# Perception Analysis of Scholarly E-Books

# in the Humanities at the Collegiate Level

## ACLS Humanities E-Book

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## Introduction

This analysis and report is the result of an independent study research project that examined a small segment of collegiate library acquisitions, specifically electronic books in the humanities. At the American Library Association's (ALA) Midwinter Meeting in Dallas in 2012, both JSTOR and Project MUSE announced their respective e-book collection product launches. Many librarians commented that it took approximately ten years for electronic journals to become comfortably established in the marketplace. When e-journals first launched, there was confusion due to formatting, platforms, delivery methods, etc. Publishers and academic librarians are finding that the introduction of e-books to the marketplace has not been as seamless as initially expected. The same issues that had plagued journals are now evident in the e-book market. This paper examines current perceptions and understandings among libraries regarding e-book and humanities collection offerings.

## Problem Statement

At present, there is significant market confusion regarding e-book selections in the academic marketplace, particularly in the humanities. University acquisition librarians, unsure of what the offerings actually are, have found themselves unsure of where to allocate funds, which has resulted in the postponement of e-book purchases. This paper provides a current assessment of the status of e-book offerings in the humanities.

## Abstract

The goal of this endeavor is:

1. To provide an overview of the current e-book offerings in the humanities.
2. Measure the perception of humanities e-book offerings among academic librarians.
3. To examine the issues from the perspective of the librarian.
4. To capture feedback from the market and ascertain the driving factors of buying decisions.

# Methodology

## *Data Collection*

Throughout this project, both primary and secondary data collection methods were used. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were employed to achieve a significant base of information. Five different methods of data collection were used:

1. Research was conducted using publicly available information (e.g., websites and industry blogs).

2. In-depth telephone interviews were made with a strategic sample of librarians from around the country. A total of twenty-one librarians from across North America in academia were interviewed in July 2012 and September 2012.

3. Two surveys were developed and distributed to a random sampling of 500 academic librarians. The selection of participants was generated from lists obtained from the American Library Association (ALA) and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). Questions were designed to obtain objective responses and measure the feedback. Factual information, such as whether or not the school in question had experience with any one of the four targeted assortments, was gathered. At the end of a four-week period during the month of July and a one-week period in September, there were sixty-nine respondents, representing a 14% response rate.

4. Post-survey interviews were conducted. Questions were designed to obtain subjective responses about librarians' perceptions. Seven additional interviews were completed.

5. Two face-to-face interviews were held: one at New York University in New York and a second at Oakton Community College in Des Plaines, Illinois. In both the four-year school (NYU) and the two-year school (Oakton), the librarians had similar outlooks about the subject.

Sample control: a targeted subset of librarians was chosen for this project. The criteria were that the participant must be an academic librarian who is involved with digital media and experienced with humanities acquisitions.

### *Data Analysis*

The methods of analysis were:

1. Coding of open-ended responses
2. Frequency analysis
3. Cumulative percentage breakdown
4. Statistical analysis

# Background

The introduction of electronic books (e-books) traces its roots to academia. In 1960, Doug Engelbart from Stanford Research Institute and Andries van Dam from Brown University opened the door for what would become e-books. Together, through the NLS (oN-Line System) Project, they changed the format by which a document was input and accessed by computers. They reformatted hardware and software to organize documents by structure. This enabled automated indexes as well as allowed for hyperlinks and the inclusion of graphics (van Dam 1971).

In 1971, Michael Hart, a freshman at University of Illinois, used a Xerox Sigma Mainframe to create a copy of the Declaration of Independence; this document is now referred to by some as the first e-book. Hart formed Project Gutenberg. It was his mission "to put at everyone's disposal, in electronic versions, as many literary works from public domain as possible for free." Over the next two decades, the growth of new titles was slow, and by 1994, there were 100 e-texts in the Project Gutenberg collection (Lebert 2008).

