

Letting the patrons choose - using EBL as a method for unmediated acquisition of ebook materials.

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Abstract

For many of our network savvy patrons, accustomed to identifying and instantly obtaining text material, convenience and immediacy are highly valued attributes. The library's hard copy collection struggles to meet these expectations. For example, should a patron articulate a need for a monograph item which has yet to be added to our collections, it is doubtful whether "convenience" and "immediacy" would describe our standard responses.

Libraries deal with the time lag inherent in their acquisitions processes by endeavouring to predict demand for particular monograph items, using the skills of collection development staff and other predictors of potential use. Inevitably, some of our scarce monograph materials budgets are wasted on materials for which our predictors or instincts failed us – books which no-one will read. We will spend a not insignificant amount of time and effort in adding them to our collections, and after however many years of inactivity, removing them again.

What would happen if we let the patrons choose, without intervening directly in the process?

Swinburne University of Technology has implemented the EBL ebook nonlinear lending model. In July 2006 the library loaded the entire EBL list of more than 34,000 thousand records into the catalogue. There is no distinction as far as the patrons are concerned between an item which the library has yet to acquire and an item which has been purchased. Patrons can browse and download any of the EBL ebooks. An ebook which has not been purchased is borrowed by the patron, and the library pays a percentage of the list price of the item. Through the application of preset customizable parameters, patrons purchase items without intervention by Library staff. Swinburne is the first library in the world to have loaded all MARC records into the catalogue and allow unmediated loans and automatic unmediated purchasing of the entire EBL collection.

There are many advantages in such a model, as well as some potential issues. This paper describes the implementation of the EBL ebook nonlinear lending model at Swinburne University Library, analyses practical issues which were encountered (such as duplicate records of ebooks already held), examines data on expenditure, range of content and usage gathered from July to December 2006, and considers implications for collection development.

Introduction

This paper reports on a trial implementation of the EBL non-linear lending model at Swinburne University of Technology Library over six months July to December 2006. The time elapsed in the trial is not sufficient to make a full estimation of the value and impact of the EBL model, but the results over even so brief a period are extremely encouraging and have encouraged much discussion about our current collection development practices. Many of the initial anxieties with which we approached the project have proved to have been unfounded.

What is Ebook Library?

Ebook Library (EBL) is a web-based ebook lending platform which delivers the catalogue of Ebook Corporation's ebooks - at end of 2006 the catalogue comprised around 40,000 ebooks.

EBL provides a patron portal which allows patrons to browse for ebooks, read them online or download them to read offline. Online reading and browsing is done through the web-based patron portal. Downloading ebooks for offline reading is done via Adobe Acrobat and uses the Acrobat Digital Rights Management features to control use, including printing and copying from the ebooks.

There is also a librarians portal which allows the library to configure a range of automated loan and purchase options, mediated or unmediated according to library-defined criteria.

EBL offers innovative functionality such as:

- Multiple concurrent access - "non-linear lending"
- Online and offline access – read via the web-based patron portal or download
- Read aloud for all titles (yes – in online mode you can get the book to read itself to you.)
- Chapters for reserve circulation (which we haven't explored as yet)
- Course-pack and document delivery solutions (which we haven't explored as yet)
- Free browsing for up to 10 minutes before loan or purchase¹

EBL offers a number of different options and models. For example, libraries may choose to load the entire collection or only selected subject segments of the EBL catalogue. Libraries can choose to make only titles which they have purchased visible or show all titles. Libraries can load MARC records just for titles which have been purchased, or load MARC records for the entire EBL list. Where the library displays a title which is not owned, it can configure EBL so that the patron can borrow the book, with or without mediation by the library.

How the "EBL ebook nonlinear lending model" works

Swinburne chose to implement the EBL nonlinear lending model for the entire and growing EBL collection allowing unmediated short term loans and automatic unmediated purchase of ebooks after a set number of loans.

The nonlinear lending model applies to the vast majority of EBL titles and allows multiple simultaneous use of an ebook (there are some limitations on simultaneous use of a small number of textbooks).

An ebook which has not yet been purchased is borrowed by the patron as a short term loan and the library pays a loan fee to EBL - usually around 10-15% of the list price for the ebook. Through the application of preset customizable parameters, additional loans will automatically trigger the purchase of ebooks without intervention by library staff. Once an ebook has been purchased it can continue to be borrowed, but the library no longer pays a loan fee.

