

# Patron-driven, librarian-approved: a pay-per-view model for e-books

Pay-per-view (PPV) e-books are a viable new business model for cost-effective delivery of online content to library users. As global recession negatively impacts the library's budget, we must seek new ways to make our dollar go further and challenge the traditional role of the academic library as a 'just in case' collection vs. a 'just in time' service provider. The University of Texas Libraries has invested two years in a pilot program for PPV e-book delivery with Ebook Library Corporation as the primary corporate partner. This article discusses the parameters, developments and challenges of the pilot, as well as potential new directions for using PPV services to augment traditional collection development.



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## Introduction: e-book environment and UT context

The e-book philosophy at the University of Texas Libraries (UT) has historically been one of experimentation driven by the intent to provide users with the most cutting edge, economical and technologically advanced resources available on the market. We remain open to a variety of platforms and payment structures and consider all products on their own merits. We recognize that users are savvy and capable of negotiating a range of products and interfaces. We are vigilant about the improvement of discovery tools that empower users to find e-books without library hand-holding. We have not found it necessary to implement a comprehensive marketing plan for e-books; our usage statistics illustrate the increased acceptability and desirability of electronic versions of books.

UT has been investing in e-book services since 1999 and has sought an active role in shaping the developing e-book market. We began with NetLibrary over a decade ago and included UT System (15 university campuses across the state) librarians in the title-by-title selection process. Among the host of platforms and products that the

UT Libraries provide, in addition to NetLibrary, are ebrary, MyiLibrary, ACLS Humanities E-book and a number of full-text databases such as Early English Books Online (EEBO), Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), Gale Virtual Reference Library and The Gerritsen Collection. Our current e-book holdings include approximately 600,000 titles (as reported in the Association of Research Libraries' ARL Statistics 2007-2008: <http://www.arl.org/stats/annualsurveys/arlstats/arlstats08.shtml>).

## EBL pilot

Simultaneous to our exploration of pay-per-view (PPV) article services, the University of Texas Libraries began investigation of PPV e-book services in the Spring of 2007. We selected the E-book Library Corporation (EBL) to pilot a patron-driven e-book program, which began in August of that year. At that time, EBL offered a catalog of approximately 60,000 titles from academic and

commercial publishers, brief MARC records for loading into the OPAC, the option to allow the user to download PDFs of the books or have books readable online only, and an administrative module allowing for price capping, publisher restrictions and highly customizable rent/purchase variables, as well as detailed reports on use of the collection. After the initial EBL book record load, successive updates increased that total by approximately 2,000 books a month during the first fiscal year of UT's EBL pilot to a total of approximately 85,000 by the end of the fiscal year 2007/08.

The initial number of rentals ('short-term loan' or STL) before auto-purchase and the initial budget for the EBL pilot were informed by analysis of nearly ten years of usage data from our NetLibrary e-books. A small proportion of titles had four or more uses, while a far greater number of titles had three or fewer uses. This convinced us to begin the EBL pilot with STL fees for the first three uses and the auto-purchase of the title upon the fourth use. STLs are approximately 5–10% of the list price and are set by the publisher, while purchase price is approximately equal to the list price.

UT Libraries allocated \$300,000 to the EBL pilot for the first fiscal year. In addition, we restricted the record load to EBL titles priced under \$700, and opted to mediate any STL transactions priced at \$50 or more. A prompt for authentication appears when a user clicks on any EBL title from the OPAC and when a patron enters the EBL database from the library website. After entering a book by selecting 'Read Online' from an EBL book's left sidebar menu, one can begin reading. When an as yet unpurchased EBL book is open beyond the initial five minutes, a message appears: "Your time browsing this book has elapsed. Do you wish to continue? Yes (create a loan) No (return to catalogue)". At this point, if the book rents for \$50 or more, the patron can complete a request for the STL to be approved. The mediator receives an e-mail with the details and can determine then whether it makes most financial sense to purchase the book outright or allow our two more rentals to occur at that price prior to automatic purchase. (The mediator can view and approve any cumulated requests in the administrator module). Upon approval, the patron is automatically notified by an EBL-generated e-mail that the book is now accessible. The mediation process has not proved onerous, and averages about five to six STL requests requiring approval each week. This

restriction has allowed us to closely monitor the activity during the pilot and to respond quickly and make needed adjustments should that prove necessary. The vast majority of transactions, however, do not require mediation, and the pilot runs almost effortlessly in this regard.

