

E-Books: who wants what and how to ILL them

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1. Introduction

The popularity of E-Book grows every day and the speed of E-Book technology development is extremely fast. Libraries are trying to find an effective solution to manage E-Books but existing library management system does not provide adequate answer to the challenges. In addition to the technical difficulties, there are many others issues related to the license and access of E-Book which present new anxieties to libraries performing their traditional services, let alone the restrictions and technical huddles which make the resource sharing activities almost impossible.

In this presentation, I would like to present, first, our users' preference of E-Books and discuss the issues which give difficulties to meet their needs. Then, I wish to propose the requirements which need to develop an ILL system for E-Books.

2. E-Preference by Users at the Columbia University Libraries

During the period from September 2012 to June 2013, the author has gathered users' preference of E-Books through the Interlibrary Loan request form. To the question, "*Will you accept an E-Book version of this item, if it is available*" users can select their answers; *Yes* or *No*. The default option is left as blank (No Answer) to give a chance to users' to express their preference clearly.

The users' answer shows that 46% of them wants E-Books and only 15% of them refused the E-Books. There were 39% of users left the answer as blank but still it is clear that almost a half of the users would accept the E-Books. Further analysis on the data shows that this pattern maintains without significant exceptions. The data divided by subject areas shows that Literature and Language is the only subject in

which respondents show weak preference of E-Books. But still the number of users who answered Yes are significantly exceeding those of No. (36 % vs. 24%)

3. Existing E-ILL Model

Currently a company, Ingram is providing E-Book titles through the OCLC interlibrary Loan network and it is based on a platform called *MyiLibrary*. As of March 2013, Ingram's *MyiLibrary* holds about 80,000 titles and they provide the link to the title upon the borrowing libraries request. The books will be available to borrowing libraries patrons for nine days and the loan period starts from the time the link is provided through the OCLC Resource Sharing system. 15% of the price will be charged as lending fee and it is payable with the IFM

Although the model will provide the item almost immediately, it does not satisfy neither the users' needs nor borrowing libraries existing workflow. Also an important question the libraries need to raise is about the sustainability of such a lending model that is developed by a vendor. It is not an Interlibrary Loan model but it is a short-term loan model which other publishers and vendors also provide. Only difference is the fact that Ingram's *MyiLibrary* is available through the traditional resource sharing network.

4. Functional Requirement for an E-Book ILL system

There are many questions to be answered for planning a good and sustainable E-Book Interlibrary Loan system. For example, libraries need to know about users' understandings of E-Books and the reason they want E-Books. Although there is no significant research or data answering those questions, one thing the libraries keep in mind is the importance of a platform in which libraries' needs and voices are embedded, if not a platform that is developed by libraries.

Traditionally the libraries are the platform providers for print books. Libraries provide the stacks, circulation system and reading rooms. There is no reason that the libraries would abandon this role in the E-Book environments. Rather, it is strongly recommended that the libraries play the crucial role to provide the guidance and standards for the system that provides E-Book to the users. Also in doing so, libraries need to consider the needs and interests of each stakeholders of E-Book environment.

Restricting the goal of the E-Book Lending system to the Interlibrary Loan functions, here are some requirements an E-ILL system must include;

- The platform should be controlled by the libraries. The lending library should be able to generate, renew and close the link to E-Books loaned to other libraries.
- The platform should be independent to any software platform which publishes or vendors have developed.
- The platform should provide a mobile platform which is also independent to any mobile devices or operating system
- The platform should be providing a fast turnaround time with minimal staff involvement.
- The platform should offer good quality print out and download should be allowed under the copyright guideline and Fair use.
- The platform should have a comprehensive Union Catalog which enables finding items and locating the holding library are as simple as possible.

5. Conclusion

Despite the challenges which the emergence of E-Book is posing to the library community, it can also provide a great opportunity, especially to the International Resource Sharing community. Sharing of the physical book internationally was always a challenge to many ILL practitioners because of physical distances between the countries and complicated bureaucratic procedures in postal services and the customs offices of each country. Yet, the E-Books can solve most of those challenges if we can establish a stable E-ILL system. It is indeed a great advantage we need to take advantage of.

However, libraries are struggling even to lend the E-Books to their own users, let alone to supply them to the users' in other institutions. Since E-Lending platforms are slowly emerging, we need to make the resource sharing communities' voice heard to the broader library communities. It would be too late to add Interlibrary Loan functionalities to already established E-Book lending platform so we have to act now with other sectors of library to establish an E-Lending platform which serve the users of both, our own library and other libraries.

Given the fact that all the stakeholders are reluctant to move ahead because of the rapid changes happening in the E-Book technologies, libraries need to move proactively for taking the initiatives and pilot the future direction that will serve libraries' role as free information providers for all users. And we need to remember a simple but obvious fact that **“No library can be self-sufficient in meeting all the information needs.”**