1994 was also the year that publishers recognized the marketing potential of the web to promote their books. The National Academy of Science, followed by MIT Press, was the first to start publishing books online. Their print sales did not suffer. In fact, for every online book they released, two print copy sales were generated. By 1997, technology allowed publishers to digitize books, speeding up the process, thereby increasing the volume of material available to libraries, faculty and students.

The first decade of the new millennium saw the continuation of advancements in technology, including hardware dedicated to reading e-books. Also apparent were both the growing demand

and educational applications that were outstripping publishers' ability to control this new medium. In the early days, content was offered freely. However, as the e-book industry grew, the underlying costs of creating e-books and journals began to emerge. At base, someone had to be paid to produce the work. Even if the material fell out of copyright, publishers still needed to pass on the costs of digitizing, archiving and delivering the collections they held to consumers. Heading into the second decade, the struggle between the publisher's need to control a highly fluid property and academia's desire to provide scholarly research materials at low or no cost contributed to this cost confusion. The acceleration of electronic academic materials combined with the significant pressure to "lock in" library budgets created heated competition among publishers and aggregators.

# Usage Issues

## *Digital Rights Management (DRM)*

DRM is technology encoded in digital content or devices that restricts the use of content in order to protect the copyright holder's control of the material. DRM technology may be used to limit the ability of students and faculty to easily use this format. It makes the material used difficult to copy, share and download. Academic libraries have relied on the section of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 that allows for "fair use" as it applies to electronic library reserves. In *Cambridge University Press vs. Patton,* the Atlanta federal court upheld Georgia State University's assertion that the institution was within the law (publishers claimed seventy-five infringements; the court found only four) when they copied and distributed works through their e-reserves system and asserted that their reserve system does not infringe on the copyright as long as faculty adhere to the college or university's policy that governs use of protected works for educational use (Dames 2012). Publishers were put on notice that it was their burden of proof to establish clear ownership of copyright works. Publishers are expected to challenge this ruling.

ACRL's blogger Laura Braunstein quotes librarian Sarah Houghton as stating that "publishers continue to falsely view [e-books] as a threat instead of a partner." Barbara Fister of Gustavus Adolphus College notes that "large trade publishers think sharing is a bug, not a feature" (quoted in Braunstein 2012b).

Celeste Feather of The Lyrasis Consortium, a 1,700 member nonprofit that supports technology in libraries by providing training and content via e-books and journals, stated that the top two points that Lyrasis will address in 2013 when they negotiate with the publishers have to do with the elimination of "friction," a term which refers to the restrictions put in place by the publishers. In the negotiations, Lyrasis will push for the ability to loan complete titles to other libraries and the ability to download complete titles to mobile readers for users. Currently, both downloading and transferring are accomplished on a chapter-by-chapter basis.

Feather believes that:

> The only way to successfully address these two points is to carefully negotiate group licenses on behalf of groups of libraries that have an express desire to purchase the content in question. In a number of cases, publishers do not create book-level files as part of their technical process and are not able to share with libraries and users. Another means of addressing the interlibrary loan issue is to allow short-term, low cost rentals, which would have lower administrative costs than that of traditional interlibrary loans and would allow a user to access content directly on a publisher's site (correspondence with authors).

## Patron-Driven Acquisition (PDA)

Libraries allow patrons to select which materials the library will purchase through a program that monitors usage. With shrinking budgets and the overwhelming volume of accessible electronic content, libraries are beginning to reconsider traditional methods of library acquisition that can lead to acquiring expensive, under-used collections. Some aggregators have opened up their collections to the demands of end users, such as students. When a predetermined threshold of downloads or online usage occurs, a purchase is triggered. The value of this method is that 100% of the content is used, whereas content of some aggregators' collections can go unused. The drawback is that those patrons making the buying decisions can negatively impact the level of quality of available content. The subject matter selected in this model is likely to reflect what is

in vogue instead of what is scholarly. There is the very real danger that libraries will only buy what is popular and current instead of considering those works that might support future scholarly research.

