

eBooks@Flinders: Patron-Driven Acquisition and eBooks Research Project


by Deb Zott and Aliese Millington

This paper covers two broad topics related to eBooks@Flinders – patron driven acquisition of eBooks and an examination of how eBooks are faring at Flinders, through the prism of our eBooks Research Project. Although we commenced our eBook research project in August 2012, we are still in the process of surveying staff and students so it will be some time yet before we can analyse the collected data and write up our findings. Here, we outline our aims for the project and discuss our methodology.



eBooks@Flinders

We began to think seriously about purchasing eBooks in 2001 and our first step was to conduct a feasibility study. The study revealed that many of the purchasing models available at the time were unsuitable for us and that there were severe restrictions on viewing and copying text. There was also a need for proprietary software in order to access the eBooks, and rather than being available for individual title purchase, eBooks were usually only available on a subscription basis, often with a requirement that a package of titles be purchased.



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In 2002, we attempted to order two individual nursing titles, but the order had to be cancelled because we learned that there was a vendor requirement to order a minimum of 200 titles. In 2003, with kind permission from the University of Adelaide, we added MARC records for their collection of free eBooks, containing around 500 titles. Then in January 2004, we began a trial of the Lippincott Clinical Choice Collection on a subscription model. This collection consisted of 42 medical textbook titles.

Later in 2004 we added several more eBook titles, including 110 Medical / Science titles from Wiley Interscience, which we believe was our first outright purchase of eBooks and the first eBooks to be treated as books rather than serials. Unlike earlier eBooks that only had brief collection level and individual title level records in the OPAC, the Wiley Interscience eBooks had full catalogue records, which were available from the vendor.

Today we purchase both ePackages (or collections) and individual titles from a range of vendors and we have also implemented a patron-driven acquisition (PDA) model via EBL. We will discuss this in more detail in the next section.


To date, we have purchased around 37,576 eBooks and provide access to over 114,271. Workflows vary and involve staff in both our Metadata & Acquisitions and Digital Resources departments. For purchased titles we download MARC records from Libraries Australia at the point of order, or create full original records on receipt of the URL if no records are available. For ePackages we activate the titles in SFX Open URL link resolver. There are no MARC records in the library catalogue and titles are harvested by Primo for our FindIt@Flinders discovery tool. We also activate PDA titles in EBL LibCentral and in SFX so that they can be discovered by our patrons.

Patron-Driven Acquisition

In June 2012, we embarked on a 6 month trial of Patron-Driven Acquisition with EBL. We set aside an initial budget of 40,000 AUD and opted to receive monthly invoices rather than set up a deposit account. 60,000 titles were made available to our patrons via FindIt@Flinders in the initial load. This has now grown to over 83,000 titles.

Before we began the trial, our Acquisitions Librarian, Chris Moore, and I spent a lot of time speaking to PDA vendors and making comparisons between their offerings. We found that in most respects the offerings and purchase triggers were fairly similar but we eventually settled on EBL and began the process of setting parameters for our profile. For example, we set an upper limit on the auto purchase price, opted for titles published in 2009 or later and selected subject areas to match our teaching and research profiles.

We decided on a PDA model that included 3 unmediated short-term loans (STLs), with automatic purchase triggered on the 4th access; the cost of STLs being 5-15% of the list price for a 1 day loan and 15-20% for a 7 day loan. Within six days of the titles



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being activated, we had 21 short-term loans showing in the EBL LibCentral interface. The total cost of these loans was \$110.07, an average of \$5.24 per loan - much cheaper than the cost of a loan via Document Delivery. However, now that we have more data, that average loan cost is sitting a little higher, between \$7.50 and \$8.25. Two weeks into our trial we had 75 short term loans on 69 individual titles, one of which had been accessed three times, but no auto purchases had been triggered.

