

## eBooks @ La Trobe – are they future ready?

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### Abstract

In our presentation we share the La Trobe University Library's perspective on the future readiness of the eBook format from both the library and the user's perspectives. Examining eBook selection and usage, the eBook publishing landscape, reports on user experience, we ask the question "When is an eBook not an eBook?"

To demonstrate how eBook purchasing and use is managed at La Trobe University, we present a case study that gives a five year snapshot of eBook use on a major platform - ProQuest eBook Central. The case study looks at how eBook use is increasing, decisions regarding purchasing vs patron driven acquisition (PDA), and the future of eBook access. An overview of the recently updated ProQuest eBook Central platform is included.

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How we think about eBooks is usually modelled on our concept of a book – a print book; a physical copy of a book that we can carry around and open and shut as and when we like. When we translate this into the digital world, we imagine the same thing, only digital: available on a device and with additional features such as highlighting, cutting and pasting passages (without ruining the copy) and linking to the book in a document. This model is a great match for the plans La Trobe has for the learning, teaching and research experiences university staff and students engage with. The words that are repeated in La Trobe's strategies for future development and digital learning are 'flexible', 'innovative', and 'promoting active learning'.

The University strategy is about being 'future ready' and the library's contribution to this strategy is framed in its mission statement:

*The Library will provide stable, reliable and seamless access to resources relevant to the teaching, learning and research needs of the university at point of need.*

The La Trobe University Library Collection Development and Management Framework (2015 – 2018) principles states:

*Resources are acquired in digital format where practicable to facilitate location-independent and long-term access.*

These strategies are designed to support La Trobe's focus on digital literacies and the availability of eBooks is central to this focus.

### **When is an eBook not an eBook?**

User surveys repeatedly find that students want more from eBooks and that students and academic staff alike, have both good and bad experiences with eBooks.

- The literature around eBooks says that eBooks are universally used, but not used well
- eBooks have not yet replaced textbooks. Some US and European studies found that students prefer print texts despite the interactive nature of e-texts. There are problems with access models, and user capabilities have been found wanting, which may influence this finding
- In one user study, students reported they wanted "improved search results, better and more flexible page viewing, easier navigation and removal of the access problems"

While students are increasingly using e-books as resources, they continue to encounter issues with interface designs as well as the ability to easily control and manipulate their own copies.

Summing up the findings from various studies, gaps were identified between user expectations and user experiences. Many of these speak to the conceptual difference between a print book and an eBook. eBooks are not just digitised print books. They may have additional features but may also be missing components such as indexes and images. For some reading devices, functions such as searching, browsing, and indexes do not work as well as they should, and problems with navigation deflect readers from their main purpose. Future developments were identified for closing the experiential gaps, by enabling eBooks to provide the key navigation features available in print books as well as additional tools based on the ability to search electronic text.

### **Case Study**

eBook use is on the rise at La Trobe University. In a five year snapshot period (2011 to 2015) for one of our largest eBook Platforms - EBL (Electronic Book Library), now called ProQuest Central, our statistics show that EBL eBook downloads over this period had increased by 288%. In 2011, there were 13,157 downloads and in 2015 there were 51,030. Total usage, including downloads and browser reading, has increased 618%.

In 2011, there were 42,387 uses compared with 304,480 in 2015. Auto-purchasing, or Patron Driven Acquisition, has risen 193% from 2642 titles in 2011, to 7,752 titles in 2015.

Interestingly, the total use (downloads plus browser reading) for the first half of 2106 was 198,000. This is almost equivalent to the total use in 2014 (208,000).

### **Purchase vs Patron-Driven Access (PDA)**

Patron-driven acquisition (PDA) provides a large number of titles for our users to access but we only purchase titles that our clients actually use. Our PDA program is set up to allow one short term loan (STL) use per individual title (a use is defined as any title that is used for more than 5 minutes). When a title is used a second time, the book is purchased automatically.

Since June 2014, our workflow has been to add titles to our PDA rather than purchase them outright. This workflow was initially instigated to provide quicker access to titles requested by our users as we are able to add a book to our PDA pool of titles and then provide access to our users within a few minutes. This is particularly useful for rush requests. Purchasing titles outright via our normal acquisitions workflow can take up to a week before access is available. This workflow has also realised significant savings because of the low rate of purchasing compared to the number of titles requested: of 2589 requested titles added to the PDA pool, only 21.5% resulted in a purchase.

### New purchasing model to offset higher STL

Many publishers have increased their STL prices over the past couple of years which has had an impact on our spending power. EBL/ProQuest have been looking at new purchasing models to offset higher STL fees from publishers. One new model now offered is the *Access To Own* model for both front-list and back-list titles. See below for examples of how each model is designed to work.



1

At La Trobe University Library, we are looking at introducing this model as it provides access to front-list material that is not currently available in the PDA due to embargoes or the publisher just not allowing purchase through the PDA model.

### Future of eTextbook access

eTextbooks are much in demand for academic libraries and there are many different models for purchasing these books. However, eTextbooks are often only available on a three user license which creates a number of issues for users. EBL/Proquest have been working with publishers and have some pilot programs in place with Cengage and Oxford University Press (in which we have taken part) to test various models. ProQuest and EBSCO continue to work with publishers to provide more eTextbook content on their platforms but even these pilot models are only offering the eTextbooks on a three user license.

### New eBook Central Platform

EBL/Proquest launched their updated platform earlier this year. This new platform combines both EBL titles and Ebrary titles. The platform provides access to approximately 850,000 titles, from which we select to firm order purchase. The platform also hosts about 116,000 titles in our PDA pool. Currently La Trobe owns 50,000 EBL titles in perpetuity.

EBL/Proquest have provided more user-managed settings to assist return on investment and seamless use for our users, such as the ability to auto-upgrade licenses rather than mediating the purchase of additional copies. As an example, a title with a one-user licence that is in use and is required by another user, will automatically upgrade the licence to a three-user licence, providing instantaneous access for the second user.

Digital rights management (DRM), or the restrictions placed on aggregator platforms in terms of printing and download limits, has been problematic for users relying on these platforms such as EBL/Proquest. On the updated platform, the DRM limitations have changed enormously. Copying limits have been raised from 5% to 20% of the book, printing limits have been raised from 20% to 40% of the content, and these limits are reset every 24 hours rather than the previous times of up to six weeks.

As an example, a user can print 10% of a book today, leaving them with 30% for the next 24 hours. After this time, their limit is reset and they can print up to 40% of the book again.

This does not infringe copyright as the publishers have given these permissions under the EBL/ProQuest licence terms, but of course copyright restrictions regarding the use of the material still apply.

### **eBooks – are they Future Ready?**

We believe eBooks are future ready. This does not mean that they are perfect, but we believe the continuous work being done to improve and adapt the technology as required by users will result in a highly interactive information enquiry experience for users. We will continue to work with our users to understand their evolving requirements and pain points in relation to eBooks. We will also continue to work with publishers and aggregators to ensure that they are aware of academic users' evolving needs to ensure that eBooks continue to be ready for the future.

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