EBL empowers libraries to specify e-book borrowing periods as well as allow EBL books to be downloaded. UT Libraries opted for a 24-hour loan period and decided to disable downloading. Since none of our other e-book platforms (NetLibrary, ebrary, MyiLibrary) are currently set to allow downloads, we elected to keep user experience and expectations consistent across platforms.

Patrons can print up to 20% of an EBL book's total content and can copy and paste up to 5%. When reading online, the EBL patron portal keeps track of how much content each patron prints or copies and will block printing and copying when the limits are reached. (The downloading option available uses Adobe Acrobat's Digital Rights Management features to control use including printing and copying from e-books).

EBL offers three access models; UT Libraries most frequently use the Non-Linear Lending™ (NLL) model. (A Textbook Lending model and Unlimited Access model are also available). The NLL model, which provides multiple concurrent users access to a book, enables each copy of an e-book that the library purchases to be read up to 325 instances or 'uses' per year (though a few publishers are now offering more uses per year). A 'use' is any activity within a title over five minutes for unowned and ten minutes for owned titles. This grace period eliminates unnecessary payments for accidental views or situations where a user quickly determines the book is not needed. When an e-book is accessed online, each loan instance consists of 24 hours. A patron can access an e-book as many times as desired during the 24-hour period without incurring additional loan instances. After the 325th use of a purchased book, a library has three choices: it can make the book unavailable until its anniversary date, at which time the 325 uses are available again; the library can extend mediated or non-mediated short-term loans for the title until the anniversary date when the loan number is reset to zero; or the library can purchase a second copy of the title which then gives it 650 uses per year every year. To date, no UT Libraries-owned EBL book has reached the 325

uses mark prompting us to make this decision. We expect it to be made infrequently and on a case-by-case basis. (For a full overview of the features of EBL see [http://www.eblib.com/about\\_ebl.asp](http://www.eblib.com/about_ebl.asp)).

Of the initial fiscal year 2007/08 allocation made by the UT Libraries for EBL, \$286,849 of the \$300,000 allocation was encumbered. Of that amount \$190,043 was spent on EBL rentals (short-term loans) and \$96,806 went to EBL purchases.

### The 3% project

The UT Libraries' Collection Team has over the last two to three years considered options and scenarios for gradually shifting collecting strategy from buying books in print or online that do not circulate to supplying just those books our users indicate that they want in the formats they prefer. After examining the usage data by publisher from EBL and reports on circulations by publisher and call number from our Integrated Library System (ILS), Millennium, we set out to identify imprints we could potentially block from arriving through the print approval plan and instead rely on patron-driven EBL access. Our approval plan vendor, Blackwell North America (BNA), provided sales and returns reports, which were analyzed to target publishers that supply us with a proportionately high number of titles shipped, a high average price and highest yearly invoice total. We informally polled several bibliographers regarding their opinions on examples of 'second rate' or 'marginal' publishers in their areas and created summaries of data from our ILS to compare the percentage of zero circulations in relation to number of titles received for each imprint. Those publishers with a higher percentage of zero circulations were checked against the EBL publisher list. This group of publishers was scrutinized as potential candidates to be blocked from print approval in an effort to gauge whether these might be better selected via EBL as needed by patrons. The target figure for this pilot was 3% of the approval plan (approximately \$18,000) with a scope covering the broadest range of subject areas.