We opted to activate the titles in SFX, rather than load 60,000 MARC records into our catalogue, which we would have had to identify in some way in case we needed to remove them at the end of the trial period. There were a few teething problems with the Primo harvest of activated SFX titles into FindIt@Flinders, nevertheless, in the first few days around twelve titles were discovered and accessed without there being any records in our system. This must have occurred as patrons moved from one of our owned EBL titles to the EBL interface, where they began browsing the titles.


As of mid-June 2013, a week short of 12 months using the PDA model, we have had 6,085 STLs and 368 auto purchases at a cost of \$50,161.93 and \$24,988.58 respectively. An average of \$8.24 per STL and \$67.90 per title purchased. Although we set our upper price limit at \$200 per title we have since begun activating titles, requested by academics, that fall outside our profile parameters and therefore might be more expensive. We are seeing that, on average, we are expending 66.7% of the PDA budget on short term loans and 33.3% on auto purchases.

At the end of our six month trial (in early January) there had been 2,700 STLs and 141 auto purchases. In the six months following the trial there have been 3,385 STLs and 227 auto purchases – representing an increase over the same period of time.

For auto purchases, via PDA, we download or create a MARC record upon receipt of the invoice, and we create a purchase order retrospectively. The workflow is more or less the reverse of our usual eBook ordering procedure.

Soon after commencing our PDA trial we decided to activate titles in the EBL catalogue, outside our PDA profile, if they were requested via Document Delivery. For many titles, a short term loan represented a significant cost saving over the cost of a Document Delivery loan. The standard delivery charge for a loan or an article throughout Australia is \$16.50. Flinders University bears the cost of any Document Delivery item up to \$33, which is the cost for a rush request. So if the cost of a short term loan is found to be under \$33, the title is activated in our PDA profile. Staff in Document Services make these titles visible in LibCentral (the EBL interface) and they are also activated in SFX so that our other patrons can discover them.

To date, we have activated 153 items. We have also activated 354 titles requested by Liaison Librarians or academics. We have received very few objections from patrons with regard to sending an eBook link instead of a physical item (3-4 complaints) and it has meant



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that we are able to supply the item much sooner. It takes moments to activate the title in LibCentral and then email a link to the patron. It takes a little longer for the SFX record to be activated and harvested to our discovery layer.

It is our policy to only process document delivery requests from our patrons if we are unable to supply the item ourselves. Since we are able to supply access to the eBook via PDA, we have fulfilled our provision of the title and it is unnecessary to request it via an external provider. If there are legitimate reasons why the resource must be supplied in physical format we can resolve the complaint quickly by processing the patron’s request for a physical item. ‘Legitimate reasons’ are determined on a case-by-case basis in line with Document Delivery policies.

We received one complaint via our eBook survey. This was from an administration staff member requesting titles on behalf of an academic. The academic had expected to receive the items in print format. The information desk also reported the occasional situation where a patron’s document delivery request had been cancelled because we already held the eBook but the patron hadn’t found it, or because it could be activated in PDA. However, as already mentioned this is standard practice and occurs with all eBook titles, not just those in the PDA profile.

When we reviewed this practice after an initial trial period of 3 weeks, we found that 87% of Doc Del activations had been accessed but there were a small number of titles that had only just been activated so the percentage might have been higher had we allowed another week. More than half generated a short term loan but several were accessed within the free browsing period so did not incur a cost. The titles remain visible to our patrons and might later generate further short term loans, or trigger an auto purchase if accessed four times.

It is true that purchasing the eBook upfront costs less than paying for three short term loans and subsequently purchasing the book, but this model of patron led acquisition ensures that there is actually a demand for the title and that it won’t just be purchased then never accessed. As an example, let’s take the title *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. The cost of a 1 Day loan is 9.00 USD, or 12.00 USD for a 7 Day loan. If the title has 3 x 7 Day STLs the cost is 36.00 USD. If it never triggers a 4th loan, and therefore an autopurchase, this is all we would pay. If it does go on to trigger an autopurchase the price is 60.00 USD plus the cost of the STLs (96.00 USD). We could have just purchased the title for 60.00 USD but if it was never accessed that would be money wasted. We could have borrowed it via Document Delivery but for three loans this would have cost between 49.50 USD and 99.00 USD and we would still not own the book, although with three loans it would have then been considered for purchase, making the total cost somewhere between 101 USD - 148 USD.



