

E-texts – a targeted approach

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E-journal embedding and effective utilisation is still a topic that consumes time, discussions and energies across the library and information profession. Even though we have access to ever-increasing, quality electronic resources, we are still unsure as to their impact on learning, teaching and research. Many higher educational institutions now have an e-journals strategy and marketing strategy. This article argues the case for a focused, targeted e-texts strategy, illustrating how lessons learned in e-journals development and integration can be applied within the e-books context, and how a holistic approach based on curriculum collaboration and partnership can reap rewards. This overview will illustrate how an e-books pilot and strategy are emerging from e-journals success at Edge Hill College of Higher Education. A curriculum case study will be explored in detail. Benefits and lessons learned will be highlighted and framed within an e-texts targeted approach and strategy.



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Introduction: e-resources developments and strategies

A previous issue of *Serials*¹ focused on the management, maximisation and marketing of e-journals, highlighting the complexities of the hybrid library as 'a dynamic – it is not a static concept or a given place in time.'² The opportunities proffered by the contextualisation of e-resources within learning and teaching, and the advantages of collaboration between information professionals and teaching colleagues, were also key messages. The issue for future development and marketing of e-journals is one of 'embedding skills through new relationships with a variety of stakeholders, rather than simply a matter of access and promotion.'³ Undoubtedly, strategies for developing and marketing electronic resources have moved on apace since early 2001. E-journals are no longer the latest discovery, but an integrated part of the learning landscape and learning resources provision. E-books are now emerging as 'the next best thing' (although viewed sceptically in some arenas!), but little has been written on their use and evaluation and, more importantly, on their impact on learning, teaching and research. Can we learn from our trials and tribulations of introducing, managing and exploiting e-journals, and apply the strategies and techniques to e-books?

The electronic resources landscape has changed over the last 2 years and developments at Edge Hill are probably representative of many higher education institutions. Figure 1 illustrates the main trends during this period. These trends have emerged from an ever-increasing distributed approach to learning and teaching, and as a consequence, to learning infrastructures and learning resources. This context illustrates the constantly shifting nature of the hybrid library and

Figure 1: E-Resources development

November 2000	November 2002
E-journals subscriptions: 2,600	E-journals subscriptions: 5,000 E-books introduced
Remote access increasing	Off campus services launched: VISTA
Emergence of VLEs	Embedding e-resources within – (WebCT) 5,000 users
Some curriculum partnership/more generic approaches	Curriculum approach and partnership across most subjects/limited generic
JISC User Behaviour Monitoring and Evaluation Framework	How to evaluate impact on learning, teaching and research?

the fertile ground for further e-resource developments cultivated by e-journal adoption, management and exploitation.

Marketing e-journals: from apprehension to embedding

Numerous interconnecting strategies have been developed to maximise the investment in electronic resources, and particularly e-journals, including:

- e-journals/collections on reading lists
- embedding e-journals within VLEs
- sections in module handbooks
- modules integrating information literacy skills
- emphasis on critical evaluation
- partnerships between staff/creative dialogue
- e-resources written into Learning and Teaching Strategies

At Edge Hill, e-journals are now accepted as 'the norm' by our staff, students and teaching colleagues. We have learnt that integration and contextualisation do not simply mean 'placement', i.e. e-journals on reading lists, linked within virtual learning environments (VLEs), but rather are based upon interaction, an understanding of their role within the curriculum, and are linked to learning needs and outcomes. This can only be achieved by matching the product/service with user needs and by effective collaboration at an early stage between library and information staff and academic areas.

Applying e-journal strategies to e-books

It would appear that the strategies applied to e-journals can also be applied to new developments such as e-books. The development of new products and services can often be divorced from the needs of users, and a truly market-focused approach (rather than simply advertising and promoting new services once they have been adopted) remains rare within our context. Marketing has been defined as 'The provision of goods or services to meet consumer need' (Collins English Dictionary). Within the context of electronic resources, we can take this further and add the embedding of goods or services within the learning and teaching context and environment. Lessons learnt in e-journals marketing also

indicate that one size doesn't fit all and that a generic approach is not that effective.

Within the context of high demands on finite resources, a targeted marketing approach is attractive and, ultimately, necessary. With diverse curriculum areas at Edge Hill, as elsewhere, we must be political and focus on areas of maximum impact; health and education. In addition, these two curriculum areas are increasingly distributed in nature, both in physical terms and in learning approaches, for example with the growth in adoption of the VLE (at Edge Hill, this is WebCT). Consequently, additional electronic resource solutions (such as e-books) would appear to fit the market need, and embedding strategies used during e-journal development would appear to be applicable.

Why e-books?