Prior to implementing the block on the publishers selected in the print approval plan, bibliographers were informed of the details of the experiment, how publishers were analyzed and selected and where to access these reports, and finally the provision by which any of the titles

affected by the imprint block could be purchased from a central fund, should a faculty member, patron or librarian specifically request that a print copy be added. In the first year of the pilot, there were fewer than five cases where a print duplicate was requested for purchase when an EBL title was available. In a few more cases, a print title from an approval-blocked publisher was purchased because that book was not available (or not yet available) in EBL. In all of these cases, the requests were generated by a librarian. Because there is not a one to one relationship between a publisher's catalog of current titles and what is released to be sold through EBL, we expected there to be greater use of that option, but this never materialized.

A bi-weekly list of titles purchased from EBL from the beginning of the EBL program has been assembled and distributed to bibliographers detailing information about each EBL title at the point of purchase, including:

- Was this particular book already owned?
- If so, how many copies were available and in what formats?
- Were any print copies missing, checked out and/or on hold for another borrower?
- Which branch libraries have the book?

For the first year of the EBL program:

- 34% of the books purchased had no print or online counterpart already available at the UT Libraries
- 4% of the books purchased had no print duplicate in the collection, but another electronic version was available
- 25% of the books purchased also had at least one copy available in print or online from another vendor or resource we license or own (discoverable via the library catalog or by navigating directly to the e-book provider from our online resources list)
- 37% of the books purchased were already owned by the Libraries in print, but at the time of the purchase no print copies were available (i.e. the copies were checked out, missing, or declared lost).  
(See Figure 1.)

EBL assigns each book to one or more subject categories, which can be searched separately. EBL titles purchased by UT during the 2007/08 fiscal year ranked by 'total minutes read' per category appear in Figure 2, and the 'Top 15' in Figure 3.

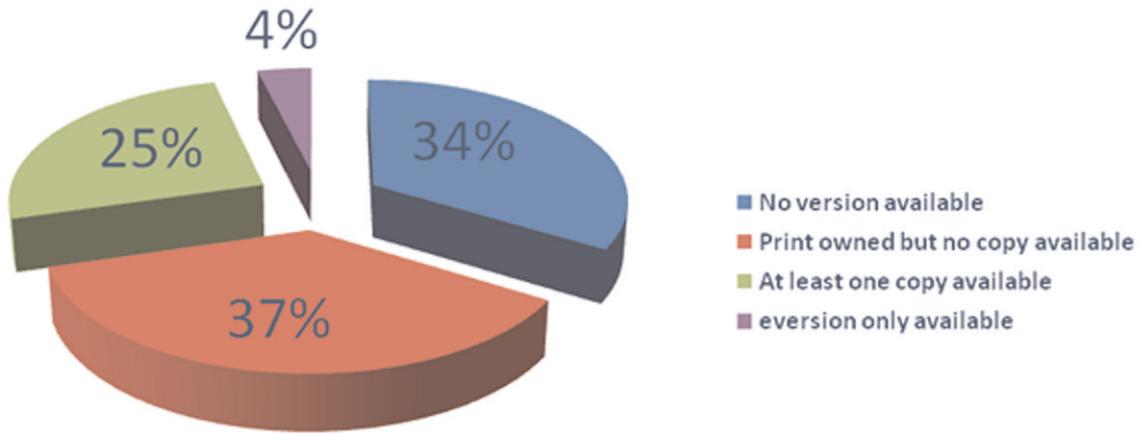


Figure 1. Availability of print copies when EBL purchases were made during the fiscal year 2007/08

