# Who are the winners? E-book consortial purchasing

The e-book consortia pilot project was funded by Jisc Collections during 2012/2013 and managed by Information Power Ltd. The aim of the project was to see if there is an effective way to purchase e-books on a title-by-title basis with a collaborative group of academic libraries. The project explored a range of questions including: did all books receive sufficient use to provide value for money for libraries; how such an initiative could be equitably funded by libraries; how much would publishers charge; what benefits there would be for participating publishers; and how it would be managed. The project focused on engineering e-books, and usage data and cost data was collected and analysed in depth.

Background

Consortia worldwide are struggling to find sustainable and cost-effective business models for purchasing e-books, and Jisc Collections in the UK is no exception. It is true that consortia have had some successes with the purchase of e-book *collections*, but consortial purchase of *individual* e-book titles still posed a significant challenge. In early 2012, Information Power Ltd (IPL) was selected by Jisc Collections to manage the e-book consortia pilot project (engineering e-books): an attempt to trial a specific business model for individual titles, selected by library staff in six participating institutions and made available to all users in those institutions. The consortium business model to be investigated had already been piloted in Germany by the Max Planck Institute and in Spain by the Consortium of Academic Libraries of Catalonia (CBUC). However, neither organization had analysed the results of their pilots. The main aim of the Jisc Collections pilot, therefore, was to run the project for one year and then undertake a detailed analysis of the findings. The business model was relatively simple. Whenever one of the participating institutions purchased an e-book, Jisc Collections would pay a multiplier – to be negotiated individually with each participating publisher – for all of the libraries to have access to the purchased e-book. Clearly, in a 'real life' scenario, the multiplier would be split between the participating libraries, but for the purpose of the pilot project, Jisc Collections made the payments.
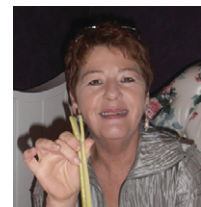
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Selection of participants

A small consortium of six university libraries was gathered together – Cranfield University, Loughborough University, Newcastle University, Brunel University, University of Southampton and University of Liverpool. All these institutions have significant engineering faculties and had expressed an interest in participating in a one-year project to investigate the collaborative purchasing of engineering e-books.

The libraries were asked to identify their top five engineering publishers. Unsurprisingly, the initial list included some large commercial engineering publishers. However, some of the libraries already had access to significant collections from these publishers which meant that they would not order titles from them. It was therefore decided not to include these publishers. Following the consultation, eight publishers were selected by the libraries and IPL began negotiations. Out of the eight publishers shortlisted, six agreed to participate in the

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pilot and agreed what multiplier would be used. The pilot publishers were: Artech House, Cambridge University Press, Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET), Taylor & Francis, Wiley and World Scientific Publishing.

The selection of the hosting service for the pilot was also made in close consultation with the libraries. As each library used a range of e-book suppliers and hosting services, it proved somewhat time-consuming to reach a consensus. Finally, it was agreed that Dawson Books would be approached and an agreement was reached.

> "... all libraries got more value than they purchased"

Implementation

It had been hoped that the pilot would start at the beginning of the university financial year 2012. However, negotiations with libraries, publishers and hosting service took rather longer than expected and it took some time for the libraries to start ordering the e-book titles. In order to speed up and facilitate the library ordering process, the publishers were requested to provide the libraries with a list of their engineering titles which were available from Dawson. A combined total of 6,305 e-books were available for purchase from the six publishers.

The first e-book orders were placed in December 2012. Feedback from the libraries at this early stage of the project indicated that the ordering process was somewhat cumbersome and did not fit with their existing workflows. Nevertheless, eventually the process settled down and orders began to flow. A further issue which arose was provision of MARC records, which were slow to be supplied to the libraries. As library users were unable to locate the books in the OPAC until part way through the pilot, this may have had bearing on usage of the titles.

The provision of COUNTER e-book statistics (BR1 and BR2) was central to the pilot. Once IPL had received the consolidated statistics in August/September 2013, data analysis began. The first step was to compile headline statistics for each participating library which were sent to them prior to a wrap-up phone interview.

The findings

The headline statistics for the pilot were extremely interesting:

• there was very high usage of the e-books purchased

• 98.6% of e-books were used by at least one library

• the percentage of e-books bought and not used by individual libraries was low – an average of 7%

• the libraries that didn't purchase (but had access) frequently used the e-books more than the purchaser

• the number of books purchased out of the total available, however, was very low – just over 2%.

Tables 1–4 show the numbers involved.

