraries should present a unified collection to their users, has been hotly debated since the arrival of e-journals, and will become an increasingly important issue as libraries' e-resource collections continue to expand. At the University of Surrey (UniS) the decision was taken in 2005 to begin cataloguing the existing collection of e-books. This case-study will examine the challenges that are being faced at UniS as MACHine-Readable Catalog(u)ing (MARC) records begin to be imported and created for these resources. It will look at the unique cataloguing problems that the e-book format presents, and will explore the issues surrounding the relationship of electronic and printed books. Finally, it will consider the future for cataloguing procedures as e-resource collections become more and more important to libraries and end-users.

The potential of e-books

There has been a considerable amount of excitement surrounding the arrival of the e-book. However, in reality e-books have been relatively slow to catch on; as Clifford Lynch remarks: 'I suspect more words are being published about the e-book phenomenon in print than have actually been placed into e-books so far.'¹ The excitement surrounding this format lies in its potential capabilities: the e-book – a digital or electronic representation of a printed book – can be made available to the user at any time and anywhere. It can also offer greater functionality than the printed item, including cross-referencing, hyperlinks to other sources and enhanced searchability. For information professionals, collection management issues such as storage, space and deterioration of stock are potentially solved by electronic collections. Yet, current technologies mean that on-screen reading is still uncomfortable and that reading from print is the preferred choice for many. E-book collections are therefore still in their infancy and, for those who have begun to purchase or license this format, how to manage these resources remains unclear.

E-books at UniS

E-books began to be purchased at the University of Surrey in 2001. Feedback from students was positive, and they reported that they were keen to use e-books more.² UniS has therefore been gradually expanding its e-book holdings and has recently signed up to Ebrary's 'Academic Complete' package. The students at UniS now have access to thousands of titles: in just this package alone, users can access almost 30,000. However, the e-book 'collection' at UniS is not unified, but is fragmented into a variety of different packages, purchased or licensed from a variety of suppliers. As well as Ebrary, these include netLibrary (currently the main supplier of e-books to academic libraries), Business Source Premier, CRC netbase, PsycBOOKS, World Tourism Organization, KnowUK, and Xreferplus. Each e-book package is different and comes with different licensing terms and viewing restrictions, for example, netLibrary restrict the number of simultaneous users while Ebrary do not. The format and functionality of e-books also varies from package to package.

Initially, individual e-books were not catalogued. The packages were all linked from the library home page, forming a separate collection from traditional print holdings. Later, the decision was taken to catalogue all of the netLibrary titles. In 2005 the library began looking into cataloguing individual e-book titles across all packages.

The decision to catalogue e-books

The decision to catalogue e-books was based primarily on the need for users easily to discover these resources.³ The main access point to the library's collections is the library Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) and it was felt that it was important for e-books to be accessible there in order to exploit these new resources fully. The library OPAC at UniS (Talis Prism) includes a searchable 'electronic book' subset within its advanced search page and thus titles can be located both purposefully and serendipitously by users. Although it is currently too early to measure usage statistics effectively at UniS, other libraries have found that cataloguing e-books significantly increases their use: at the University of Texas, after adding records to the online catalogue, usage increased immediately, and by about 50% over

three months.⁴ Similarly, netLibrary argue that 'integrating eBook MARC records into your OPAC is the single most important step you can take to ensure successful adoption of your eBook collection.'⁵

The decision to catalogue therefore seems straightforward. However, there are a number of issues that are raised by the integration of e-books into the OPAC, and that surround the relationship of electronic resources to the 'traditional collection'. Many libraries use a gateway approach for e-resource collections such as e-journals and the effect of this is that e-resources are isolated from the library's 'core' holdings. Whether the library does in fact wish to create a variety of discrete collections, or whether, as has traditionally been the case, the library catalogue should remain the primary source of information, is something that will need to be considered by information professionals. For e-books, their organization within collections is further complicated by confusion over what an e-book actually represents: whether they are simply 'hi-tech photocopies' or a unique entity in themselves is a question that has implications for how the resource is catalogued as well as how it should be accessed.