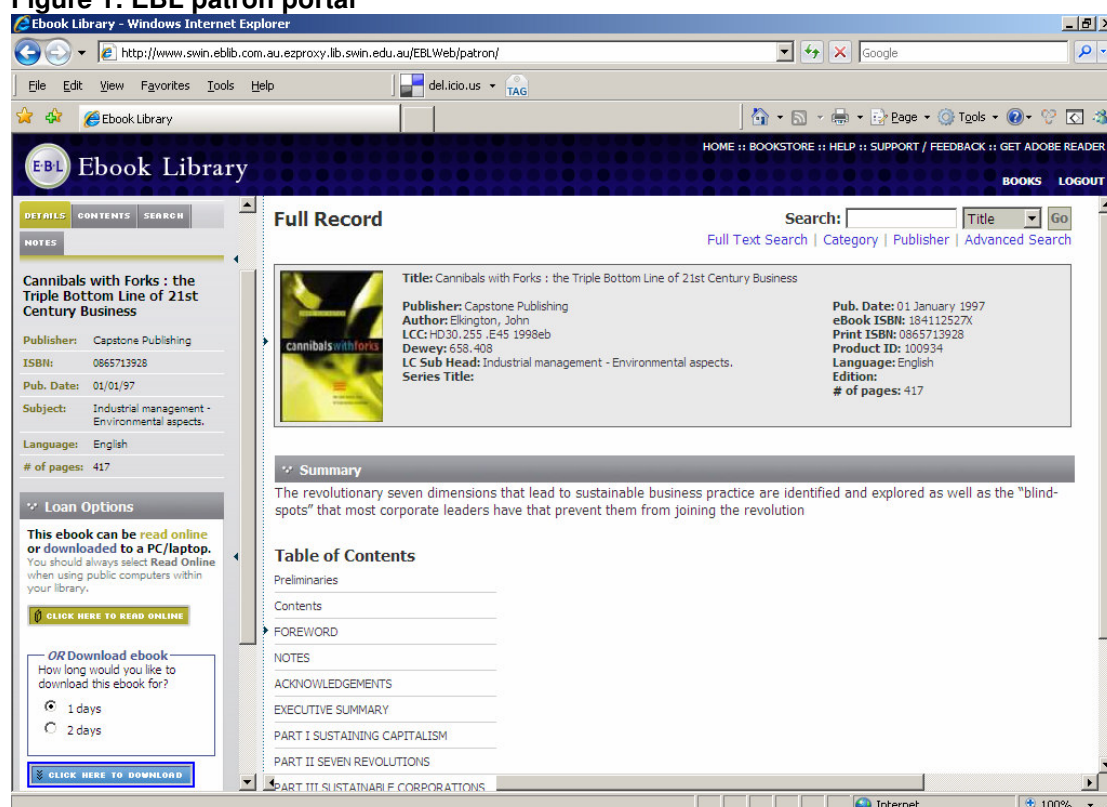
When an ebook has been purchased it is owned by the library in perpetuity and can be borrowed up to 325 times per year thereafter. Reference titles may be used an unlimited

¹ For a full overview of the features of EBL see http://www.ebllib.com/about_ebl.asp

number of times. High demand ebooks that are borrowed more than 325 times in a year would generate automatic purchase of an additional copy - in the first six months of our pilot we haven't come anywhere close to 325 loans for any of our EBL titles.

Once an ebook has been borrowed by the patron it can be read – online or offline – and the patron has limited rights to print and copy content from the ebook. Basically the patron can print up to 20% and can copy up to 5% of the ebook content. When reading online, the EBL patron portal keeps track of how much content each patron prints or copies and will block printing and copying when the limits are reached. This data is tracked for use over multiple sessions. If the patron elects to download the ebook using Adobe Acrobat the EBL patron portal is unable to track printing and copying so more blunt limitations are applied: on the first download the patron can print 20% and copy 5%; on the second download these limits are halved; on the third and subsequent downloads the patron cannot print or copy. For this reason EBL – and we – generally recommend reading online.

Figure 1: EBL patron portal



Why were we interested in the EBL model?

Swinburne was attracted to a number of specific aspects of the EBL model. The range of content was a good fit with Swinburne's teaching and research profile. The essentially unlimited concurrent access was less fiddly than other ebook models, and removed one potential source of annoyance for our patrons. Access to the content is straightforward since EBL uses Acrobat Reader to display downloaded ebooks for offline reading.

