

The Digital Strategy: a new era in e-book provision at UniSA

The University of South Australia Library (UniSA) has long recognized the advantages of e-books. In late 2011, the Library implemented a Digital Strategy that resulted in dramatic changes to the proportion of print and electronic monograph resources being acquired for the Library collection. The building of a new Learning Centre prompted the Digital Strategy and has provided both opportunities and challenges for the Library. This article examines the issues behind the creation of the Strategy and the impacts on academics, librarians, vendors and students.

Introduction and context

The University of South Australia (UniSA) is the youngest and largest university in South Australia and is a multi-campus institution consisting of four metropolitan campuses and one regional campus. Over 300 degree programmes are taught, both on-campus and externally, covering a wide range of subject areas, with the 2012 Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative identifying 86% of UniSA's assessed research as rated world-class or above. UniSA's vision for the future is that it will be a leading contributor to Australia having the best higher education system in the world, supporting the world's best educated and most innovative, cohesive and sustainable society¹.

The Library has been purchasing e-books since 2002, beginning with a small set of NetLibrary titles, and has increasingly explored new purchasing options to grow the size of the e-book collection. In recent years, there has been an explosion of new titles added, via numerous mechanisms – individual title, patron-driven (PDA), subscription and collection purchases from a variety of vendors.

A new Learning Centre is being built at City West campus and the Library will be co-located there with other central units of the University. Naturally, there have been discussions about the space requirements of each occupant, ultimately resulting in insufficient room to house the current contents of the existing City West Library. While there was a need to reshape the City West collection to fit its new home, this situation also provided an opportunity to significantly improve access to information resources for academic staff and students.



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Figure 1. Architect's image of the City West Learning Centre

Image courtesy of John Wardle Architects and Phillips/Pilkington Architects in association

175 The Vice Chancellor, Peter Høj, felt that the Learning Centre should be a primarily digital building and the Library's response to that vision was to implement a Digital Strategy.

Digital Strategy overview

The Digital Strategy was implemented at the end of 2011 and has resulted in a significant alteration to acquisitions policies and processes. The Strategy was created in response to the changing needs of patrons, the Library and the University itself, and in order to find a more systematic and proactive approach to dealing with the changing world of books and their electronic counterparts. The collection size continues to increase and the relegation of lesser-used titles into storage can only be seen as an unsustainable approach. This pressure would lessen with an increase in the proportion of electronic books in our collection, with the additional benefits of increased portability, and convenience for patrons².

"... the changing world of books and their electronic counterparts."

The key stated strategies were to provide access to additional digital information resources; encourage the move away from textbooks and recommended readings in print; and to reduce the size of the City West print collection from 170,000 to 100,000 volumes. Additional capital funding was provided by the University to increase the Library's capacity to purchase a greater quantity of e-books than would normally be possible within existing budget constraints. Use of that funding was focused on City West subject areas for the most part and would be used to mitigate any impact of the print reductions.

The success of the Strategy would be measured in two ways. Firstly, by the results of the user survey on materials availability as compared with print-era surveys, hopefully indicating greater discoverability of e-books. Secondly, statistical evidence of a minimum 10% increase of the proportion of e-books as part of the whole monograph collection.

Digital Strategy in practice

Collection replacement, relegation and renewal

The electronic evolution of the City West print collection began with an attempt to match existing print titles held at City West campus with their e-equivalents. The goal was to replace existing print with e-versions in order to reduce the physical collection size and make the titles more accessible and able to be integrated in teaching. Spreadsheets containing details of City West holdings were extracted from the Voyager ILS and sent to ebrary, one of the major e-book aggregators, for matching against their available titles.

A discount was negotiated with ebrary for a bulk purchase of titles and the orders were placed. No distinction was made based on usage, with the assumption that the most recently published titles would be more likely to be available electronically. The orders were initially divided into custom publisher sets that enabled us to have a greater awareness of which publishers were well represented within our collection. This process was run several times between 2011 and 2013 as more back-lists were released electronically. It was also run with multiple vendors in an effort to gain the best possible match available and also as some publishers have deals with specific vendors.

A proportion of the print titles that have been replaced with electronic versions remain on shelf at City West with green 'E-book Available' stickers on their spines. This has been done in order to increase user awareness and also provide a buffer for the final collection move. These print titles are readily identifiable and can be either taken to the new Learning Centre or left behind depending on the fit, providing flexibility for the final move.

The team at City West then began work on the disposition of print titles, aware that they were expected to reduce the collection by around 70,000 volumes before September 2013. This set an average weekly reduction target of 1,000 volumes, and staff from the Collection Management team relocated to City West to assist. The work was done from shelf-lists and

176 low use volumes were relegated to the University's offsite store or became part of regular book sales. Due to the efforts of the team, the reduction will be completed in July 2013, two months earlier than anticipated. Replacement of print titles with their electronic versions will be an ongoing process for now, but new titles are being acquired, either individually or as collections, as a matter of course.

