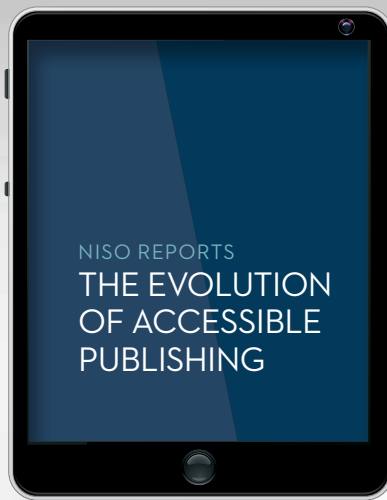
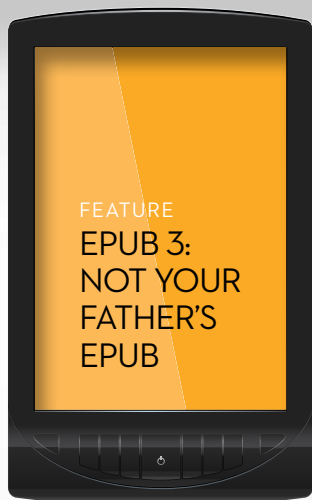


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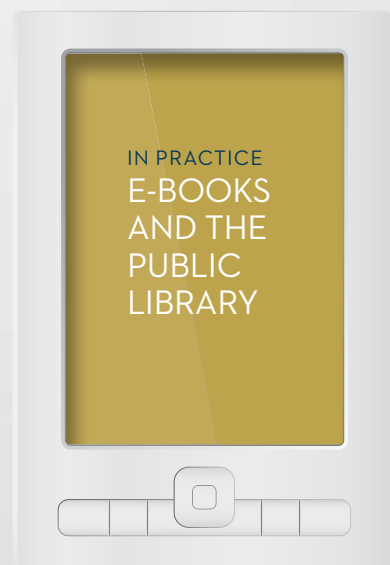
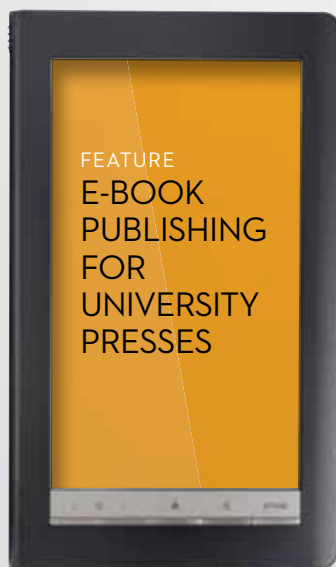


# ISQ

## INFORMATION STANDARDS QUARTERLY

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SPECIAL EDITION: VIEWS OF THE E-BOOK RENAISSANCE



**NISO**  
How the information world  
CONNECTS

# OP

[ OPINION ]

A judgement formed about something;  
a personal view, attitude, or appraisal



Wendy Allen  
Shelburne



WENDY ALLEN SHELBURNE

## Drinking the E-book Kool-Aid in a Large Academic Library

I would love nothing more than to be able to say that I absolutely never met an e-book I didn't like because for the most part I simply love e-books. What really can be better than a book that an unlimited number of people can read at the same time from multiple locations, search and retrieve every word, and download or print as much as they need or want to? The book is never checked out or lost, there's more than likely no pages missing or odd notes from the previous user, and this book can be used whether the library is open or closed.

That's not to say that I think there isn't room left for improvement in e-books or that all of the e-book problems in the world have been solved, but for the most part even with their problems, let's face it, they are fantastic. When we line up our collective memories and experiences to consider what electronic resources and associated tools have done for the expansion of content to users, the ways in which they have facilitated and changed teaching and learning, and how they have affected the work of libraries and publishing, it is simply an amazing journey. And to this day, after eight years as an Electronic Resources Librarian, I am still waiting to meet the user who is not happy to be able to use electronic content. Given this, I am sometimes more

than a bit shocked, knowing that the "new" iteration of e-books is surely five to six years old at this point, that we are not further along on this shared journey, and we still haven't run out of things to say and/or do, or whine about with regard to e-books. But then I remember, we haven't run out of things to say about other electronic resources either, but they may not take up as much of the spotlight anymore.