From a collection development collection management perspective, the concept of unmediated purchase by our patrons was particularly attractive if somewhat challenging. Like every other Australian University library we are consistently told by our customers – regardless of our best efforts to please them - that our collections suck. We simply haven't got enough of what our patrons want, when they want it. Materials availability surveys indicate that a patron has somewhere between a 3 to 4 in 5 chance of finding a specific item they want.

When we get around to acquiring what patrons ask for – assuming they can ascertain how to ask us which isn't always straightforward - we have what seem to patrons to be arcane, cumbersome and unbearably time consuming processes for acquiring materials. Library patrons are more Web savvy than ever and have high expectations for information providers.

Libraries deal with the time lag inherent in their acquisitions processes by endeavouring to predict demand for particular monograph items, using the skills of collection development staff and other predictors of potential use. Inevitably, some of our scarce monograph materials budgets are wasted on materials for which our predictors or instincts failed us – we buy books which no-one will read. We will spend a not insignificant amount of time and effort in adding these unwanted items to our collections, and after however many years of inactivity, we will spend more time and effort removing them again. We may even place these items in long term low use storage, where they will go on costing us money or effort indefinitely.

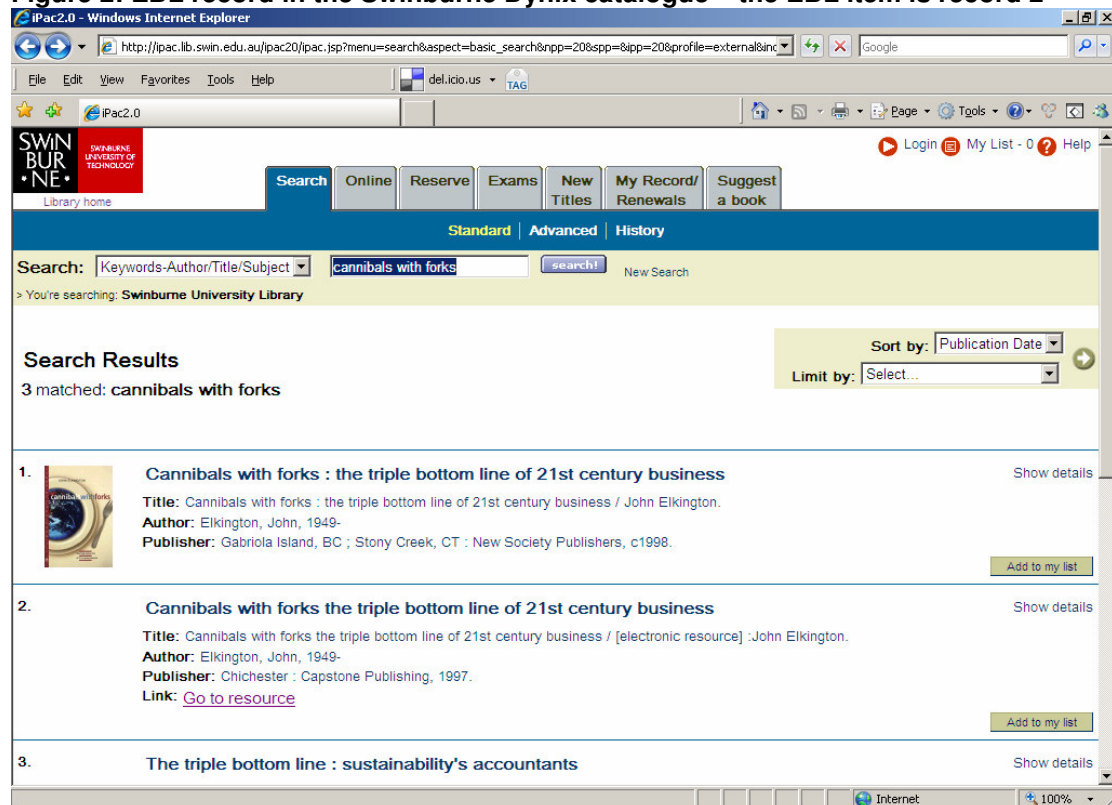
We felt that a system that offered patrons a good range of current and expanding titles, always available, when they wanted them, which removed the substantial costs of selecting, acquiring, end processing, cataloguing, storing, loaning reshelving, weeding and thoughtful disposal is worth a second look.

Getting started

In July 2006 we loaded MARC records for the entire EBL list of more than 34,000 ebooks into our Dynix library catalogue and made them all available for unmediated loan. There is no distinction as far as the patrons are concerned between an ebook which the library has yet to acquire and an ebook which has been purchased. Patrons can browse, read online and download any of the EBL ebooks.