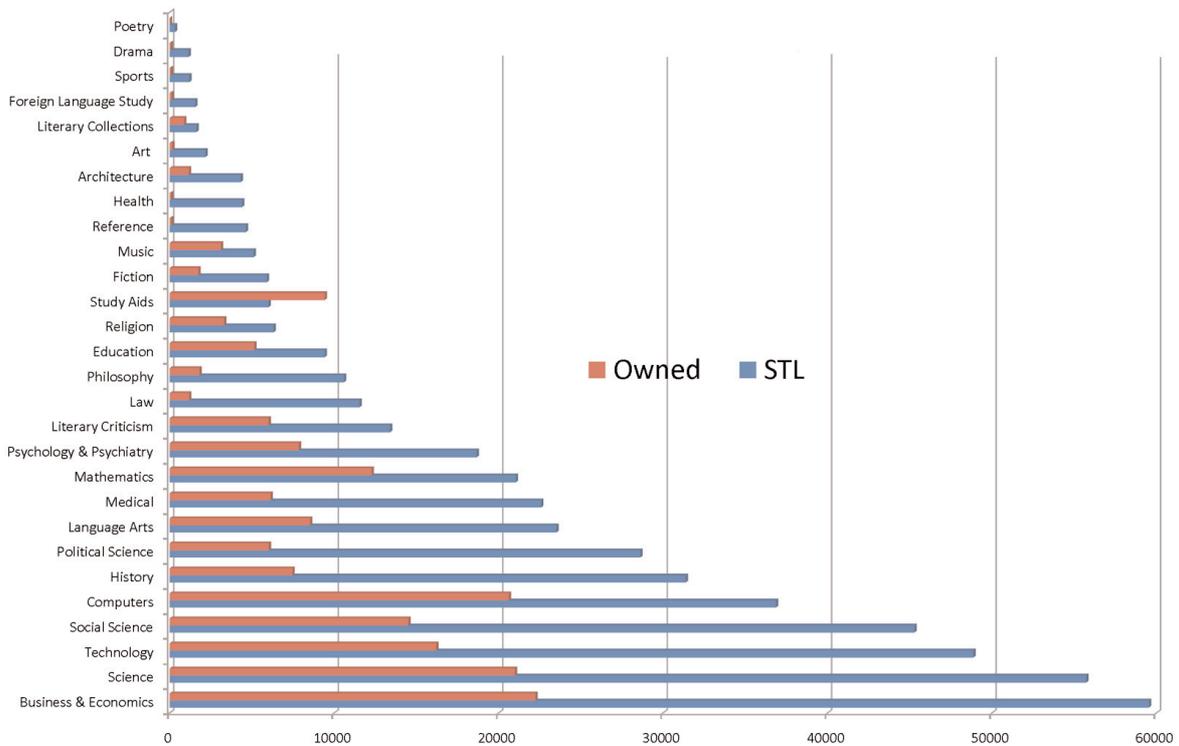


Figure 2. EBL 'total minutes read' for the fiscal year 2007/08 by EBL category; titles may be assigned to more than one category

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the EBL interface is preferred over NetLibrary's in cases where titles are duplicated on each platform. This preference may be attributable to interface usability and printing options. The 25% duplication rate with other print and electronic editions is currently being addressed by the Patron Driven Acquisitions workgroup, discussed in the 'New directions' section below.

### Challenges

There are a variety of challenges associated with PPV e-book models and with EBL specifically. The first challenge encountered was lack of philosophical buy-in from librarians. Their concerns included: the perceived slippery slope of reallocating money previously used for print collections, anecdotal disinterest or difficulties some users have with

Top 15 EBL purchased titles (by total minutes read in FY 0708)	Minutes
CliffsTestPrep® PCAT (Wiley, 2006)	5036
Orality and Literacy: the technologizing of the Word (Routledge, 2002)	3206
R Book (Wiley, 2007)	2823
Estimating Building Costs (Marcel Dekker, 2003)	2574
Microbial Physiology, Fourth Edition (Wiley, 2002)	2436
God is Not Great : How Religion Poisons Everything (Allen & Unwin, 2007)	2175
Game Design Workshop : Designing, Prototyping, & Playtesting Games (CMP, 2004)	1970
Death of a Parent : Transition to a New Adult Identity (Cambridge, 2003)	1827
Contending Visions of the Middle East : The History and Politics of Orientalism (Cambridge, 2004)	1691
CliffsTestPrep® DAT (Wiley, 2007)	1665
New Meaning Of Educational Change (Taylor & Francis, 2001)	1592
Wireless Networks (Wiley, 2003)	1561
Crash Proof: How to Profit From the Coming Economic Collapse (Wiley, 2007)	1477
Persuasive Technology : Using Computers to Change What We Think and Do (Elsevier, 2002)	1434
Foreign Exchange : A Practical Guide to the FX Markets (Wiley, 2006)	1426