### *Budgets*

The cost of higher education continues to rise. The Associated Press reported that the average tuition at a four-year public university rose by 15% between 2008 and 2010 (Armario 2012). According to *Bloomberg*, college fees and tuition have risen 1120% in the last thirty years (Jamrisko 2012). *The Scholarly Kitchen* reports that the percentage of university funds spent on libraries has been on a downward trend despite the explosive increase in overall revenue (Davis 2012). Over the last twenty-five years, there has been a decline from a high of 3.7% in 1984 to just under 2% in 2009. One respondent at a major private school in Chicago claimed that her acquisition budget had been cut by one-third in 2009 alone (interview with authors). Along with the costs of journals and books, faculty and administrative salaries are rising, yet library budgets are shrinking. Library acquisitions in the humanities seem to be disproportionately affected.

### *Standardization of Technology*

The flexibility of e-books' technology is the primary appeal of the medium to librarians. Patrons are able to access research material around the clock, thereby allowing acquisition librarians more time to manage their collections. Most librarians would like to see clear industry standards regarding cross-platform compatibility, increased access, simultaneous usage, and ease of downloading and printing.

## Aggregators

The first survey and subsequent round of interviews compared four different aggregators. These four were chosen because they are all nonprofit academic aggregators that offer titles in the humanities. During the course of the interviews, common themes emerged and, as a result, the field of inquiry was opened to include consideration of for-profit publishers, such as EBSCO,

Wiley, and Elsevier. The second survey and follow-up interviews focused on the librarians' perceptions.

## *Nonprofit Aggregators*

### JSTOR

JSTOR was founded in 1995 with a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. A nonprofit organization, JSTOR has supplied the academic marketplace with over 300,000 journals, covering fifty-three different disciplines. In 2007, JSTOR merged with ITHAKA (a nonprofit organization with a mission to help the academic community take advantage of advances in new technologies) and, in January 2012, announced its entry into the scholarly e-book marketplace. Currently, JSTOR is publicizing its list of 22,000 books, approximately 4,000 of which are humanities titles (JSTOR 2012).

### Project MUSE

Project MUSE was founded as a nonprofit collaboration between libraries and publishers. It was established in 1995 and has been a major presence in the scholarly journal space. In early 2011, it was announced that Project MUSE and UPeC formed a partnership to deliver e-books into the academic marketplace. Currently they have 15,000 titles in their collection. They initially started as fifty-five university presses; to date, seventy-five university presses are involved (Project MUSE 2012).

### Oxford University Press (OUP)

OUP dates back to 1478 and has published a range of titles from *The King James Bible* to *The Oxford English Dictionary.* In 2000, OUP launched their e-book program, offering 14,000 titles in nineteen subject areas. According to Oxford University Press' 2011 Annual Report, the print market in North America and other developed nations is shrinking due to competition and online growth in these mature markets. OUP has made the strategic decision to make more content available online. They have targeted politics, religion, sociology, economics/finance, and music as the chief areas to promote. The core disciplines of history, philosophy, and linguistics have grown threefold (OUP 2012).

## Humanities E-Book (HEB)

In 1999, the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), with the support of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, launched the History E-Book project, now Humanities E-Book (HEB). Currently, their online collection is made up of 3,700 high quality titles in the humanities, 100% of which are selected by scholars and most of which cannot be found in other collections. The title selection process, like that of ACLS's fellowship awards, requires rigorous peer review led by scholarly committees (ACLS Humanities E-Book 2012).

## *Commercial Aggregators*

## EBSCO

In 1930, Elton B. Stephens sold magazines to put himself through school. In 1944, he and his wife formed a partnership and sold magazines to the U.S. Armed Forces, and in 1948, they purchased Hartsfield Publishing Company, the first of several acquisitions that would place many publishing companies under the EBSCO umbrella. In 1963, the company started selling to libraries, and by 1986, EBSCO launched EBSCO Electronic Information. Its mission was to produce and sell electronic products. Today, EBSCO is the largest leading database and e-book provider for libraries and institutions, offering over 300,000 e-books and audiobooks. At 100 million page views per day, they are one of the most used fee-pay sites (EBSCO 2012).