Although we didn't know it at the time, Swinburne became the first library in the world to load MARC records for the entire EBL list into the library catalogue and allow unmediated loans and automatic unmediated purchasing of all titles by patrons.

Figure 2: EBL record in the Swinburne Dynix catalogue – the EBL item is record 2



As shown in the above example the book cover images often do not display for the EBL titles as the EBL MARC records contain the eISBN rather than the print ISBN which is used for matching Syndetics enhanced content in our catalogue.

Initial questions, issues and decisions

Coming to the decision to proceed required overcoming a number of anxieties:

- How much will it cost?
- With only basic catalogue records will patrons be able to find the ebooks in the catalogue?
- Will the patrons select the right sort of material?
- Some patrons don't like ebooks
- What to do about duplicates?
- How would we handle updates and deletions?
- What would we do if it was not sustainable?
- How could we get the optimal return within our budget?

How much will it cost?

Libraries with fixed budgets don't like open ended commitments. Going into the pilot we had set aside an amount of money, hoping that it would last until the end of the year, but really having no idea of what we were letting ourselves in for. Would our patrons run amok and spend the library's material budget in the first month?

We had initially taken some comfort in the fact that Brown University in the United States was implementing what we were planning to do and we had hoped to learn from their experience. However, although Brown had started their implementation before us, there were delays in loading their MARC records and we later discovered that we had loaded our MARC records and gone live first.

So, we really had no idea at the beginning what it would cost. From July to December cost us close to A\$70,000, which was rather more than we anticipated. There were some anxious conversations during some of the busier weeks where the rate of expenditure seemed to rise alarmingly.

Will the patrons find the items, given that there would be no subject headings for the records?

EBL provides free basic MARC records with the option to order enhanced MARC records for a fee of US\$1 per record. However, since we were loading 34,000 records in the initial load and expected to add an additional 1000 records per month there was no way we could consider the enhanced MARC records due to the cost.

The free records from EBL were essentially publisher's records, with sometimes erratic subject descriptors, lack of authority in subject headings, and oddities such as CAPITALIZATION in titles. EBL's free MARC records include subject descriptors in the 653 "Topical Subject" field but this is neither indexed nor displayed in our Dynix library catalogue.

We had considered adding the 653 "Topical Subject" field to our catalogue indexes and displays but initial use of EBL was high showing that patrons were easily finding the ebooks even without subject headings. We were also concerned that if we added subject headings then patrons would find, borrow and buy more material than our budget could cover. So we decided not do anything about the EBL MARC records at least during the pilot, although we did decide to enhance the records for EBL titles that we purchased.

Other oddities included some HTML in some titles and symbols such as ™ and ® which our catalogue cannot display. These can also affect searching, for example a search for

“frommers” will not find “Frommers®”. Our cataloguers have manually edited more than 100 records to remove these symbols from titles in the catalogue records.

Will the patrons select the right sort of material?

Although there are options to load subject segments of the EBL ebook list we decided to load the entire list and see what would happen. Would our patrons spend our budget reading books that had nothing to do with teaching and learning? Almost immediately we could see that the patrons were looking at ebooks that were entirely appropriate to Swinburne’s teaching and research profile.

(Some) patrons don’t like ebooks.

Although the initial use of EBL was high, in line with our other ebook collections, we received some feedback from patrons that they didn’t like the ebooks and would prefer printed books. In large part the dissatisfaction seems to stem from the need to save and print pages of the ebooks – for example, when reading online the EBL ebooks can only be printed one page at a time.

We’re trying to get across the idea that the choice isn’t really between an ebook and a printed book but rather between an ebook and nothing at all, since there is no way we would be able to add 34,000 printed books to our collection in one go, nor add 1-2000 new titles every month.

Duplicates of existing records and – worse – of ebooks which the library had already acquired?

The EBL title list turned out to have very little overlap with our other ebook collections, however there have been some duplicates. We do not want to pay for loans or purchase of EBL titles where we already hold those titles as ebooks in other collections.

After the initial EBL MARC load our systems people ran a report of EBL titles which were possible duplicates of ebooks which we already had in our catalogue and we reviewed these titles and identified around 200 duplicates (0.5%). We then manually deactivated these titles in the EBL library portal and removed the EBL MARC records from our catalogue.

After each EBL MARC update our systems people rerun the duplicates report and our subject librarians also report duplicates that they find. As well as deactivating the titles in EBL and removing the EBL MARC records, we have added these titles to a saved list in the EBL librarians portal. EBL staff use this saved list to control visibility of titles during MARC updates to make sure the titles we’ve turned off don’t accidentally reappear. By the end of 2006 we had identified 260 duplicate ebooks.