Figure 3. Top 15 EBL titles purchased (by 'total minutes read' in the fiscal year 2007/08)

online books; an aversion to paying for but not owning/archiving purchased content; and generalized frustration at having less control over collections and relinquishing some selection power to our users. In relation to the overall monograph budget, the EBL allocation represented 13% and, given the small amount of content affected by the 3% pilot project (which continues to date) and the tiny number of duplicate print titles requested, there was a disproportionate negative reaction by staff with regard to the success of the pilot.

Another challenge came with the EBL-provided MARC records. The rental records initially loaded into the library's OPAC are brief, without LCSH subject tracing. Some librarians claim that because these brief records frequently display inaccuracies, title variations and inconsistent application of MARC rules, they are insufficient for patrons to effectively locate and use the EBL books. Nonetheless, OPAC logs show patrons overwhelmingly use the default search by keyword and are able to locate and use the EBL books without the full MARC record. After books are purchased on the fourth use, EBL sends an update of full MARC records for those purchased items to our cataloging partner, OCLC, and the full records are then loaded to replace the brief records. With regard to the record delivery and loading, the rental/brief

records arrive monthly as new, updated and deleted records. They are easy to retrieve and easy to load into our OPAC, with a load profile reserved for them. Unfortunately, the coordination between EBL and OCLC on the purchased/full records has been less timely and smooth in delivery. Discovery has been additionally hampered by disconnects between EBL records and our OpenURL link resolver, SFX.

Determining appropriate price limits was another challenge in the first year of the pilot. This \$50 mediation point was implemented after the inception of the EBL pilot in response to several rentals of expensive reference sets for which even the 5% rental fee was exorbitant. As a result of these same transactions, we also elected to block any titles in the EBL catalog with a list price over \$700, which worked well in the initial year of the EBL pilot in terms of staying close to but under budget. As we explore and expand new acquisition models, we recognize the need to monitor and adjust our EBL profile load. Current plans are to purge records for books that have remained over a year and never been accessed beyond five minutes and to do this on a yearly basis. In addition, the price ceiling for the coming fiscal year will likely be lowered and we may need to examine and adjust the \$50 STL approval threshold as our

budget and user demands fluctuate. Fortunately, the EBL administrator interface makes this simple.

### **New directions: patron-driven print**

Over time, the UT Libraries have explored and introduced new means of providing access to books and other resources intended to increase availability and use of materials, contain costs and enlarge the universe of content for affiliated users. A decade ago, it was NetLibrary e-books, then NetLibrary eAudiobooks joined by additional E-book platforms (ebrary, EBL, MyiLibrary and other aggregators). In recent years, support for buy-on-demand print purchases of current imprints through Interlibrary Services has enjoyed great success. As a next step, the UT Libraries are investigating the feasibility of introducing a patron-driven component to the BNA approval plan. Essential to the planned program's success is building flexibility into the model to accommodate changes in the budget, academic programs and other fluctuations in funding and user needs. Because of the availability of statistical and reporting tools from both vendors and local systems, analyses of usage by publisher, year, Library of Congress class, average price, and whether the book was selected by a bibliographer or the approval plan are all possible. The greater challenge lies in beginning to shift attitudes about resource stewardship, and balancing the need to provide collections of record versus just-in-time delivery of specific information resources in all formats.