University	No. purchased	No. used	No. used but not purchased	No. purchased but not used
Library 1	0	29	29	0
Library 2	19	69	50	8
Library 3	18	39	21	13
Library 4	35	74	39	15
Library 5	48	135	87	2
Library 6	22	59	37	11

Table 1. Overall analysis

University	No. purchased	No. purchased but not used	No. used but not purchased	No. used by others
Library 1	0	0	29	0
Library 2	19	8	50	19
Library 3	18	13	21	17
Library 4	35	15	39	35
Library 5	48	2	87	41
Library 6	22	11	37	17

Table 2. Number of books

University	Value purchased	Value purchased but not used	Value used but not purchased	Value used by others
Library 1	0	0	2176	0
Library 2	1365	587	5409	1365
Library 3	1777	1362	2924	1685
Library 4	3453	1696	4695	3453
Library 5	4295	154	8376	3631
Library 6	2204	1124	3887	2117

Table 3. Value of books (in pounds sterling)

University	Use of purchased	Use of non-purchased	Use by others
Library 1	0	1210	0
Library 2	252	48	2497
Library 3	320	3828	1271
Library 4	2246	4932	3753
Library 5	1491	1633	4675
Library 6	1589	3532	3875

Table 4. Uses of books (using BR2 stats)

It should be noted that Library 1 did not purchase any books during the pilot mainly due to the fact that they had already purchased significant collections and big deals from the participating publishers prior to the start of the pilot. Nonetheless, they did make good use of the e-books purchased by the other libraries.

Librarians' feedback

In order to understand the benefits and drawbacks of the pilot, interviews were conducted with all project participants. On the whole, librarians felt that they had benefited from the pilot. Five out of the six libraries said they would be interested in pursuing consortium e-book purchasing using this business model. In the light of the data, they were pleased with both the level of use of titles they had purchased, and their use of titles purchased by other institutions. They would be happy to put money into a consortia 'pot' to widen access to e-book titles (funds permitting). One librarian commented: "Increased access is the real benefit and saving money is a bonus".

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When asked what type of consortium they would join, the general consensus was that the important factor in a consortium is having synergy between the libraries (e.g. research/teaching focused). The majority favoured a subject-based e-book consortium but commented that the portfolio of publishers participating in the consortium was very important. In addition, most favoured a minimum level of financial commitment from libraries.

Libraries were particularly pleased with the detailed usage analysis provided by the pilot. All libraries said that they do *some* monitoring of e-book usage, but most claimed that lack of resources inhibited this activity. Most libraries examined high and low use of both individual titles and collections and also used the statistical data for trend analysis. Those libraries experimenting with PDA were also examining usage of patron purchased titles. However, it would appear that usage collection and analysis is becoming more important for libraries, possibly due to management requirements to demonstrate value for money and student satisfaction. The main drivers of usage analysis were: renewals and cancellations; determining how to spend the book budget; to demonstrate value for money; and to improve collection development.

> "… many [publishers] agreed that a similar model using a variable price multiplier would be more attractive …"

Publishers' feedback

In contrast to the librarians, publishers were less enthusiastic about the pilot. The majority were disappointed with the sales figures. All claimed that the e-books offered to the libraries generally sold well in the UK; one publisher speculated that possibly many of the back-list titles offered had already been purchased by the libraries prior to the project. Generally speaking, the smaller publishers were most enthusiastic, commenting "our role as a publisher is to get our content out there … we need to get our brand noticed." All publishers expressed a common desire to protect the value of their titles. Of the three larger publishers, only one was positive about the business model used during the pilot. Comments included, "We do not feel that this business model is sustainable" and "We are keen to work with library consortia but we don't like shared ownership/collections … we would rather give a discount." However, many agreed that a similar model using a variable price multiplier would be more attractive, enabling them to offer back-list and current high-demand titles.

On the whole, publishers were pleased and very interested in the usage data from the pilot. One interesting finding was that none of the publishers examined e-book usage in any detail at the company level (only e-journal usage and e-book sales data). However, from the general conversation during the interviews, publishers did give the impression that comprehensive usage data, while currently not at the top of their agendas, may become more important.

Who are the winners?

Overall, the pilot provided Jisc Collections, the libraries, publishers and hosting service with a wealth of interesting and informative data about e-book consortial purchasing. Of the key stakeholders:

- the majority of *librarians* felt that the business model worked well and they got good value for money

- the *publishers* were not enthusiastic about the business model but suffered no financial detriment

- the *consortia* obtained valuable, unique data about the business model and the usage of the shared collection

- … but the real winners were the *users* who had access to much more content – and used it!

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