In addition to duplicate titles, we have the issue of multiple editions of the same title within EBL. Older editions are generally retained in EBL when a new edition of the same title becomes available and in some cases our patrons have generated loans and automatically purchased both the current and older editions of the same book. So far EBL staff have manually identified these and consolidated payments into the latest edition. In the future we’ll need to face the issue of what to do when a new edition becomes available for a title that we have previously purchased in EBL – should we leave the old edition visible or hide it and force patrons to find the new edition and repurchase?

How would we handle updates and deletions?

We’ve had several years experience of bulk MARC record updates to our catalogue through using SerialsSolutions. Every month we delete the entire SerialsSolutions file and reload around 20,000 MARC records. However, our systems people believe that we have reached the limits on the number of records we can process in a bulk loading operation so with EBL,

after the initial MARC load of 34,000 records, we have loaded update files of new titles in addition to the original load.

We currently have no update routines with our Dynix library system to automatically update and match on existing records, so we have been manually deleting titles that are removed from EBL, and where existing records are upgraded by EBL we haven't been able to load the upgraded records. There have been issues with identification of deletions and what are really updated records and we'll need to find a more systematic way to handle these in future.

During 2007 we will investigate implementing an automated match and update profile with our Dynix system that would allow deletions and updates to match on the EBL system number in the MARC record.

What would we do if it was not sustainable? How hard would it be to unscramble the catalogue?

As we had no idea at the beginning what the EBL pilot would cost we had to think about what to do if the money ran out. If the funds ran out that we would need to remove the EBL records from the catalogue? If we did decide to remove the EBL records from the catalogue, we would want to keep records for those EBL ebooks we had purchased. We also didn't want to remove the entire EBL MARC holdings from the catalogue because we had spent a lot of time and effort identifying and removing selected records for duplicate titles and we didn't want to have to do this again if we planned to turn EBL back on later.

In order to quarantine the purchased ebooks from the non-purchased ebooks, when we upgrade the MARC record for a purchased title by adding subject headings and so on, we also give these titles a separate series entry and a separate Dynix holdings collection. This would allow us to hide from the patrons only those EBL titles we hadn't yet purchased. We also decided that if funds ran out, rather than removing the MARC records, that we would deindex them in the catalogue. The records would still be in the library system but just not visible to patrons and we could easily reindex them again if/when we turned EBL back on.

Ultimately we didn't need to worry about this, but it was comforting to have a plan ready just in case.

What settings? How could we get the optimal return for our patrons within our budget?

The EBL librarians portal allows the library to configure various settings to allow a range of automated actions to occur, and these can be mediated or unmediated. We decided that we would allow unmediated automatic short term loans of the entire EBL ebook list from our catalogue.

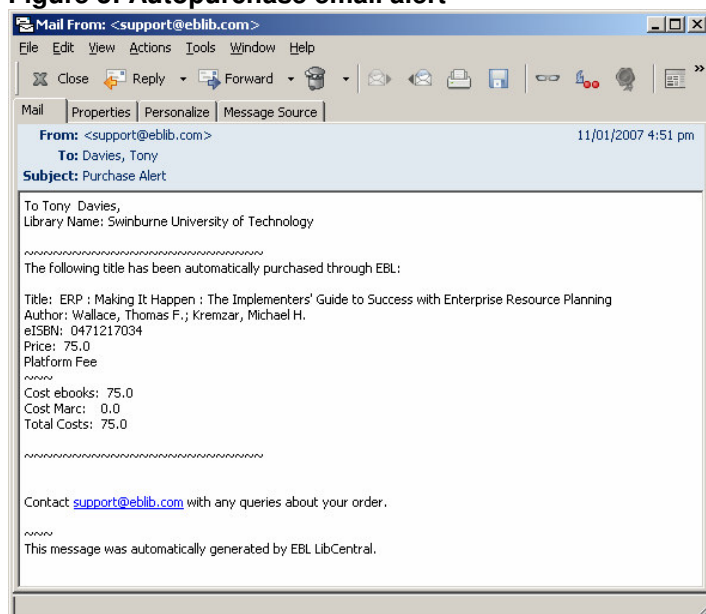
As multiple use of an ebook is an indicator of future use we also decided that we would set the system to automatically purchase the ebook after a preset number of loans. Once an ebook has been purchased we would no longer pay loan charges for that ebook. The question was: how many loans should trigger the automatic purchase?