“After one year of PDA at Flinders we have noticed something interesting with regard to the collection development efforts of our Liaison Librarians. Of the 354 activation requests via Liaison Librarians, which includes titles recommended by academics, only 15 or so autopurchases have been triggered so far.”

The total cost for our trial period was 30,590.24 USD so we were well within our budget of 40,000 AUD. This was very reassuring as we had been concerned that we might exceed the budget as other libraries had reported this as a major concern in the PDA literature. For example, the Open Polytechnic Library in New Zealand used a mediated STL and purchase strategy to manage the uncertainty of their PDA expenditure,¹ and Swinburne University of Technology reset their autopurchase trigger to occur after the third STL, rather than the second STL, to slow down expenditure when it proved to be higher than anticipated.² We didn't want to be in a position where we would have to deactivate the titles due to excessive expenditure.

Interestingly, when we compared our total EBL expenditure for the 2012 fiscal year (which included the 6 months of the trial), we had only spent 1750 AUD more than our total EBL expenditure for the previous year when we were ordering title by title, as recommended by Liaison Librarians. For the duration of the trial Liaison Librarians were asked to only order EBL eBooks manually if the titles were outside the PDA profile. Now that the trial has been hailed a success and the continuation of PDA as a standard acquisition tool has been approved, Liaison Librarians continue to order EBL eBooks manually only if they are outside our profile. Thousands of titles are already available via FindIt@Flinders and will be autopurchased if the demand is there.

Shortly after commencing the PDA trial, we also began ordering individual eBook titles from Ebrary and EBSCO if they were not available via EBL. Previously we had only ordered EBL eBooks manually. One of the deciding factors in choosing EBL as our PDA vendor is that we were already familiar with the EBL eBook interface and had established procedures in place, even though we did need to alter the workflow.

After one year of PDA at Flinders we have noticed something interesting with regard to the collection development efforts of our Liaison Librarians. Of the 354 activation requests via Liaison Librarians, which includes titles recommended by academics, only 15 or so autopurchases have been triggered so far. The titles are outside our profile if they cost over \$200, are published before 2009, or are outside our core teaching and research areas. The most likely reasons for low usage are that they are on topics of narrow, or specific, interest or, being published earlier than 2009, they may be considered dated. Another possibility is that the title is also held in

1 Geoff Kelly, “A Year of Demand Driven Acquisition of eBooks at the Open Polytechnic Library,” (2010): 6.

2 Gary Hardy and Tony Davies, “Letting the Patrons Choose - Using EBL as a Method for Unmediated Acquisition of Ebook Materials,” in *[Proceedings] Information Online 2007: 13th Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) Exhibition and Conference, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, 30 January-01 February* (2007): 7..

“If these titles are not being accessed it raises the question of whether lower priority collection building activations are a good use of our time. We may do better to wait until a title is needed for a specific purpose, rather than collection building just in case.”

print and the print version is being preferred.

This is something we intend to investigate in more detail. The low usage of traditionally selected materials is often discussed in the library literature. For example, Anderson et al. (2002) analysed circulation statistics of books purchased via Purdue University Libraries' Books on Demand project, where print books requested via interlibrary loan were purchased, rather than borrowed. The circulation statistics were compared with those for similar titles purchased via normal selection processes, such as selection by a subject librarian. The statistics revealed that

68% of the Books on Demand titles acquired during the project's first two years have circulated at least once after the initial use by the original ILL patron (42% have circulated more than once); in contrast, 36% of titles normally acquired during the same time period for the HSSE Library have circulated at least once (16% have circulated more than once). The figures for the Management Library are even more dramatic: all Books on Demand titles had at least one checkout, whereas only 48% of the books selected and purchased with library funds had circulated one or more times during the same two years.³

The document delivery activations are essentially patron selected and these have also generated a low number of subsequent auto purchases, but relative to the total number of document delivery activated titles the percentage is higher than that for titles recommended by librarians and academics. For the document delivery selected titles 10 auto purchases have been generated, representing 6.54% of 153 titles, compared with 15, or 4.23% of 354 titles selected by librarians / academics. The titles activated as a result of document delivery requests are also likely to be on topics of narrow, or specific, interest.