Taking into account the e-text philosophy that Information and Media Services (IMS) had developed within teaching and learning, the next logical step from e-journals appeared to be involvement with e-books but only where specific user group needs could be satisfied. We decided we would need a target pilot group for e-books, one who would benefit from such a resource, i.e. a user group that studies on a multi-site basis and has a critical mass of part-time/distance users. A user group that met these criteria were the students of the School of Health Studies. NetLibrary was chosen as the e-books supplier as they were able to provide e-books within a library setting, we were able to work within the NetLibrary model, and our curriculum requirements were met.

Health students and e-books: identifying market need

The School of Health Studies has dispersed student and staff groups. Health Studies at Edge Hill, in its various forms, is taught on three of our campuses: in Liverpool, Stockport and Ormskirk. Therefore, in this instance, 'multi-site' is not referring to different buildings in the same town, but actually multi-site in three different counties. When students are studying similar subjects and curricula in geographically dispersed areas, remote resources are obviously very effective, and

e-books appeared to fit these 'multi-site' demands. In addition, the School of Health Studies' students (nurses, midwives and operating department practitioners) have a very full curriculum and timetable. Therefore they have less time to use resources physically located in the libraries within IMS sites. In addition, geographically, they may be some distance from an actual physical site. They also undertake very intensive clinical placements, during which students will often work shifts, and are almost always away from any of the Edge Hill campuses. These placements may be in any NHS hospital trusts or NHS Primary Care Trusts within Merseyside, Greater Manchester, or West Lancashire, adding to the dispersion of our students.

The Health Studies curricula are very much 'key text' based, and such curricula make much use of specific health related government reports and documents. The students tend not to stray away from texts that are recommended within the curriculum. For this reason we had already started introducing some of the key Department of Health documents such as 'Making a Difference'⁴, 'the NHS Plan'⁵, etc. which are already freely available online. Therefore we had already been encouraging the use of online and electronic textbooks, thus paving the way for e-books. Health Studies lecturers and tutors are also very aware of the developments within virtual learning environments and are actively trying to put course content online. The introduction of e-books, as a new electronic resource, met their needs for virtual learning resources developments.

Project development and approaches

IMS collection development policies are based around academic staff deciding upon resource titles, so curriculum advisers from the School of Health Studies were invited to choose titles already available within the NetLibrary catalogue. Having done this, IMS were then able to order a core collection of health and nursing titles. Before introducing the titles to students or any of our service users (even though the titles became immediately available), we had to ensure that we had a solid support structure in place. That meant developing our own web pages (<http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/ims/er/netlib.htm>) to support our students and users of NetLibrary.

This needed to include frequently asked questions and a direct link to NetLibrary (<http://www.netlibrary.com>). We also had to ensure that we had the staff help and support in place, so all help desk staff throughout the campuses had to at least be aware of NetLibrary and had to be able to use it on a basic level.

With the support structure in place, as part of the marketing strategy, concentrated subject-specific workshops were delivered to School of Health Studies staff. Workshops were also delivered to all our departmental staff who worked on service desks within IMS, and also to a pilot group of part-time nursing students who were involved in studying on a WebCT based module. Having completed the delivery of all this training during the NetLibrary evaluation period, an official launch was held in October 2002. This entailed publicity in the college magazine and local press, as well as a leafleting campaign around the Health Studies teaching departments. Although after this point, School of Health Studies' students were no longer a pilot group, NetLibrary training will continue to be organised and delivered on an ongoing basis, and was included in the resources training which IMS delivered to the new Health Studies students who started in September 2002.

Issues to resolve

Introducing electronic books as a new resource surprisingly does not come without its issues. For example, there are questions concerning the model of NetLibrary, i.e. it operates on a single user licence, and NetLibrary books (per copy) cost more than print books, although the actual way in which e-books are accessed and used needs to be taken into account. There are general considerations about maximising value for money, but models and prices of e-books are issues that individual libraries will have to address. A particular model and pricing structure may well be ideal for a specific user group, (e.g. Edge Hill School of Health Studies' students) but not others.

NetLibrary allows access to management information about e-books usage, so it is important to utilise that functionality to monitor usage by targeted groups in order to be sure that both the materials provided and the method of access are acceptable to them. Now that we have

established our e-books collection, it is important that academic staff continue to choose them, not only for reading lists, but to embed them into the WebCT modules. These issues can be seen as opportunities to further target the marketing of e-books to academics and students alike. E-journals having been implemented successfully over several years, it is now second nature to most of our students to use them. The embedding of those e-journals has taken time, so we must not be alarmed if we do not see a significant rise in use of e-books immediately. We will have to monitor it over a period of years, continue to obtain further relevant academic content, and market the resource accordingly. This managed and targeted marketing strategy was aimed deliberately at School of Health students. It is a specific resource for a specific user group. Consequently, the marketing strategy that has worked for the School of Health Studies will have to be adapted and customised for other academic departments.