After analysing the loan and purchase costs it appeared that the most cost effective point of purchase would be after the second or third loan. Initially we set autopurchase to occur after the second loan, however as our loans and purchases were higher than expected - and we were concerned about blowing the budget - we changed this in early October to automatically purchase after the third loan. This had the effect of slowing down the automatic purchase of the ebooks and slowing down expenditure.

We contacted our colleagues at Brown University to find out what they were doing. Brown University had initially set autopurchase to occur after the fourth loan but found they were paying too much in short loan charges, so later changed this to occur after the second loan - which is where we started. We will need to do some more analysis to see if purchase after the third loan is the most cost-effective purchase point in the longer term.

Purchase of the EBL ebooks is entirely automatic and almost entirely unmoderated. We receive an email alert each time a book is automatically purchased and we can check expenditure on loans and purchases through the EBL invoice report generated through the librarians portal.

Figure 3: Autopurchase email alert



The library can configure the loan periods permitted for downloaded books, however longer loan periods may involve higher loan charges. We decided to allow a fairly short loan period for downloaded ebooks.

We had some concerns about automatic purchase of very expensive ebooks – for example, EBL contains some quite expensive reference ebooks that we might decide are too expensive for us to purchase at all.

While it isn't possible to set a price point at which the purchase can be moderated, it is possible to set a short term loan charge which triggers moderation. We decided to set a short term loan charge limit of US\$25 – since this would generally indicate an ebook whose purchase price would be in excess of US\$250. As any loan charges above this amount would require moderation we could decide then whether to allow the loan, manually purchase the book, or deactivate the book if we decided it was too expensive. After six months we've received just three moderation requests and have either allowed the short term loan or manually purchased the ebook.

How did it go?

We loaded the initial batch of EBL records into the library catalogue on 14 July 2006. We also provided a link to the EBL database from the library web site, although we believe that almost all usage was generated by patrons following links from the library catalogue.

EBL ebooks can be read online using the EBL patron portal or downloaded for offline reading. Reading online is recommended since this allows more fine control over the digital rights management of the ebook printing and copying. In practice our patrons seem to be wedded to the concept of downloading even though this offers no advantages in most cases over reading online.

Patrons can also browse ebooks for up to 10 minutes. This is to allow patrons to decide whether they actually want to read or download the ebook. The library does not pay a loan

charge for browsing. Once a patron has exceeded the 10 minute time limit EBL will ask if the patron wants to continue reading and, if the patron agrees, will then apply the loan charge. The table below shows that we have paid loan charges for less than half of the loans – we haven't paid loan charges for browsed titles or for any use of owned titles.

Table 1: Use by patrons - downloading, reading and browsing

	Owned books	Unowned books	Total	Loan charges
Download	698	2771	3469	2771
Read Online	635	1911	2546	1911
Browse Online	627	3443	4070	0
Total	1960	8125	10,085	4682

To date approximately 20% of our total use has been on owned books, and some of the use of unowned books ultimately leads to these books becoming owned as the loans trigger a purchase. In addition to the short term loans and use of purchased titles our patrons also browsed titles that we don't own and for which we've paid no loan charges 3443 times for up to 10 minutes. We have no way of knowing what sort of usage they made of this content – which in effect we have obtained for free – but it would be nice to think that a reasonable proportion was also meaningful - the sort of usage where a relevant page or two is skimmed, where a useful fact or snippet of content retrieved within the time limit.

Table 2: Charges for Short Term Loans and Autopurchases

	Short term loans US\$	Autopurchase US\$
July	\$2,533	\$914
August	\$8,075	\$5,967
September	\$8,230	\$9,930
October	\$6,888	\$2,039
November	\$3,933	\$2,274
December	\$1843	\$976
Total	\$31,502	\$22,100

In addition to the short term loan charges and auto purchase charges shown in the above table we manually purchased 24 titles during July, totalling US\$1540. Total expenditure on loans and purchases from July to December was therefore US\$55,142.

Some titles have shown extremely high use and more than 10% of the titles have had 10 or more loans since purchase. One title has had more than a hundred loans since purchase. It is hard to see how we could have satisfied demand for such titles if we had ordered a single copy of the printed book and we certainly could not have satisfied the immediate demand due to the inevitable delays in sourcing and processing printed books.