### The First Adventure, or Let's Buy a Big Package of E-books and See What Happens

At the University of Illinois I have been, for the most part, an evangelist for e-books since late 2005, when I was first

introduced to a new publisher-based e-books model soon to be on the market. This was the Springer e-book model. It was so very exciting to me as it held so much in common with the e-journal model and, knowing a thing or two about e-journals and e-journal usage, if nothing else I was pretty sure our users would be very accepting of an e-book that looked and smelled like an e-journal. Turns out I was not wrong, and our journey into large scale, frontlist e-book purchasing began. I should be truthful and admit, however, that no matter how exciting all of this was on the surface, it was incredibly difficult on the back end and, as a matter of fact, in some ways it was just downright ugly and remains so even today. Beginning with arguments about

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how to realign budgets to pay for them, to how to make the duplicate print copies stop coming, to utter confusion about what titles were being published and which ones were we getting, and ending with a pretty sad tale about having no idea where to get the MARC records for our shiny new resources until many months after the fact. To be honest, it was really a complete and utter mess, at times almost verging on disaster, but in the end we stayed the course because everyone believed it was really worth doing no matter if we killed each other in the process. Today I would say our coping skills are significantly improved, but we still have a long way to go.

### This Model vs. That Model vs. That Other Model

So, what is so hard about e-books outside of money? I am leaving money out as an obstacle to e-books since money is an obstacle to just about everything in libraries these days and it seems very disingenuous to single it out against e-books. First and foremost, the hardest thing about e-books in my mind is that there may be as many models to purchase and or subscribe to them as there are Dalmatians. Keeping them all straight is almost a feat unto itself. There are one-time purchase models from publishers, one-time purchase models from aggregators, e-books you can download and print just like e-journals, e-books you can only cut and paste from or only print one page at a time from, e-books that are HTMLfiles only, and e-books that are only

for an individual and not an institution. Or there are the e-books that you buy via a combination pricing model of users and title value that you can then weed later. Notice how I'm avoiding the device conversation, not to mention all of the other models I can't possibly list here. But the worst e-book model in all of this, in my opinion anyway, is the dreaded site licensed PDF download book. Imagine the standard workflow, as if e-resources actually had workflows, where staff purchased PDF e-books online and then we e-mailed them around to each other to load on web servers, add to proxy, and then hand-add links to A-Z lists, and, I assume, then add a catalog record as well as a record and target parser in the link resolver. The only thing worse that I can think of is the "free," for however long, PDF e-books online that are found and sent in to have us add them to the OPAC.

Currently I would guesstimate that I have at least one weekly interesting e-book "model" conversation since part of my job is to investigate resource pricing for our selectors. The one that is clearest in my mind at this writing is the one where the publisher has a print plus online model whereby you purchase the print copies for X dollars and have online access free for two years. I was very interested to find out what would happen at the end of the two years, but unfortunately the publisher did not know, and there was no option to just purchase the electronic. Yes, I did laugh out loud and yes, I did apologize for it, but seriously? Let me say it again, I want e-books that act like e-journals, and I

want to buy them like e-journals, even if it is just picking out one now and then as opposed to a package. And I want to pay my invoice and have someone load a record and be done with it so that I can move along to the next problem that is waiting to sneak up behind me.

### MARC, Metadata, and Why Isn't It in the OPAC Yet?

After models, I suspect the next challenge with e-books is MARC records and managing discovery. From who makes them to where do we get them and ending with the never-ending discussion about quality, it seems that no one, even if they tried, could come up with a harder thing to do relative to e-books. Given that there is now access to electronic abstracts for books, and frankly more metadata than we ever dreamed of relative to book publishing, are we really going to continue with the MARC record as the gold standard of access to an e-book? It is unfathomable to me that almost nine years after Roy Tennant declared "MARC Must Die" I am still trying to figure out why it is so hard to load the MARC records for the e-books, and am now also watching the growing e-book cataloging backlog that might ultimately match those cataloging backlogs of print, which never quite seem to completely go away. It is also patently clear to me that it is a good thing I decided not to pursue a career in cataloging, as I obviously would have been really bad at it. Further, I have to say that I remain very worried that link resolvers and associated electronic resource management knowledgebases and tools will never truly match what is needed to manage e-books because we remain forever tied to MARC, and still somehow lack the ability to rethink not only how we buy these materials but how we provide access to them. Seriously, did we not learn anything at all from e-journals?

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I like to think of devices as eight-track tape players, but an even more clever colleague called them disposable razors and I'm sure I like that better. I just hope that in our environment we are able to purchase formats that allow us to remain device agnostic.