The cataloguing and importing process

The information in this case-study was gained from observations of practice, experience taken from working at the University of Surrey, and interviews with staff members. In 2005, UniS began importing catalogue records into the Talis Library Management System. For many of the e-book packages, suppliers were offering downloadable MARC21 records that could be imported into the catalogue (and were converted to the UKMARC version still in use, TalisMARC). This would therefore be extremely time-saving and require the cataloguing department to edit and upgrade records rather than catalogue manually. For those packages that did not supply MARC records, for example, the World Tourism Organization, original records would be created. Following discussions with staff at Portsmouth University, based on their own experience, the decision was taken to import records in batches rather than all at once. From July 2005, records began to be imported, initially onto the MIS (back-up) server and finally onto the live server, and packages began to be upgraded by the

cataloguing team. In 2006, records for the World Tourism Organization package began to be created and templates for different kinds of e-book records were made.

Importing issues

When importing records a number of problems were experienced. On occasions, and particularly when a record for the print copy of the e-book title existed in the catalogue, records would fail to import. Conversely, sometimes duplicate records were imported, with more than one item on one work record. This meant that the importing process took longer than expected, in part due to the fact that the Library Management System, Talis, was unused to importing records on a regular basis as it enables catalogue records to be downloaded from its union catalogue, Talis Base. Sometimes individual fields would fail to import within records. One example of this was the 008 field. This was particularly frustrating as, owing to a defect within the Talis Alto system, it was not possible to manually insert this field. The importing procedure also had knock-on effects for the authority control process as the workload of authorizing new catalogue entries was greatly increased by the inclusion of the large amount of e-book records into the catalogue.

Cataloguing and upgrading issues

For cataloguing purposes there were a number of decisions that needed to be made. The first was the choice between using a single 'hybrid' record for the print and electronic copies and using separate records for each. Practice for this has not yet been widely established by academic libraries, and the situation at the time was that libraries made their own local choices in this matter. There were a number of factors to consider: using one record would help users easily locate the electronic copy from the print record, yet using two records would make the updating process easier to manage. Initially, e-links to electronic copies were added to the print records in order to help users navigate between the two formats. Yet as new editions were published, e-book links were being updated, while the links on printed records became obsolete. Furthermore, e-books often have unique information, for example, an e-ISBN and a different publication date, so joint records could look confusing and jumbled. There was also the problem of items that are born digital and do not

have a printed counterpart. After assessing these issues, and looking at the example of other universities, UniS chose to use separate records for each item. This decision supported the idea that the two resources are independent from one another and have different functionality, rather than that the e-book is simply a replica of the printed text, a 'high-tech photocopy'.

Establishing what information to include within records was another issue that needed to be addressed. One problem was confusion about publisher information. Some packages such as KnowUK would cite the provider as the publisher of the book, while others would use the publication details of the printed version. This was an important issue to standardize as students would clearly need to reference the resources in their work. Similarly, whether to include classmarks within records was also a question that needed to be answered. After exploring the practice of other universities, UniS chose to do this and to use a standard classmark of 'electronic book'. The granularity of records was also an issue. When beginning to catalogue the netLibrary records, records included a high level of detail, for example notes providing information on Athens passwords, the source of the title proper, and the date the title was viewed. Yet, with the e-book collection expanding, it was soon realized it would not be possible to continue at this level of cataloguing. Moreover, it became apparent that some of these fields could cause problems as the information included was not static. Changing from using Athens to a new authentication system, for example, would mean that each record would have to be altered. Ultimately, this information relating to passwords and access was instead added to the library web pages.

Importing a variety of conflicting records into the catalogue, and tailoring these to local procedures and system requirements, meant that a large amount of upgrading was necessary. Sometimes indicators on records, or capitalization errors, needed to be changed. Links also proved problematic. Sometimes they contained the incorrect direction and had to be amended for the access route that UniS provided. Records might also provide the 856 link but, as Talis uses a hotlink function instead, this often led to two links being visible to users on the OPAC, and thus records had to be amended. The sheer number of records made any upgrading a time-consuming task. Although changes were

small, often hundreds of records would need to be edited.

