



Against the Grain

“Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians”

ISSN: 1043-2094

Own or Rent? A Survey of eBook Licensing Models

by Scott Rice (UNC Greensboro) <scott_rice@uncg.edu>

eBooks seem poised to take off. With the advent of exciting new technologies such as electronic ink and electronic paper, and readers like the **iLiad** and **Sony Reader**, eBooks may finally break into the big time. If that happens, librarians will need to come up to speed on the options available to them to provide eBooks to their patrons. This will not be an easy task, however because of the bewildering array of different licensing arrangements. Fortunately, the complexity of eBook licensing can be mitigated somewhat because most can be grouped into a few basic broad categories.

There are three basic models of eBook licensing that seem to cover most vendors, with a few variations and one notable exception. The print model of eBook licensing treats the eBook the same as a print book present in the library. The book is offered for checkout, and once checked out, cannot be accessed by other users. The other dominant model follows the familiar “database subscription” model, and parallels subscriptions to such resources as **InfoTrac OneFile**, with an annual subscription fee and unlimited simultaneous access for users. The final model is the free or open access model, which encompasses all those eBook collections that are available for free on the Web.

To understand and negotiate the various types of eBook licensing agreements, librarians must have a basic understanding of **Digital Rights Management (DRM)** technology. **DRM** is used to prevent unauthorized use of eBook content. This can include limiting the number of pages that can be printed within a certain time period, limiting the amount of cut-and-paste a user can perform, regulating the period of checkout, or keeping track of the use of the materials (e.g., how quickly pages are being viewed).

Print Model

NetLibrary is a prime example of the print model of eBook licensing. Just like a print book in the library, one user at a time is permitted to view the content of the eBook. When the book is checked back in to the collection, then the next

viewer is allowed access. If a library wants two users to be able to access the book, they will need to purchase two copies. Tables of Contents can be viewed without checking out the book, and email notifications assist the user in getting their turn with the content they are seeking. When purchasing books, institutions can choose an annual access fee or a five-year prepaid access that **NetLibrary** calls perpetual access. This is because any future access fees will only be assessed in the case of unforeseen changes to the service or technology. **NetLibrary** has very restrictive **DRM**, which limits printing to one page at a time, limits the number of times a cut-and-paste operation can be performed, and forces the user to enter a code if the software detects that the user is paging too quickly through the content.

Libwise is another vendor that uses the print model for a portion of their collections. Four different tiers, reflecting a sliding scale of monthly checkouts and cost, are offered. A library purchases a set number of checkouts per month, which covers all checkouts over the collection. The **Libwise DRM** will cause the eBook downloaded by a particular patron to become unusable at the end of the checkout period, at which time it is available for use by another patron. Both vendors also provide a simultaneous use model for portions of their collection, such as **NetLibrary's Reference Center**.

Database Model

The database model is one of the most popular licensing arrangements. It essentially treats the eBook content as similar to a database. You license the content from the company and as long as you continue with the subscription, your users will be able to access all the content. **Ebrary** is a good example of this model. Some other vendors following this basic model include **Books 24x7**, **Greenwood**, and **Knovel**.

But not all vendors use such a straightforward implementation of this licensing model. For example, when purchasing a reference work from **Gale Virtual Reference** you are actually purchasing two things: the work and access to it. **Gale** uses the subscription model in that they allow simultaneous access to multiple users while you are subscribed to their service. But at the same time, **Gale** recognizes that you have bought the content and that it is yours to keep; they will send you an electronic file of that content and you are free to host it yourself.

ABC-CLIO also allows for the outright purchase of an eBook. As part of this purchase, the institution receives a license for unlimited simultaneous usage. They are then free to provide access to the eBook in any manner, whether it is a hosting service such as **NetLibrary** or a homegrown service. Of course, **ABC-CLIO** will also provide hosting services which need to be renewed periodically. Both vendors

have an array of different choices for these renewal periods.