## Gale

Gale was formed in 1954 because founder Frederick Gale Ruffner was looking for a list of voluntary associations. Unable to find one, he took it upon himself to publish the *Encyclopedia of Associations*. After Thompson Corporation took ownership in 1998, Gale merged with IAC and Primary Source Media (the former largest source of microform archives). Today Gale-Cengage Learning is a leader in e-research and educational publishing for libraries (Gale Cengage Learning 2012).

## Wiley

Today, John Wiley and Sons is a 1.8 billion dollar company. Formed in 1807 as a small New York print shop, Wiley has grown into a leading international publishing house with businesses in scientific, technical, medical and scholarly publishing. In 1997, they acquired Van Nostrand

Reinhold for a foothold in the electronic book space. Today, they publish everything from college textbooks, trade publications, scientific, technical and medical journals as well as the *For Dummies* collection (and what student hasn't, at some point, relied on *Cliffs Notes*?) (Wiley Online Library 2012).

## Elsevier

In 1880, a Dutchman named Jacobus Robbers founded a small publishing company devoted to classical scholarship. Elsevier now serves over thirty million scientists, students and health professionals. It is an international multimedia publishing company with over 20,000 products. Elsevier was a key player in the field of electronic books for academic libraries. In 1992, with the TULIP project (The University Licensing Program), Elsevier became the first publisher to release copyrighted material over the Internet. Fifteen major universities received forty-two science journals. At the time, concerns over copyright/royalties and the subscription-based model vs. fixed-fee access were discussed, but it was assumed that these and other problems would be decided naturally. Twelve years later, they are still unresolved (Elsevier 2012).

# Results of Survey and Interviews

When asked what factors are important in librarians' choices about acquisitions, issues of interlibrary file sharing and the ability to "own" the rights to copyrighted material came up numerous times. Cost and quality were ranked as the top two factors, while sharing and the ability to "own" ranked last.

- **Purchase** - Perpetual access, but restricted usage. This can include the ability to buy a single title or collection. Some aggregators provide discounts for multiple users and some even have demand-driven models. Several collections are using Carnegie Classifications: a means of establishing tiered pricing. For example, one aggregator offers three years' worth of titles that can be purchased for a one-time fee of $130,000 for a tier 5 school. One of the large aggregators allows for single collections to be purchased separately. Two examples are: the film collection sold for $4,000 or the history collection for $11,000.

- **Leasing/Licensing** - Deeply discounted pricing offered for a limited time with usage-reporting tiered pricing. The traditional business model offers annual renewals of subscriptions.