While providing access to the recommended titles is fairly straightforward, it does require some staff time in Acquisitions to check the title in LibCentral and add it to our visible list. The information then needs to be conveyed to our Digital Resources team who activate the title in SFX link resolver so that it can be discovered via FindIt@Flinders. There is also the time spent by our Liaison Librarians to search and recommend titles for activation. If these titles are not being accessed it raises the question of whether lower priority collection building activations are a good use of our time. We may do better to wait until a title is needed for a specific purpose, rather than collection building just in case. We haven't analysed the usage for these titles but it's a fair indication that demand is low or non-existent if they aren't accessed enough times to generate a purchase.

In summary, we now own over 37,000 eBooks and have access to more than 114,000 but we have never formally assessed how they

3 Kristine J. Anderson et al, "Buy, Don't Borrow,". *Collection Management* 27, no. 3/4 (2002):. 9-10.

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are faring, although access statistics show that, overall, they are being well used. From the Information Desk, we have anecdotal evidence of patrons, both staff and students, having difficulties accessing eBooks. This type of feedback is also filtered back to us from staff attending university wide meetings and programs, where academic staff have commented on their eBook experiences. This is the starting point for our research project.

eBook Research Project – Aliese Millington, Chris Moore and Deb Zott

The Research Working Group

Our research project, titled *eBooks @ Flinders University Library*, is part of the Flinders Library Research Working Group (RWG).

In 2010 our University Librarian, Ian McBain, formed the RWG to foster a culture of research and professional reflection at Flinders Library. Library staff are encouraged to submit proposals for research as individuals or in groups. Once accepted into the RWG, individual researchers or representatives of group projects attend regular meetings to gain guidance on their research and the research process. The group includes a research consultant (a staff member with experience in the research process) and a Chair to keep track of the projects, resourcing and outcomes. The Chair also supports researchers in pursuing opportunities to disseminate research.

The RWG has created an environment in which Library staff can explore the research process and has provided both informal and formal information sessions, such as ‘how to write a literature review’ or ‘tips for getting through an ethics application’.

Having the RWG sanctioned by our Senior management has also meant endorsement of schemes to buy out time and bring in casual staff to cover parts of day to day work to give staff time to conduct research. As everyone would relate to, staff have found it difficult to find time in their busy roles to conduct research, so such support has been vital.

The RWG has gone from strength to strength in the last three years. One project (an evaluation of our discovery layer, Findit@Flinders) has already been completed and we have seven projects currently underway, including collaborations with Flinders academic staff and students (e.g. exploring partnerships with Screen and Media students to create educational and promotional material about the Library, examining librarians engaging with researchers as researchers); projects assessing our systems or services (e.g. reviewing our Library assignment, assessing the effect of information literacy training on first year science students) and even a project assessing the impact of the RWG itself. All of these projects have been representing Flinders Library via various research outputs, and the RWG continues to support this.

Background: eBooks @ Flinders University Library

Our project, eBooks @ Flinders University Library, came out of

two separate projects. Deb Zott (Metadata/Acquisitions Services Librarian) and Chris Moore (Acquisitions Librarian) had submitted a proposal to research the Patron Driven Acquisitions trial detailed above. Aliese Millington (Liaison Librarian for the Humanities) had submitted a proposal to look at user behaviour around our increasing eBook collection. Our University Librarian saw that these proposals were linked and put the projects into one team.