Safari Books Online has business and technological packages as well as a “desktop” collection which provides support information for various commonly used office software applications. **Safari** also allows simultaneous access of the collection as well as the capability of searching across the entire collection.

Safari also has a “bookshelf” package that allows the individual to select a set number of slots, either 5, 10, 20, or 30 (starter, small, medium, and large tiers) and populate it with titles. An individual title may cost a half-slot, a full slot, or two slots in the chosen tier. You can then access the content of those titles cover to cover. You can also swap out any title for another after it has spent 30 days on the bookshelf.

The bookshelf package alters the nature of

continued on page 29



Own or Rent?
from page 28

searches on **Safari**. When you search, you search the whole collection, but are only provided full text access to those books on your bookshelf. Any content not on your bookshelf will only get you a preview of a small portion of the eBook. If you upgrade to the “Max” package, you can then download the chapter to which this preview leads.

Open Access Model

The final category of eBook licensing includes free and open access titles. It encompasses tens of thousands of quality eBooks freely available on the Web. While access to all these eBooks is free of charge, restrictions on use vary greatly among the various sites. Also notable is the lack of any **DRM** technology for open access eBooks. At **Project Gutenberg** (<http://www.gutenberg.org/>, 18,000 eBooks), for example, there are few legal or copyright restrictions. On the other end of the spectrum lies the **National Academy Press**, which offers over 3,000 books that are free, but all rights are reserved. In between these extremes are such sites as the **University of Virginia Electronic Text Library** (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/>, 10,000 eBooks publicly available), the **California Digital Library eScholarship** editions (<http://content.cdlib.org/escholarship/>, 350+ eBooks publicly available), and the **Oxford Text Archive** (<http://ota.ahds.ac.uk/>, 2000+ eBooks). All of these sites offer free of charge access to large collections of eBooks, but may reserve some rights and ask users to seek permission for some uses.


A Notable Exception

EBL (Ebook Library) offers their “**Non-Linear Lending**” model. This allows a certain number of “loan instances” per year. A loan instance

is one use of a book by a patron. Users can have multiple simultaneous accesses to a work, but each user will be counted as a loan instance. When you run out of instances for the year, you have the option of leaving the book inaccessible, buying another copy of the book (which gets you another full set of loan instances), or renting the book. As part of the purchase of the book, the institution receives the capability to use one chapter of the book as an e-reserve.

Other tiers of service include textbook lending (only allows three simultaneous users per book) or unlimited access with no restrictions on users or loan instances. In addition, to cover all bases, **EBL** offers the capability to get a short-term rental on a book that is not currently in your collection. These paid accesses can provide valuable information for future collection development decisions.

In Conclusion

With eBooks becoming more and more popular and with new technologies such as electronic ink and electronic paper bringing the experience closer to print, librarians will need to navigate the maze of licensing models to provide the eBooks their patrons want. The print model of licensing seems to be waning as it neither takes into account the way users like to access content nor does it seek to accommodate the electronic environment. Already, database models (and variations) are by far the most popular arrangement. In the future, more innovative licensing models such as **EBL’s “Non-Linear Lending”** are more than likely going to be much more popular as librarians and vendors seek to balance the needs of users and the desires of copyright holders. 

*“Linking
Publishers, Vendors
and Librarians”*



Against the Grain

Uncommon ...

Against the Grain is your *key* to the latest news about libraries, publishers, book jobbers, and subscription agents. *ATG* is a unique collection of reports on the issues, literature, and people that impact the world of books, journals, and electronic information.



Against the Grain

Unconventional ...

ATG is published six times a year, in February, April, June, September, November, and December/January. A six issue subscription is available for only \$40 U.S. (\$50 Canada, \$70 foreign), making it an uncommonly good buy for all that it covers. Make checks payable to *Against the Grain, LLC* and mail to:

Katina Strauch
209 Richardson Avenue
MSC 98, The Citadel
Charleston, SC 29409

| | | | | |
|-------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|------------|
| | | | | |
| Name | Address | City | State | Zip |
| | | | Phone | |
| | | | Company | |
| | | | Email | |