Interestingly, ebrary now has a service which is being marketed to libraries as 'Title Matching Fast'. This service has been created as a direct result of the work that was done for UniSA in matching e-books with existing print holdings. Additional development work has been done by ebrary to enable the matching to be done even more quickly and effectively as they too now see the wider potential to institutions.

"low use volumes were relegated to the University's offsite store ..."

E-preference

The Library has put an e-preferred ordering process in place, with print titles published 2009 or later being held for six months in hope that an e-book version will become available. When the process was first implemented, titles were held for six weeks, but this was later extended to six months. If that period passes without an e-book being released, and the original requestor is an academic, the print version is purchased. Titles meeting the same criteria but ordered by librarians for collection development purposes, are also held, but if an e-book does not become available then the request is returned to the librarian and they need to select a subject-equivalent e-book title.

Some subjects are excepted, such as art and Australian law, generally because they are lacking in e-book availability. E-books have shown disappointingly slow growth in these subjects and, as these are large areas in our collection, would be ideal candidates for an e-book version. The recent announcement by Thames and Hudson of an imminent e-book collection has resulted in much interest.

Academic Library Services (ALS) are encouraged to select an e-book version in preference to print at every opportunity. There was some initial hesitation, understandably, as this change in thinking was quite dramatic, but the ALS teams work hard to both promote and support the Digital Strategy by attendance at Academic School Board meetings and one-on-one contact with academics.

The Library provides access to a vast array of e-books, e-journals, streaming media and databases; and the Strategy aims to encourage greater integration of those resources in teaching practice. Recently, there has been more uptake of streaming media within teaching and that has been encouraging.

Impacts and challenges

There was an immediate impact on print acquisitions. It was obvious that limitations should be placed on the quantity of print titles purchased in order to reduce the need to deselect them in future. To reduce the quantity of print books being purchased, a target was put in place at the end of 2011. In 2012, acquisition of print was not to exceed 8,000 items, a 33% reduction on 2011 figures. For 2013, the target is 5,000 items.

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Acquisitions staff and vendors

The initial consternation experienced by the Acquisitions team was not based on the complicated nature of the new e-preferred workflow but rather on the potential effect on performance targets. The prospect of deliberately delaying orders offended the sensibilities of team members, as they felt their efficiency would not be reflected in the longer turnaround times³.

177 The move to e-preference increased the intensity of mouse and keyboard work for Acquisitions staff. Previously, their work was broken up by the need to move physical items, but now they were dealing with virtual items for the most part. There has been some occupational health and safety impact but this is minimized by use of macros and Workplace ergonomic monitoring software enforcing breaks from repetitive tasks. The initial training load was quite heavy, as the Acquisitions library assistants had not been involved with e-book ordering previously and it took time for them to understand and become familiar with the process. E-book acquisitions processes are now very smooth, streamlined and straightforward.

UniSA is part of the Academic and Research Libraries Acquisition Consortium (ARLAC) and has two preferred vendors for monograph purchases, Yankee Book Peddler (YBP) and James Bennett. Both have for some years provided the Library with e-books from a variety of platforms, and also large numbers of print titles. A financial commitment to those vendors is agreed each year and this amount has decreased over the period of the Strategy. They continue to provide UniSA with e-books but the reduction in print has impacted on their business. This reduction has prompted a change in focus to shelf-ready services, as the Library now has a greater interest in high quality e-book records for the individual e-book titles that are purchased. This option has now been agreed and customized e-book records are now supplied by YBP at point of order.

Library staff

The Strategy received a mixed reaction from Library staff. Most were supportive of the aims of the Strategy, with some concern about the delay in ordering titles as a result of e-preference. There has been negative feedback from some staff who prefer print to electronic for a number of reasons, including limitations on how e-books can be accessed and used.

The e-preferred process has the most impact on the titles that have no apparent urgency attached to them. Urgent orders are processed immediately and not delayed in any respect. E-preference affects titles that, for the most part, are being purchased for collection development purposes. It is felt that as these non-urgent items are not required for a deadline there should be minimal negative feedback from academics and librarians within the University⁶.

Librarians also expressed concern that they would now be the frontline in e-book troubleshooting and they did not feel confidence in their ability to advise users. This was an understandable reaction, as the quantity of e-books, and also questions, had increased dramatically. A self-paced training programme was designed to increase staff skills and confidence, with a range of tasks to be completed using e-books on different platforms and with a variety of restrictions on their use (see Figure 2). It was felt that the best way to learn about e-books and their platforms was to play. This program successfully increased staff confidence, but many have only gained confidence with more exposure to the problems being experienced.

Academics and students

Academics are being encouraged to incorporate e-books and streaming media within their teaching. The quantity of electronic resources now being acquired by the Library has resulted in a variety of new options for integration within teaching. Some academics have seen new possibilities becoming available and have leapt at the opportunity to refresh and evolve their courses. Others seem intimidated by the technology and reluctant to embrace any integration within their coursework. The ALS teams have made themselves available to academics who would like advice or support.