It has been fruitful to combine the projects, to be able to link qualitative user perspective data with the patron use statistics gathered automatically via the different eBook platforms and via the PDA. These statistics tell us that patrons are using our eBooks in increasing numbers. This is also seen in stats we have from a recent (2012) survey conducted by the Library (Insync Library Client Satisfaction Survey, figs. 1 and 2).

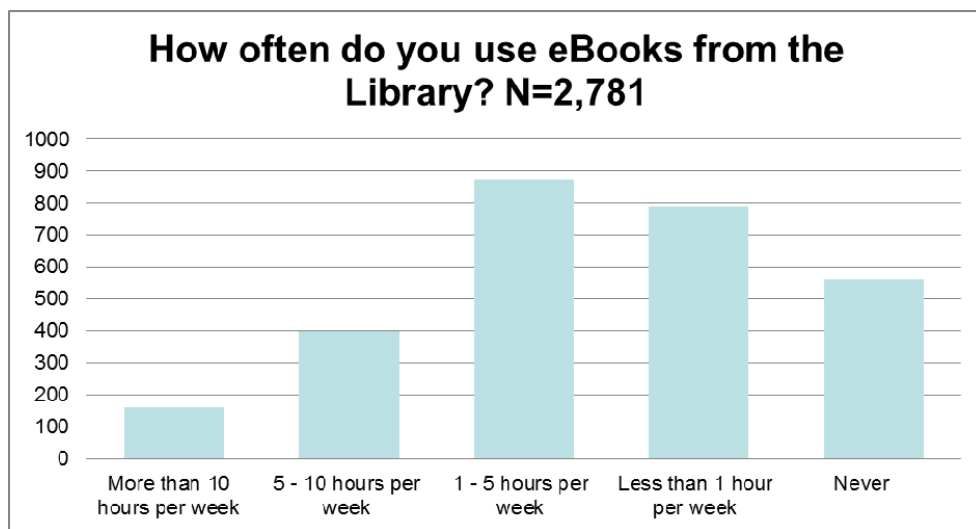


Fig. 1

Of the 2,781 patrons surveyed, 874, or 31% of our staff and students were using eBooks 1-5 hours a week, and 790, or 28% were using our eBooks at least once a week. Only 20% were not using them at all.

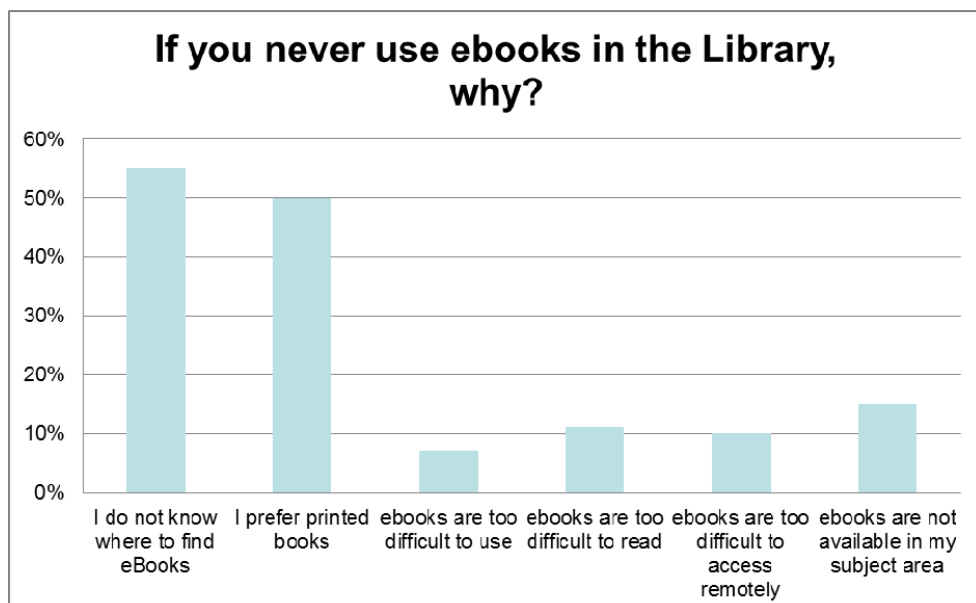



Fig. 2



“The plan is to administer two surveys on eBooks, either side of online eBook training. It is hoped that the results of the research will inform in-person and online information literacy training, as well as our general promotion and presentation of eBooks to users.”