**Which aggregators do you use?**
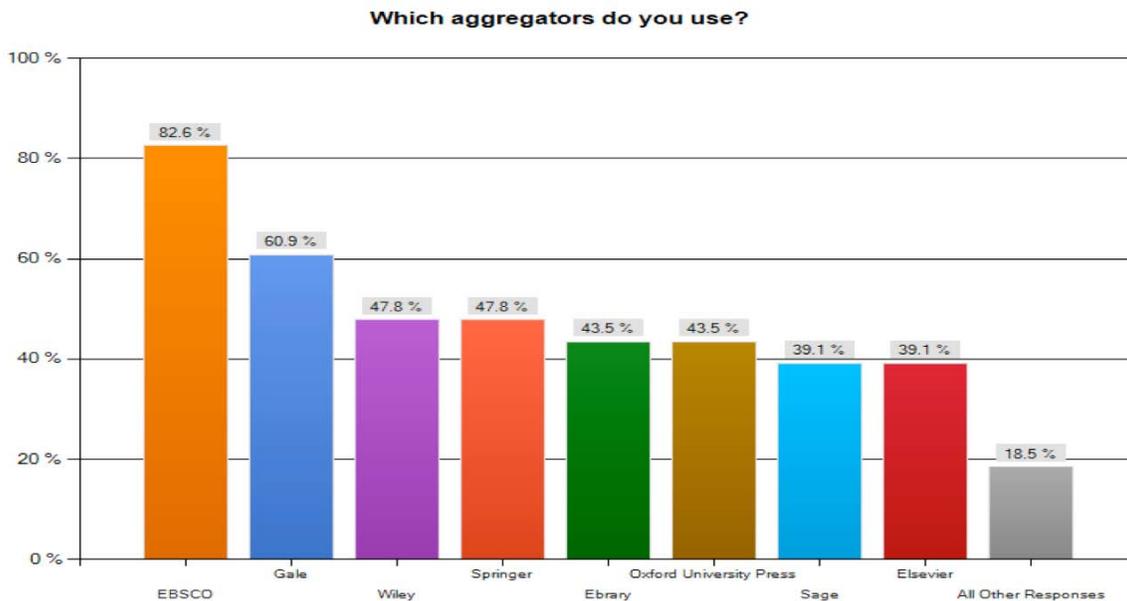


What makes some aggregators better than others? Respondents' answers were not ranked, but were equally weighted, allowing for more than one answer.

- Ease of use was cited by 65% of respondents. This covers interface, platforms and the ability to download or copy. 24% mentioned DRM.

- 42% cited subject matter of the collection, whether or not the titles came from one single vendor or many. A main concern for librarians is that content should be relevant to their institution's curricular needs.

- 33% stated that vendor relationships were important. Some believed that by working with specific vendors or consortiums, they could negotiate better prices.

When acquiring titles, is "buying" even at a higher price, a greater value then licensing at a lower price?
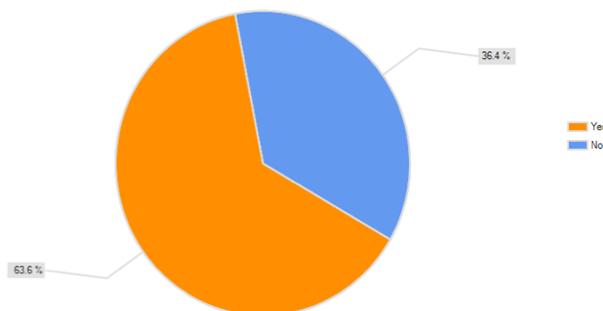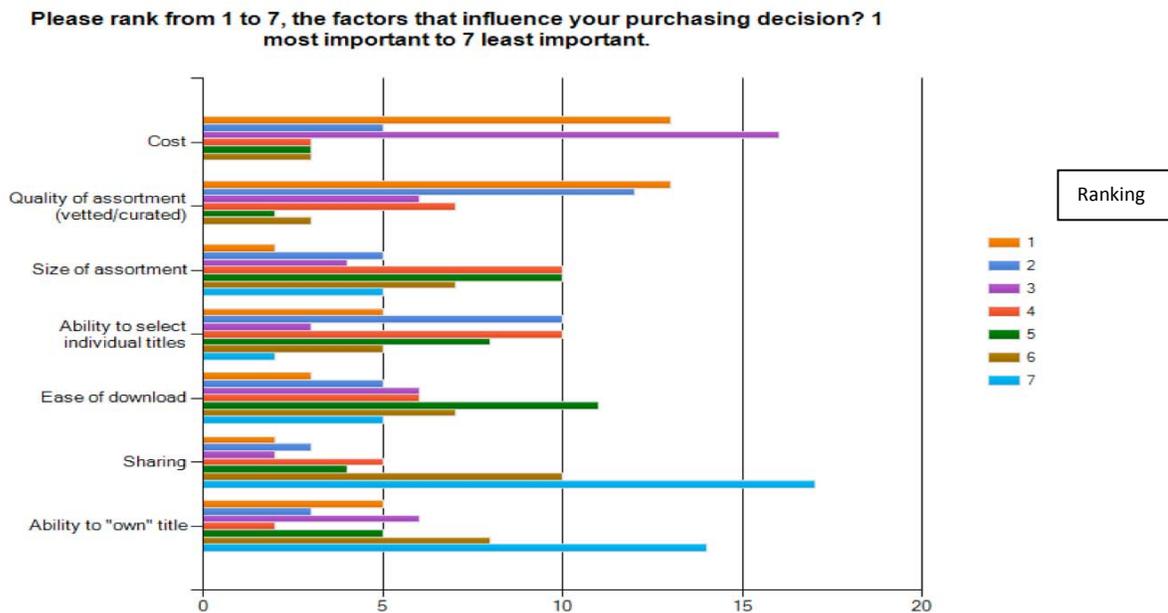
- 28% said that price was a differentiating factor in an aggregator's popularity.