Analysis

The experience of the University of Surrey reveals that there are a number of considerations that are unique to the cataloguing of electronic resources and that, as Lee and Boyle argue, often procedures 'modelled in the print world will not suffice'.⁶ The sheer size of electronic collections is one of the main reasons printed models cannot easily be transposed onto electronic works. At UniS, the level of granularity that would ideally be used for catalogue records, and was suggested by sources such as the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR), was shown to be impractical for thousands of e-book records. As Mitchell and Surratt explain:

*'What makes online resources unusual are their growing numbers, their tendency to become available in large clusters or collections are activated rather than as a continuous stream of incoming material.'*⁷

Unlike printed items that are purchased one by one, e-books are bundled and sold or licensed via large packages. Even small changes to records became laborious when dealing with hundreds of items.

Yet another reason why printed models will not easily suffice is that the information within the records for electronic items will often need to be prioritized differently. Previously, cataloguing had focused on the bibliographic description of items, but for electronic resources, access and password information, sources of the title proper and the routes for linking to the resources become more important than describing the physical scope or dimensions of the item. The provision of this information is further complicated by the dynamic nature of the electronic resource. Unlike a record for a printed item, the record for an e-book is not static. Links and password procedures change, as occasionally do names of providers. Yet, changes to thousands of individual records are not easily made.

The experience revealed that e-book cataloguing is still a nascent field and that there is a lack of guidance in this area. Information professionals simply do not have access to the same amount of support that exists for printed collection management. National deposit libraries are still only

collecting the voluntary deposit of e-books,⁸ and, as discovered by the E-books working group, AACR's treatment of e-resources is still in need of revision.⁹ Mitchell and Surratt explain: 'The standards for managing electronic collections tend to evolve more slowly than the resources themselves'.¹⁰ With the formats and possibilities of electronic resources changing rapidly, it is not surprising that the bibliographic implications have not been fully examined.

Conclusions and recommendations

It is paramount that users are aware of the electronic resources that libraries are investing in. Thus, the decision to import or to create catalogue records for e-books is a route worth considering by libraries as a way of signposting the end-user to these collections. It is also a decision that allows libraries to conserve the library catalogue as the primary access point for the library's holdings, and to avoid presenting users with diverse, discrete collections. Providing a searchable subset for electronic books within the OPAC is also a good way of allowing collections to be accessed and searched.

There still exists a lack of guidance within this area. However, the experience of staff at UniS shows that libraries can find support from collaborating with others in a similar position. At UniS, discussions with professionals at Portsmouth University, Sheffield University and the University of the West of England (UWE) meant that staff were able to gain advice from others who had already experienced similar problems. Electronic spaces for collaboration can also serve as a useful place for communication. UniS made use of spaces such as the Talis forum¹¹ and the Joint Information Systems Committee mailing list (JISCmail) LIS-E-BOOKS¹² for queries and as a space for discussion, and libraries should take advantage of these opportunities to share their experiences and gain support, particularly when going through a similar period of transition.

The importing of MARC records from providers created a number of issues for systems and cataloguing staff at UniS. Nonetheless, even despite the upgrading required, the availability of importable records was extremely time-saving. Ultimately, manual cataloguing of the thousands of records would have been impossible, so the

importing of batch records is a viable direction for other libraries to consider. However, providers are only in the early stages of beginning to supply MARC records to their customers and it is important for them to realize the need for libraries to have access to reliable and standardized information. Although netLibrary's MARC records are created by the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), a reliable source, records from many other providers do not have the same degree of authority. The provision of more reliable records from providers would make the burden on libraries significantly easier.

For libraries undertaking a similar process, there is also a need for a greater understanding of the unique nature of electronic material. The experience of UniS revealed that cataloguing e-resources is in many ways a different process from traditional cataloguing. This understanding will become increasingly important as providers create electronic resources that move further and further away from the printed text, incorporating wider functionality and greater exploiting the potential of online technologies. Yet because of the changing nature of this area, libraries also need to be flexible in their approach. The experience of UniS staff revealed that in reality, plans often had to be modified, as in the case of the importing process which took longer than expected, and that there are procedural implications, as in the example of the level of information within records that had to be reconsidered. Ultimately, libraries will need to be flexible as they explore fully the bibliographic implications of these dynamic resources, and will need to re-evaluate traditional procedures in the light of changing priorities.

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