The proposed model includes a two-pronged approach for the collection of print materials: continuation of a scaled-down print approval plan comprised of publishers and subjects for which high usage in print format has been demonstrated in the current two years, and an expanded buy-on-demand approval profile, comprised of records to be regularly uploaded into the OPAC. Those books selected by patrons through use of these records will be purchased on demand via an online form. The intent of the planned project is to expand the scope of books discovered in the catalog and only purchase those titles specifically needed by patrons.

The buy-on-demand profile will be shaped by the recommendations of a working group comprised of bibliographers representing the primary areas currently served by the English language approval plan. The group is tasked with examining

the data and along with specific knowledge of subjects, publishing trends and local use, establishing the parameters for print approval and buy-on-demand profiles and making their recommendation to the Associate Director for Research Services. Among the challenges faced by this group are a requisite commitment to objectivity and willingness to review, dissect and question numbers in reports, and think strategically and analytically about best-practice uses of funding for the access and correlating any changes in customer satisfaction. In addition, group representatives must communicate positively with their colleagues, faculty and students about changes and advantages of evolving models of collection building and management. The ways specific populations physically browse a collection and the use of works which do not currently generate usable data, as well as differing and strong opinions about whether this is the most efficient way to use our resources are among the challenges faced by the group. Therefore, the working group is committed to transparent and inclusive processes in the formulation and implementation of customer-driven acquisitions, acknowledging the many perspectives and issues to be considered, and the conversations we expect this work to generate will be invaluable to future steps down the road.

### **Conclusions**

UT Libraries' two-year involvement with EBL has offered valuable lessons in transforming a traditional print collecting model to a hybrid print/electronic one. Foremost in these lessons has been managing the shifting responsibilities and roles of subject specialists, as well as managing the subject specialists' expectations of the collection, the budget and the PPV pilot program. Concerns were raised about whether the library should continue to facilitate serendipitous discovery in the physical collection (stacks browsing) through print approval plans, offer more opportunities for online discovery through PPV programs and what combination of these efforts will best satisfy our users. Subject specialists were uncomfortable with the possibility of some titles "slipping through the cracks" in cases where the print approval plans and the PPV programs do not overlap, or as a result of tweaking print approval plans without the ability to predict the exact titles excluded. Communication, early

and often, is key to the successful implementation of these changes. Subject specialists needed to feel involved in the decision making, particularly with regard to the details of the approval plan changes for publishers, subjects and dollar thresholds. Once this librarian buy-in is achieved, the subsequent task of informing the faculty of anticipated changes to the collection can be communicated with greater ease. As purchasing shifts from the automatic arrival of certain publishers' output and monographic series to a PPV model, faculty need to be aware of their role in driving those acquisitions.

Another important component of our PPV pilot has been discovering ways in which we can improve our purchasing power through statistical analysis of cost, use, publisher and subject. As global recession negatively impacts the library's budget, we must seek new ways to make our dollar go further and challenge the traditional role of the academic library as a 'just in case' collection vs. a 'just in time' service provider. Competition from other information providers creates the imperative for us to provide additional online discovery tools and shift limited financial resources to materials people are guaranteed to use. The increasingly sophisticated statistics-gathering tools provided by vendors are crucial to identifying strengths and weaknesses in library collections and spending patterns. Empowering subject specialists to create their own reports in these tools and assess the data helps bring them into the conversation as equal players.

With regard to library patrons, our experience tells us they are highly amenable to using e-books, particularly in the fields of science, computer technology and business. Their interest in e-book editions often supercedes their interest in print editions. In cases where both are available and in cases where a print edition is absent, they rarely ask the library to supply one when an e-book edition is present. Further study of inter-library loan data to account for these instances is planned. While vendors should continue to improve the quality and consistency of their MARC record content and provision, our usage statistics indicate that abbreviated records do not pose a hindrance to e-book readership. We look forward to taking advantage of emerging technologies that can assist

both our library patrons and the budgetary bottom line. We intend to expand experimentation with new acquisition models, and offer a combination of online and print options from which librarians and patrons can select with the goal of finding the most efficient and cost-effective means of connecting customers with the information sought in the formats desired.

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