When librarians were asked whether it was a better value to buy or to license, the initial response was 63.6% in favor of buying, while 36.4% believed that licensing was a better value. When asked to expand on their reasoning for either buying or licensing, the number favoring purchasing over leasing dropped to 41%. Most librarians feel that a mix of the two is a healthy formula. Purchasing is desired when longevity of the material is established. It is comforting to know that long-term access is available for core subject matter. On the flip side, when titles are popular, licensing may be a more economical option.

When asked about their strategy for the digital library marketplace, 56% of respondents said that they have developed a digital strategy, while 44% said that they have not. Respondents appear to be evenly divided on patron-driven, as opposed to curriculum/faculty-driven, acquisitions. Some librarians seek to match what they have in print, while others are replacing complete programs, depending on the discipline and the level of faculty acceptance. One of the key factors is the appeal of 24/7 access to research material in online collections.

The average title count amongst respondents was approximately 39,000 e-books per library. A minority of librarians stated that in some situations and subject matter, there is a shift towards e-books replacing print books. 17% feel that eventually all library books will be electronic, but an overwhelming majority (83%) reject this possibility. "Print books are not going away," said one librarian. Another asserted that all-electronic libraries might occur "in some distant future age I wish not to live in."

**Please rank from 1 to 7, the factors that influence your purchasing decision? 1 most important to 7 least important.**



## Follow-Up Interviews

This series of questions was designed to gauge respondents' perceptions. They were informed of this at the beginning of the interview for the sole purpose of putting them at ease. The respondents were not rated as having given a correct or incorrect answer.

When asked if the aggregators they were using were either nonprofit or commercial ventures and whether that status mattered, 78% were not only unaware of the status of the different companies, but also shared the perception that it did not matter where content was acquired from. It should be noted that nonprofits cycle profits back into the educational system in the form of grants and fellowships to support research, whereas commercially driven enterprises exist to generate a profit.

Interviewers asked if, in the humanities space, it is important to have scholarly instead of academic titles (front end, textbook-type titles) in library holdings. There was a general lack of clarity on this point. 26% of respondents felt it was more important to have scholarly work, compared to 20% who felt it was more important to have academic, with 20% wanting a blend of both. 33% of librarians were confused about the terms and did not know the difference.

The distinction between scholarly and academic is subtle but important. The difference between the two is that **scholarly** is defined as work that has been created by scholars for scholars and is

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subject to rigorous peer review. Not to be confused with review by an editorial board, the peer review process requires that a community of experts in a given field review the work with impartiality. It is understood that research that cites scholarly material has a significantly higher level of credibility. In contrast, the term **academic** is much broader, referring to reference works, textbooks or anything used in the classroom to support the educational process.

When it comes to journal offerings from publishers, most are peer reviewed and, therefore, scholarly. Traditionally, many books from commercial publishers are not peer reviewed, and, therefore, fall into the academic category. Most books from societies are peer reviewed and, consequently, scholarly. When asked where aggregators get their titles, 80% of respondents either did not know or were incorrect in their assumption that all came from publishers, societies or a combination of the two.