Looking more closely at the 20% of patrons who never use our eBooks, we see perhaps an opportunity for Library training. A surprising result is that the majority of patrons who aren't using our eBooks don't know where to find them (55%). Comments of the type reflected in fig. 2 are often reported anecdotally across the Information Desk, via Liaison Librarians, or via Librarians who have visited different areas of the University in the course of their everyday work.

For example, we'd sometimes hear that as we have different vendors, users can find the different ways to read online/download confusing. One particular issue is that EBL books require the user to download a software program called *Adobe Digital Editions* before they can download an eBook. When patrons are in the library they are not able to do this, because they can't install software on University computers. Ideally, when in the Library, patrons should use EBL's option to 'Read Online', but this is often counterintuitive as they are used to downloading and saving eJournal articles onto USB.


Many of the queries we had heard about eBooks relate to digital rights management or publisher restrictions on the book. We believed that information literacy that simplifies the process down into short easy steps might help our patrons, but we wanted to test it first. So we started to ask - what are the barriers to eBook use for patrons? We need to make sure that if patrons 'have a go' at an eBook we can give them appropriate support, which is likely to make their experience better and in turn increase their use of eBooks in the future. With this in mind we began our research project.

The project so far: the first survey

Our focus is to look at how eBooks are faring in the Library, including the areas of uptake (e.g. ordering/acquisition) as well as user perspectives. The scope is everyone at Flinders, but this is self-selecting, as staff and students need to choose to fill in our survey to be part of the research. The plan is to administer two surveys on eBooks, either side of online eBook training. It is hoped that the results of the research will inform in-person and online information literacy training, as well as our general promotion and presentation of eBooks to users.

We ran our first survey in the first three weeks of April and promoted it on Flinders Learning Online, the student portal for access to topic information. We also promoted it on the Library blog and Facebook, tweeted, had posters and flyers and asked Liaison Librarians to promote to their Schools and Faculties, including staff who had given unsolicited feedback about eBooks in the past. To satisfy the requirements of ethics we didn't offer a prize or incentive for participation in our survey.

Even without a prize we managed to get 125 responses, and received useful and insightful qualitative data we can analyze along with the quantitative. We created the survey by looking at surveys written by other Universities and by eBook vendors, and tested it



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on members of the RWG. The survey was administered via Survey monkey and respondents clicked a link to access.

The survey questions covered awareness and finding and access (e.g. whether via Findit@Flinders, the eBook databases or our eBook portal on the Library website). We also asked questions to test ideas about eBook use that we'd seen in the literature – for example, the 2008 Global Student E-book Survey (eBrary 2008) revealed a small number of students who felt that eBooks were not a reliable scholarly resource, and we were interested to see if that was the case at Flinders.

Other questions aimed to find out how satisfactory the eBook experience had been for patrons at Flinders, including aspects of technical access and printing/downloading and the types of devices patrons use to access (personal computers, eReaders, tablets etc.).

We then asked if patrons thought eBook training would be useful to them, and if so what kind. Finally we gathered demographic information – whether respondents were academic/professional staff, students (undergraduate or postgraduate), their age groups and their major area of study or teaching.

Analysis of the first survey is not yet complete, but some initial themes have emerged. Overwhelmingly respondents are aware of the existence of our eBooks and had accessed them several times. More often than not they found the experience satisfactory and most felt moderately confident in their ability to access and use eBooks at Flinders. This reflects the use statistics we've received showing that patrons are accessing and using eBooks in increasing numbers.


