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## **EBooks Arrive.**

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# ONLINE DATABASES

## Ebooks Arrive

By Carol Tenopir

THE PROGRAMS AT TWO RECENT conferences (the Charleston Conference and London Online) confirm that ebooks have established themselves in libraries. While the trade and consumer book markets still struggle to find an affordable and compelling ebook reader, library users have embraced the ebooks connected to the library e-collection and accessible via the PC or laptop they typically use.

### E-reference books

In contrast with e-journals, the concept of ebooks involves a wide range of types of content used in different ways. E-reference books, including dictionaries, almanacs, encyclopedias, and handbooks, have been a part of library service for years. While reference books are technically ebooks, they tend to be used as searchable databases to answer specific questions rather than read in whole or in large parts.

John Barnes of Cengage (formerly Gale) told the Charleston audience that, while his company still sells more print than electronic reference, users prefer electronic. He believes libraries should "move faster away from print reference" to meet user needs and increase usage. He cited a study done by Wright State University's Sue Polanka that found much greater use of an electronic collection than a print one, even though the electronic collection was only a fraction of the size of the print one. Further, the cost per use for the electronic collection was less than one-fifth of the cost per use of the print collection.

### Monitoring scholarly ebooks

Most of the ebook discussion at Charleston concerned scholarly monographs, which several major publishers are presenting via collections. The Springer E-Book Collection, Elsevier's Books on ScienceDirect/eBooks, and Oxford Scholarship Online (OSO) were among the most often mentioned, in addition to aggregated collections from

netLibrary, Ovid, and Knovel. OSO was especially praised for its interface and presentation.

In several sessions presenters discussed monitoring usage of e-monographs. Peter Shephard of Project COUNTER said the first release of the COUNTER standard for ebook usage reporting was

The National E-Books Observatory Project, funded by the UK's Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), should help answer these questions. Thirty-six e-textbooks in business, engineering, medicine, and media studies from a variety of publishers will be made available through the libraries of

Just as there is no single type of ebook, there will be no single pattern of use

meant "for feedback and learning." Currently only eight ebook vendors produce the COUNTER-compliant reports at the book title and chapter level.

According to Shephard, COUNTER "doesn't want to overload librarians with usage data" but instead focuses on the core reports. In the future, he said, ebook reporting may need to be more granular, including data on usage of embedded figures (images), video, and audio clips.

### E-textbooks

Textbooks can be sold directly to students or to libraries, but because patterns of purchase vary worldwide, we just don't know how e-textbooks will be used by students nor the best way to provide access to them.

participating universities at no cost to students.

Researchers from University College London (UCL) will "observe" the use and usage patterns by analyzing usage logs. As part of the project, JISC is holding seminars to facilitate discussion among academic librarians regarding the benefits and costs of ebooks.

UCL's David Nicholas reported at both Charleston and London Online on his SuperBook project, which piloted the approach and log analysis method to be used in the E-Books Observatory Project. Over 3000 ebooks from OSO, Wiley InterScience, and Taylor & Francis were made available to UCL students at no charge and with little publicity.

Even with little promotion, the collection experienced high use; books in the UCL library catalog got more than twice the usage of noncataloged books. However, the use was quite skewed, even compared with journal titles: just two of 1200 OSO titles accounted for 12 percent of page views, and the top 20 titles accounted for 43 percent of use.

Just as there is no single type of ebook, there will be no single pattern of use. As libraries make various types of ebooks available for reference, research, and more, we'll learn more about how ebooks work.

### LINK LIST

**Charleston Conference on Issues in Book and Serials Acquisition**  
www.katina.info/conference

**London Online**  
www.online-information.co.uk

**National E-Books Observatory Project;** www.jiscebooksproject.org

**SuperBook**  
www.ucl.ac.uk/slais/research/ciber/superbook

**Springer white paper**  
www.springer.com/ebooks

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