With acquisition budget constraints, librarians cannot afford to purchase the same title from four different vendors. When asked if any of the aggregators had exclusive rights to their titles or if there was overlap in these programs, 88% of librarians recognized that there was overlap in the large aggregators' collections.


## Conclusions

Demand for e-books is growing, and academic libraries are struggling to meet this need. Budget pressures as well as the marketing "noise" have made the task more challenging for librarians and faculty. Publishers seek to protect their copyrights and seem nervous that e-books will be subject to the same pirating that has occurred in the film and music industries. At the advent of e-book publishing, there was an expectation that the transition from e-journals to e-books would be easy (for the e-journal aggregators)—a belief that has proven to be overly optimistic. Some have even said that it may take years for the digital marketplace to mature. The majority of librarians interviewed agreed that no matter who supplies institutions with content, digital rights management will be at the core of their decision-making process. Most feel that they currently have adequate coverage in their e-collections and, in some cases, too much content that they do not need or use.

E-books are here to stay. Publishers would do well to realize that academic librarians are not only customers, but also their partners in future growth. Large collections of the vendor's choosing cannot be force-fed to budget-anxious librarians. If this occurs, PDA will become the model, and it will be one that, in the long run, will result in a decline in future sales. Platforms need to be standardized throughout the industry. DRM needs to be modified so that end users have a product that they can use while still respecting copyright privileges. For this, publishers could look to the public library model, where the image of the book is removed from the patron's device at the end of the loan period.

To understand the current state of the academic e-book marketplace, one must first accept that it is in a state of flux. There is a certain romance within the humanities community toward print (as evidenced by a survey on the Princeton campus that indicated that 92% of humanists viewed print books as essential) (Bivens-Tatum 2011), but mass consumer tastes may change academic preferences. According to Amazon.com, in July 2010, for every 100 hardcover books sold, 140 e-books were sold. The Association of American Publishers stated in their 2012 report "for the first time, e-books placed #1 in individual format for Adult Fiction" (AAP 2012). While these statistics are from an online retailer, they nonetheless reflect the fact that consumers are demanding more electronic content and will expect the same from school resource libraries.

## Summary

- There does not seem to be a consensus among academic librarians regarding what is desirable in terms of humanities book offerings.
- Many librarians do not distinguish scholarly titles from academic titles. Librarians seem to lean toward known brands (e.g., EBSCO, JSTOR), irrespective of the content that these aggregators offer.
- Most libraries are still in the early stages of developing an e-book strategy, and many are unsure of which direction they should take.
- The blogs, surveys and interviews corroborate that there is no agreement amongst librarians as to which humanities content is considered necessary, which collections are

essential, which aggregators to use or what fields to cover—a marked difference to the expectations for required content in the fields of math and science.

- Most librarians surveyed believe that the various aggregators and publishers all offer the same (overlapping) content and were largely unclear about the sources aggregators use to create their title lists.

- Usability and functionality are key factors in making purchasing decisions. The primary criteria are:
    o 24/7 access
    o iPad/e-reader enabled
    o Easy user interface
    o Collection quality
    o Selected subject areas (literature, history, religion, etc.)
    o Unlimited numbers of users
    o Interlibrary loans/sharing

    However, many of these characteristics differ among the aggregators.

- Pricing schema vary among the aggregators based on both the type of purchase (more expensive) vs. licensing (less expensive).

- Unit costs per title vary between the aggregators based on license, purchase, access, etc.

- Operating differences between the aggregators are still unclear to most librarians. The distinction between front-list textbooks and scholarly works is not well understood.

In her survey response, Chestalene Pintozzi of the University of Arizona notes that future e-book technology "will continue to vary based on the values and priorities of the companies/presses providing the e-books. E-journals went through a long shakedown process before they became usable and well-managed as many of them are now."

The academic library will be witness to a certain amount of turmoil in the next few years as the marketplace grows and changes to accommodate technology. It will be the savvy librarian and the nimble publishers/aggregators who survive.

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