### The Demand and the Spending Continues to Grow

Regardless of what is confusing, challenging, or just downright awful about e-books, my mantra at the end of the day is "This is what my people want." I certainly cannot speak outside of my experiences at Illinois for those are the only ones I know as a librarian, but the user community here is more than happy to tell us at any given time that they want e-books, and even more e-resources while we are at it, and they want more of them as soon as possible. Discipline concerns are also appearing to fade. The last e-book title I ordered, at the author's request (a faculty member at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) is: *The Art of Building in the Classical World: Vision, Craftsmanship, and Linear Perspective in Greek and Roman Architecture*, published by Cambridge University Press. And when our users aren't specifically asking for the content, all that is needed is a quick check of the usage numbers and we know we are on the right path. Just last week, in participating in "Snapshot: One Day in the Life of Illinois Libraries" the quick stat from our A-Z list for e-book accesses for a single day was 472, and a year ago was 118. Overall, measureable use of e-books for a day totaled to 750. Our COUNTER stats for e-book usage confirm the desire for this content continues to grow, and in some cases it already rivals the usage of some e-journal collections. In terms of overall spending, the way our budget is built does not support much in the way of comparison for format spending, e.g., electronic vs. print, but it is already clear that in the current fiscal year (2011) our e-book spending will easily approach \$1 million.

### Is It Going to Get Worse Before It Gets Better?

While we already know so much about e-books, and have certainly purchased a good many of them to date, there's still so much remaining development, evolution, and just plain ole stuff to learn. Publisher-direct, "all in" packages may prove unsustainable for both parties. It could be the case that patron-driven acquisitions (PDA) become a requirement for both aggregator- and publisher-based purchase programs. Consortial PDA models may additionally provide even more interest in this model, as if there isn't enough already. This will certainly assist in the problem of "sharing" e-book content, but a centrally or individually funded patron driven model across institutions may not fit the bill for all parties. What will be the future role of the book jobber, especially given new developments in ownership and development of aggregated platforms, e.g., the impending University Press E-book competition between JSTOR and the University Press Content Consortium (UPCC), as well as the inevitable clash of the vendor titans between ProQuest with Ebrary and EBSCO with NetLibrary. We may well see competition for e-book provision that was never witnessed in the e-journal environment. Finally, much as I would like to avoid the topic, the proof will be in the pudding when it comes to devices and the users will go where they go. I like to think of devices as eight-track tape players, but an even more clever colleague called them disposable razors and I'm sure I like that better. I just hope that in our environment we are able to purchase formats that allow us to remain device agnostic.

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The current options for libraries to obtain e-book content run the gamut and we will likely never be able to say we did it exactly right, but we can at least say we did it to the best of our abilities given our resources.

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### Why It's Worth the Effort

I would like to think that for any library the ultimate goal is getting the users what they want. Unfortunately, our resources don't always match the need, but this has been the case for many years and our ability to keep pace with the body of publishing has always been challenged. There's certainly no silver bullet for curing what challenges libraries when it comes to e-books. Nonetheless, the current options for libraries to obtain e-book content run the gamut and we will likely never be able to say we did it exactly right, but we can at least say we did it to the best of our abilities given our resources. All of this can and does work, but it is just a mess in between. At Illinois we are pretty much working under every model we can make work, while ignoring providers with models we don't like, and waiting to see what opportunity will come around the bend. We buy books from large and small publishers in "all in" packages both solo and consortially; we are setting up a wide variety of standing orders; we are leasing content on subscription models; we are picking up one-by-one titles where that makes sense; and, like so many others, we also have a patron driven program. None of these could be considered perfect in any way. We struggle to keep up with the output of the larger publishers and are always behind in providing access when new titles are loading every day. We struggle to help our selectors understand what we have purchased and what we haven't purchased, even though we know full well something we didn't anticipate will be excluded for a reason we may not necessarily understand and we will likely have to buy it later. We wonder if we will ever have a mechanism for interlibrary loan, as we have received those rights in so many cases. We wonder what it will be like two years from now. We wonder what it will be like 20 minutes from now.

In the end, for all that can be said regarding e-books, probably the most unfortunate comment I ever hear is that "we don't have any," or "we don't want any." E-books can only be ignored at our own peril. There's simply too much at stake to not engage wholeheartedly in shaping our collective future, and e-books are just not going to go away this time.

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#### JSTOR

[www.jstor.org/](http://www.jstor.org/)

#### University Press Content Consortium

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