Table 3: Top ten most used autopurchased titles

Title	Loans after purchase
Beating IT Risks	103
Cannibals with Forks : the Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business	71
Understanding Media	50
Triple Bottom Line Risk Management : Enhancing Profit, Environmental Performance, and Community Benefits	33
Affluenza : When too much is never enough	28
Media, Gender and Identity : An Introduction	26
Is Science Value Free?	25
Film-induced Tourism	25
Visual Digital Culture : Surface Play and Spectacle in New Media Genres	23
Mobile Connection : The Cell Phone's Impact on Society	23

For the 300 titles that were automatically purchased we know that they had at least 3 to 4 uses, since the purchase was triggered on the third or fourth loan (the purchase point was changed in October). Twenty-five percent of these titles have had no further loans - so far - but 75% have had additional loans and we pay no additional loan fees ever for these titles.

It is interesting to compare use of the autopurchased titles against those EBL titles we purchased manually. During July, the first month of our pilot, when we received an acquisitions request for a title (from an academic or librarian) we manually purchased that title in EBL. From the beginning of August we decided that we would leave it entirely up to our patrons use -- only if there was sufficient user demand would the title would be automatically purchased by the system.

Thirteen of the 24 titles that were manually purchased in July/August had zero use by the end of the year, and only three of the titles would have triggered an automatic purchase.

Considering use of the autopurchased EBL titles against use of print monographs added to the library's collection in semester 2, 2006 the EBL titles show higher use.

Table 4: Use after purchase of EBL and print monographs added in semester 2, 2006

	EBL ebooks	Print monographs
Not used after purchase	25%	48%
Used once after purchase	20%	13%
Used 2-5 times	25%	22%
Used 6-19 times	26%	14%
Used 20+ times	4%	3%

Note that for EBL this table only shows use after purchase, and these titles were used 3 to 4 times up to the point they were purchased, so overall use of the EBL titles is an additional 3 to 4 loans. It is possible that the relatively high non use figure for Print monographs reflects our Liaison Librarians doing their job – predicting demand, purchasing items for next year's reading lists. No doubt a longer time period will be required to get a real feel for the relative value of the unmediated purchase versus our traditional collection building.

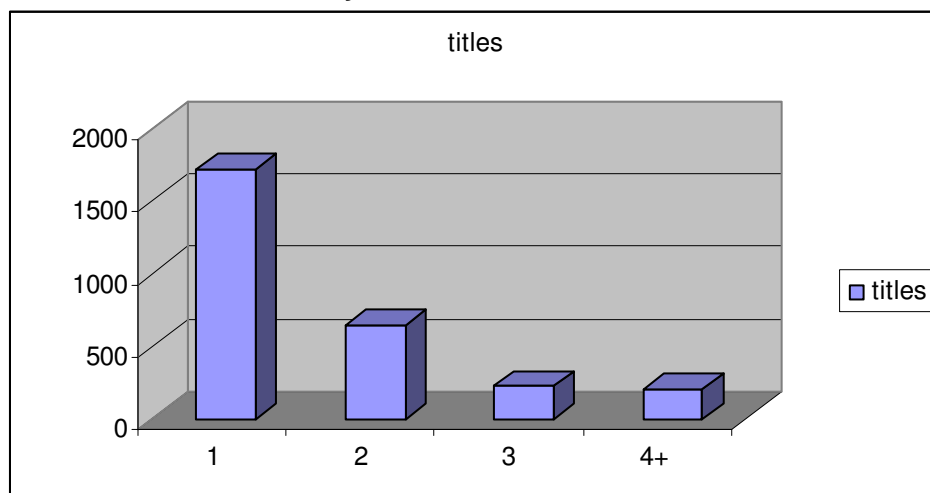
As at mid-December 2006 the average price of an autopurchase was US\$74.45 and the average price of a short term loan was US\$7.57 which compares extremely favourably with the cost of providing a loan a hardcopy item from our collections.

Breadth of use

Looking at our short term loans we can see that demand for content is relatively wide spread – more than half the titles that our patrons wanted to look at were single use only. For this type of demand it definitely makes more sense to pay for a loan rather than purchasing the book.

By the end of 2006 there were around 40,000 titles available in EBL but the 300 titles we purchased account for 20% of all use. Overall use of EBL titles is an example of the long tail – a relatively small number of titles account for high use, while a much larger range of titles account for incrementally very small numbers of use, but overall account for significant use.

Chart 1: Short term loans by title



Who used what?

It appears that use of EBL was by a wide range of users with an average of one to two uses per unique patron. This supports our belief that most use of EBL was by users following links from the catalogue. It also shows that EBL use was not driven by a small number of “power users” but by more widespread use.