The survey also garnered plenty of comments, however, that supported anecdotal evidence that some patrons are having difficulties with our eBooks. These reveal issues we can work on as a library, and perceived problems that we can't change. For example, print is still preferred, but only slightly over no particular preference for print or eBook. Also, the survey alerted some patrons to the fact that eBooks exist at Flinders Library. These two themes suggest that we can improve our promotion of eBooks to patrons.

Another theme of the survey comments is that that reading on a computer or device is generally disliked. This is perhaps something that will change as technology evolves, but also Flinders could be promoting the benefits of keyword searching and printing out relevant chapters, getting away from 'reading on screen' by using the eBook more as a reference device.

With regards to areas that could be improved via training, we received several responses that indicated that patrons often found the different eBook platforms and the various ways eBooks are accessed and restricted confusing and annoying. This theme, as well as a preference towards online rather than in-person or phone training have informed the training phase of our research project.

The project so far: the online training

With the initial survey results in mind we created online training



“Several times throughout the training we reiterate the point that patrons might need to look for different buttons, use different processes or be aware of different restrictions to access, print or download eBooks at Flinders.”

that was a basic and broad introduction, aimed at the user with little-to-no experience of eBooks at Flinders. Adobe Captivate was used to create a video presentation incorporating images and audio.

The training first covers how to find eBooks via Findit@Flinders – although there are two other ways to find and access eBooks, the Findit@Flinders search gives access to the largest portion of our eBook collections. The other sections of the training discuss reading online, printing/downloading chapters and downloading an entire eBook to a personal computer or device.

Something that is reinforced throughout the training is that Flinders holds eBooks from many different suppliers. It is hoped that explaining this will put the different parts of the process into context. For example, when the training covers reading eBooks online we point out that after patrons have searched for an eBook in Findit@Flinders, they will find themselves using a variety of different interfaces, depending on the vendor that has supplied that eBook to us. Several times throughout the training we reiterate the point that patrons might need to look for different buttons, use different processes or be aware of different restrictions to access, print or download eBooks at Flinders.

With this in mind a separate part of the training has been to create and promote a ‘libguide’, a website linked to the Flinders site summing up each eBook collection we have as well as download and print options. Patrons can refer to this guide whenever they are working with eBooks, and the guide contains more detailed information than the broad overview represented by the training.

Conclusion: early benefits and where to from here?

One of our Reference Librarians (Anne Hawkins) created the eBook libguide on behalf of our project, and this demonstrates a beneficial outcome of our research project. One of the themes of initial anecdotal evidence on the difficulties of eBooks was that much of the evidence came from Library staff who didn’t feel confident in assisting patrons with eBook issues.

Since our research started we’ve held two information and feedback sessions for Library staff. We’ve also held sessions for academic staff of the University. These sessions have informed the sessions that Liaison Librarians have with both undergraduate and postgraduate students. As well as this, staff such as Anne have been involved in our project, creating guides and assessing our survey and training materials. This has ensured that knowledge has been transferred outside of our small research group and to the wider Library. This example of evidence-based librarianship is exactly the effect the RWG aims to have on Flinders University Library.

The next step for our project is to complete the online training, which was emailed out in a link to respondents who indicated that they were interested in training via the first survey. Following this we will distribute a follow-up survey, to measure effectiveness of the online training.



“For the most part, it does seem that eBooks are being used and accepted well at Flinders Library, with the exception of a small, but important, section of our users. Our research aims to find and assist those patrons who are having trouble with these important resources as they cement their place in Flinders Library.”

The final stages will involve data analysis and write up. The most important thing to come out of our research, however, will be practical guidance and teaching materials that Flinders Library staff can use to help the Flinders community engage with our eBook collections. For the most part, it does seem that eBooks are being used and accepted well at Flinders Library, with the exception of a small, but important, section of our users. Our research aims to find and assist those patrons who are having trouble with these important resources as they cement their place in Flinders Library.

A PowerPoint presentation to accompany this paper can be found as a Supplementary file.

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