Textbooks are difficult to locate electronically and the Library has advised academics to consider allocating a textbook using an e-book already held in the Library's collection. There have been several welcomed occurrences of this to date. Cost will be a factor in any e-book textbook model and as UniSA currently purchases only a single copy of a textbook for inclusion in the collection, this will be an issue.

I promise that ebooks won't bite : a development plan for UniSA Library

This self-directed plan is designed to enable Library staff to become more comfortable with accessing ebooks and answering patron queries about their use.

The best way to learn about ebooks is to use and experience them, and it is important for Library staff to have confidence in locating answers to patron questions for themselves.

1. Search for a title and browse several pages of the book online. Print them.
2. Download the book to your PC.
 - o Are you able to download the whole book?
 - o Are you able to download at all?
3. Print several pages from the downloaded book.
4. Copy text from the book and paste into a word document.
 - o How much can you copy? Does it stop you?
5. Download/load the ebook title on to one of the following devices: iPad / iPhone / Android / ereader
6. Using the vendor's website and the ebook web interface, **without asking colleagues**, locate information about:
 - o ebook printing allowances
 - o copy/paste
 - o any access restrictions

Repeat this exercise for each of the platforms listed below and fill in a short survey with your comments on ease of use / difficulties / other comments.

Figure 2. Training plan created to increase staff confidence in use of e-books

One barrier to this acceptance seemed to be the problems inherent in single-user model e-books and Digital Rights Management (DRM). As a consequence, the Library's preference is for multi-user e-books, or e-books which are single-user but have the ability to add an extra copy automatically on demand. DRM-free titles are very well received by patrons as they are more like accessing an e-journal, with few overbearing restrictions.

The Library created an e-book libguide for use by the University community, with quick guides to the major e-book providers, an FAQ and discussion board so that queries could be resolved and shared. Many users had difficulty with setup and use of Adobe Digital Editions software and a lot of questions revolved around such technical issues.

Format preference is a personal thing, with some individuals hating the concept of electronic books but others being astounded that the Library did not have more titles. Personal reading and academic reading are two very separate activities. Some Library users prefer their fiction in print but their academic reading in an electronic form because they tend to dip in and out of relevant chapters. As with all things, it is not possible to please all users all of the time, but certainly the feedback has become more positive over time.

Outcomes and challenges

University of South Australia Library believes that e-books are an essential part of teaching, learning and research. The Digital Strategy has helped to shape the Library's collection at all campuses, not just City West. Whilst the new Learning Centre at City West has certainly been a driver, all campus collections have been transformed.

Prior to the implementation of the Digital Strategy in late 2011, e-book acquisition had been steadily increasing by up to 10% per year. UniSA had passed the tipping point in regard to the proportion of electronic to print titles acquired. That trend has increased markedly since that date. (See Figure 3.)

2012 was the first full year that the Strategy was in place and that is reflected in the dramatic increase in e-book purchases to 86% of all monographs acquired during that year. It is too early to make pronouncements about progress in 2013, except to say that the early

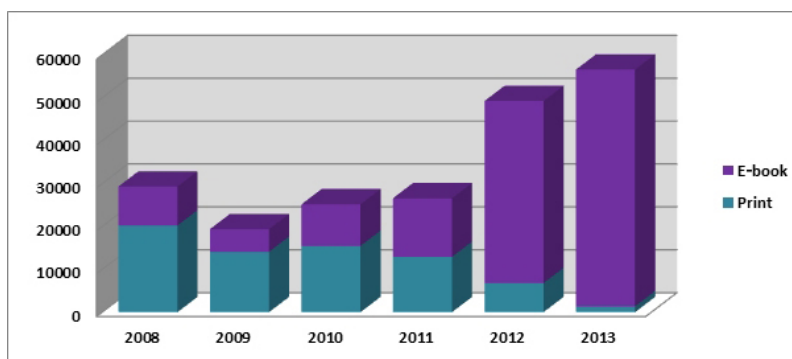


Figure 3. Percentage of total monographs purchased between 2009–April 2013

acquisition of the Springer Book Archive will have a positive impact. The reduction in print acquisitions will certainly be offset by the large numbers of e-books purchased because, although a print target is in place, the only restriction on the quantity of e-books is budgetary.

“... the only restriction on the quantity of e-books is budgetary.”

When capital funding for the Strategy ends in December 2013, the new Learning Centre will be ready for occupation and the challenge will then be to maintain momentum. The introduction of a print target is one aspect of the Digital Strategy that has ensured that the Library will retain an increased ability to acquire e-books. UniSA Library will continue to buy as many e-books as the budget will support.

E-books are seemingly being released at a greater rate than ever before and institutions like UniSA cannot obtain them fast enough. Some patrons do not understand why not everything is available electronically and instantly, while others cannot understand the fuss. UniSA seized the opportunity presented by the new Learning Centre and made the move to e-preference because it was the only forward-thinking and reasonable approach. It is only a matter of time before more institutions follow suit.

“... it was the only forward-thinking and reasonable approach.”

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