Table 4: Sessions and use to mid-December 2006

	Browse	Download	Read online
Total sessions	3846	2437	3306
Total unique titles	2438	1530	2161
Total unique patrons	2708	1773	1911
Average titles per patron	1.42	1.37	1.73

Problems, issues and things to think about

In effect, Swinburne added 40,000 titles to the pool of content available to our patrons over a six month period for a cost of less than A\$70,000. By comparison, over the course of the year we added 16,000 hard copy titles to the collection for a cost of nearly \$800,000 plus the not inconsiderable costs of acquisitions staffing, end processing, housing, and circulation.

Another aspect to consider is that the 40,000 titles are available equally – and immediately – to patrons at each of our five campuses. To provide immediate access to 40,000 print titles we would have needed to duplicate those 40,000 titles at each of our five campus libraries. Even allowing for the vast cost, none of our campus libraries have space to house an additional 40,000 print titles. The EBL titles are available 24 hours a day from anywhere – and how else would the library be able to automatically purchase a book and instantly make it available for loan at 3.00am on a Sunday?

We were somewhat relieved to receive an extremely low number of technical problems reported. Almost all were due to download issues involving the Acrobat software – for example, due to an Acrobat bug, when downloading an ebook for the second time the patron may need to manually delete the original copy of the downloaded ebook. We have tried to recommend to patrons that reading the ebooks online rather than downloading is the preferred approach. Reading online also refines the digital rights management of the ebooks and allows finer control over printing and copying.

Unfortunately printing from the EBL patron portal is somewhat clumsy as printing can only be done one page at a time – this is probably the major source of complaint from the patrons. The Acrobat Reader allows ranges of pages to be printed for downloaded ebooks but the digital rights management settings mean that printing and copying rights are halved on the second download and evaporate entirely on the third download and some of our patrons have discovered this too late.

We had problems dealing with updates and deletions, especially as we have no automated way to handle these with our Dynix system. During one memorable update we received a massive deletions file – most of which turned out not be deletions – and which we discovered only after manually working through nearly 2000 records.

Thanks to the quirks of our Dynix classic system which displays results listing most recent accession number first, EBL records retrieved in any given search tend to go to the top of the list, and our patrons trained by Google ranking tend to select the first item in the list, even when there are ebooks which we own and which have comparable content which are displayed further down the listing.

We were initially concerned that as the subject descriptors in the free EBL MARC records were not displayed or indexed in our library catalogue that this would lead to difficulty in our patrons being able to find the EBL records. However the usage has been higher than we were expecting. What does this tell us about the importance of subject headings? Should we persevere with our initial plans to get the EBL subject descriptors indexed and displayed?

Conclusion

In an age of steadily declining loans of the physical collection and growing patron dissatisfaction with the collection, this model seems to offer one way of meeting the growing expectations of our patrons while staying within our budget and within our limited physical environments. The EBL model provides a cost-effective model of significantly increasing the range of content available to our patrons. The statistics show that, notwithstanding some catalogue issues, that our patrons found and used a substantial number of books that they would have been unable to use had we not use EBL.

Although usage was somewhat higher than we were initially expecting it turned out to be affordable and we now have an indication of what it would cost over a full year should we choose to continue the experiment in 2007. We will need more experience to know the extent to which the purchased titles continue to be used, whether we are autopurchasing at the optimal use point, and whether the EBL model is viable in the longer term. Will the additional purchase of EBL ebooks lead to a decline in the number of short term loans, or will short term loans continue to grow even while we purchase some high use titles?

The EBL model provides an alternative means for delivery of monographs but it also presents possibilities for collection development and the way we evaluate and acquire content. For the ebooks available in EBL we decided very early in the pilot not to follow the model of print books acquisition – by purchasing on the recommendation of an academic or deciding to purchase titles “just in case”. We now leave it up to the market to decide. Perhaps we should look at the titles that have been automatically purchased in EBL, since these are titles that we know our patrons are using, and purchase additional print copies of these books?

It has been an interesting experiment, not only for ourselves but for EBL too. Throughout the period of the pilot the EBL people have been responsive in addressing problems, open to hearing about how things have been going and seem interested in taking our experiences and working to improve things.

So, having survived the pilot we will certainly be continuing with the EBL model. Could it be that we are seeing the beginning of a model which might see our hard copy monograph collections follow the pathway of our hard copy journal collections, towards ever less visited corners of our service landscape?

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