Evaluation

The summer period of 2002 was used to deliver training sessions and staff development, and also to evaluate the new resource. E-books were evaluated under four broad headings:

- Access to NetLibrary e-books
- Presentation of NetLibrary e-books
- Using NetLibrary e-books
- Support in using NetLibrary e-books

Approximately 90% of the responses were positive. Comments we received, for example were:

- “Excellent search facilities.”
- “E-books are a great resource for reading list items.”
- “Easy registration”
- “Intuitive interface”
- “Quick and easy access to key texts”

It would seem, from the evaluation, that our students do enjoy using NetLibrary e-books, and are able to make effective academic use of them. It was obviously pleasing to see so many positive comments, but there were also negative comments such as:

- “Reading electronic text puts a strain on the eye.”
- “It was very slow to load pages”

“I prefer to hold a printed book”

“Not enough UK examples”

Interestingly, the most regular complaint was the lack of UK published texts in the collection, but this happens to be something that NetLibrary are well aware of, and they are constantly trying to broker deals with UK publishers for more content. These are issues specific to the model and content of just one particular supplier, and of one particular targeted e-book collection.

Future e-books developments

Having successfully introduced NetLibrary e-books to our School of Health Studies students, we will continue to monitor this usage. We will also have to consider future targeted marketing to different user groups. Edge Hill has a large School of Education which, as with the School of Health Studies, delivers programmes on a multi-site basis. Education students also have to complete intensive work placements at schools, away from the Edge Hill campuses. There is also a substantial amount of education-related content within NetLibrary's available titles. For these reasons, our next targeted user group for e-books will be education students. E-books will also be tested within a purely online environment in 2003 with adoption in the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education, Teaching and Learning in a Clinical Setting. This course is delivered almost entirely online via WebCT. The academic staff who deliver the course were approached by IMS and have selected a collection of health and medical education NetLibrary titles as further resources for this course. The course will have an intake in January 2003, and the NetLibrary titles in this instance will be embedded into the learning tasks of the course. A full evaluation will demonstrate how successfully e-books can be embedded within a VLE and within online learning.

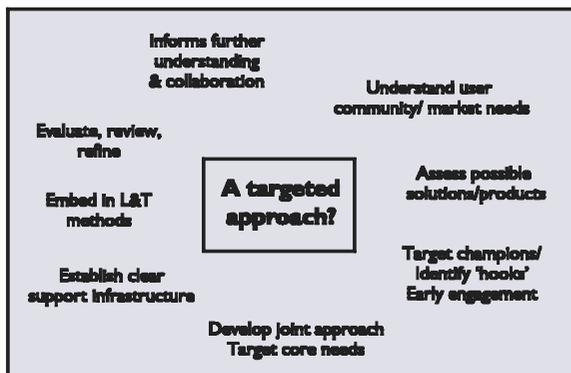
With the pilot project completed, and the realisation that e-books do have a place within Edge Hill's teaching and learning developments, IMS have produced a specific e-books policy. This policy is contained within our collections developments policy, which acts as a guideline for academic staff as to resources acquisition. Having seen that NetLibrary can be a success, we need to look at other suppliers of electronic books. Obviously they are not the only supplier and it is

a growing market. There is a national NetLibrary User Group, which Edge Hill is participating in, with one of its key roles being to lobby NetLibrary to acquire further UK content.

E-texts: a targeted approach?

Clearly a strategy for e-books development and marketing can draw heavily from previous work in e-journals. It would appear beneficial to articulate a holistic e-texts approach and strategy, integrated with the collection development strategy and within the institution's learning and teaching strategy. Our e-texts strategy aims to provide resources that are fit for purpose, targeted at specific groups with specific needs, with appropriate infrastructure and support, and underpinned by cross-departmental partnerships. Figure 2 summarises the cyclical nature of the approach to marketing e-books illustrated in this article. The possible solutions and products (such as Netlibrary) are important but are not the key; rather, the crucial success factor is the understanding of the user community and early engagement.

Figure 2



Issues to consider for e-texts development

Successful and appropriate use of e-journals within learning and teaching has taken time, and there remains more work to do across the profession. However, increasingly sophisticated strategies can be applied to new products such as

e-books, hopefully with quicker results. Further research and evaluation is needed to assess the impact of e-books on learning and teaching, and to explore user responses and behaviour. We must not only know, understand and fully engage our audiences and stakeholders, but become a part of that user community in order to marry needs with the right solution whether real or virtual. The user community, and not the product, is king, and if our strategies for marketing and embedding are effective and drawn from our understanding of that community, then theoretically they can be applied to any emerging e-product.

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