
Ebooks and elending

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The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) held a think tank on ebooks and elending at the State Library of NSW in Sydney on 28 May 2013. The Sydney think tank followed similar events in Brisbane and Melbourne, which resulted in release of an ALIA position statement on ebook and elending in May 2013. Discussion centred on pricing and access models for ebooks in Australia and other countries. Specific issues for public, academic and special libraries were also considered. The ALIA elending initiative and others like it demonstrate that libraries will play a role in the rapidly evolving book industry.

ALIA EBOOKS AND EENDING INITIATIVE

In November 2012, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) announced a major initiative to establish a position statement for Australian libraries regarding ebooks and elending. A think tank was held in Brisbane in February 2013, followed by an ebook and elending summit at the ALIA Information Online Conference in March 2013, and a think tank in Melbourne in March 2013. ALIA released a position statement on ebooks and elending in May 2013:

Summary of ALIA's position on ebooks and elending

As an Association, our values are:

- Promotion of the free flow of information and ideas through open access to recorded knowledge, information, and creative works
- Connection of people to ideas
- Commitment to literacy, information literacy and learning
- Respect for the diversity and individuality of all people
- Preservation of the human record
- Excellence in professional service to our communities
- Partnerships to advance these values

In support of these values, public, school, academic and special library users must continue to have Freedom of Access to Information and Resources (FAIR) in a digital environment – and that means access to ebooks and other eresources.

We believe the solution for ebook lending by libraries lies in a whole-of-sector approach. We call on everyone involved in the book supply chain to adopt a consultative approach, working with library leaders to achieve the optimal solution for all parties.

SYDNEY THINK TANK

After the release of the position statement, another ALIA ebooks and elending think tank was held on 28 May 2013 in Sydney. There were 76 delegates, mainly from academic and public libraries. The sessions started with an overview of ebook policy by Margaret Allen, CEO and State Librarian of the State Library of Western Australia and ALIA representative on the Book Industry Collaborative Council (BICC). Ms Allen also spoke at the Brisbane and Melbourne think tanks. She noted that the ebook environment is changing so rapidly that she had to make changes to her presentation in the few short months between events. Further sessions included a presentation on ebooks from a university library perspective by Andrew Wells, University Librarian at the University of NSW, and an outline of the ALIA ebooks and elending strategy by Edmund Balnaves, ALIA Director. The morning sessions concluded with an overview of NSW Net resources by Ross Balharrie, Services Delivery Coordinator–eResources at the State Library of NSW. This portal was created to support public library access to and use of eresources, including ebooks.

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All websites viewed July 2013.

After lunch, delegates were directed to round-table discussions, divided by type of library. Each group worked through various questions about ebooks and elending and shared the main points of their discussion with the other groups. Operational issues of elending dominated the discussion.

Some of the many points of discussion and themes from the morning sessions are detailed below:

- Device neutrality – allowing users to read ebooks on whatever device they own – is a major priority. The many ebook formats and ebook readers available currently cause problems for libraries.
- Ebook aggregators limit what is available to libraries and how it can be used. Overdrive is the dominant ebook aggregator in Australia (as of June 2013), but Wheelers has recently quickly grown its market share, partly through competitive pricing. Collections of ebooks from overseas aggregators, such as Overdrive, often do not include much Australian material. Overdrive does not provide ebooks in all formats in Australia – for example, Australian library users cannot download ebooks to read on Kindle devices. The software platforms that aggregators use do not allow for the inclusion of locally-produced materials, such as digitised items from local history collections. This limits the library’s ability to publish its own ebook content. Ebook collections from aggregators are difficult to integrate with normal discovery services and users have to look in two places (library catalogue and aggregator software) to find all formats of a book.
- Negotiation of licences and selection of material is a problem. Several librarians spoke about being pressured into purchasing packages of material, not all of which is useful to them, leaving unused portions they called “digital dust”. Whether ebooks have been purchased or licensed is another issue. With licensing, there is no certainty of supply or ability to archive ebooks. Licensing terms also restrict the number of users of ebooks and limit interlibrary lending and document delivery services that have been traditionally allowed through exceptions in the *Copyright Act 1968* (Cth).
- Public libraries tend to focus on fiction ebooks and may lend ebook readers to users. There is a need for broad education of library users about ebooks and ebook readers. For example, one delegate said that she had overheard a shop assistant telling a purchaser that a certain ebook reader would allow them to download ebooks from libraries. In fact, only about half of public libraries currently lend ebooks, and these are limited to certain devices. The phrase “Kindle regret” – referring to people who had purchased a Kindle and found that its proprietary reading system did not allow them to read the range of books they would like to or download them from library elending systems – was heard frequently throughout the sessions.
- Academic libraries focus on non-fiction eresources. The learning management system, not the library catalogue, is the key starting point for information access for students, so linking to resources from the learning management system is crucial. Many academic libraries have an “e-preferred policy”, meaning that if a resource is available in both a printed and digital format, they will automatically choose the digital format. Academic librarians do not typically consider the quality of ebooks when setting these policies. It was noted that the physical facilities of university libraries continue to be very busy, which complicates the issue of user preferences and needs for digital resources.
- For special libraries, such as in the corporate environment, there are some unnecessary technical barriers to ebook use, mainly caused by unwillingness of IT departments to support new software or services. Some librarians have been told that they will have to register for new services at home because their organisation’s IT policies will not support the process.
- The market for ebooks in libraries is immature and reflects unmet demand. The librarians who had been through the process of introducing electronic journals into libraries felt that we are going through a similar uncertain stage with elending and that there will be more clarity in the future. Although cautiously optimistic, they also agreed that the future is unpredictable.
- More discussions are needed between publishers and libraries to find common ground in which the aims of both sectors can be met. Publishers are concerned about anything that will erode their already-challenged income security. Libraries feel that the work they do can support publishers, such as in the areas of literacy development, encouragement of reading in general, and knowledge of their users.

INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

Based on the ALIA position paper and discussion at the Sydney think tank, the major issues for ebooks in libraries appear to be collection development, licensing and other legal issues, and technology. As Margaret Allen pointed out in her overview of ebook policy, Australian libraries are not facing these challenges alone. Similar issues with e lending are occurring throughout the world. For example:

- The Swedish Library Association (Svensk Biblioteksforening) has launched a public awareness campaign about the clash between publishers and librarians over ebooks.
- The Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) has formed a Digital Content committee and is conducting discussions with publishers about e lending.
- The Canadian Urban Libraries Council has consulted with the publishing industry to develop documents on ebook pricing models for public libraries.
- Also in North America, consortia such as ReadersFirst have been formed to improve ebook access and services for public library users.
- The US State of Connecticut has introduced a Bill mandating that publishers sell ebooks to libraries.
- Authors are also weighing into the discussion on e lending. The Society of Authors in the UK is campaigning for fair pay for writers when their ebooks are borrowed from libraries.
- The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) provides a seminar, principles and resources on e lending, and the IFLA World Library and Information Congress in Singapore (August 2013) will include many sessions on ebooks and content access issues.

“DIGITAL IS DIFFERENT”

The phrase “digital is different” was continually spoken throughout the Sydney sessions, but there was limited discussion on how ebooks should be created and used. While the current focus for libraries appears to be on operational issues of e lending, once equitable pricing and access models are developed, the discussion may move on to the content and quality of ebooks. Ebook formats and production processes are rapidly evolving, and librarians are uniquely placed to provide feedback to publishers on how ebooks are being used. Libraries can also provide discoverability for ebooks, including metadata creation and integration of ebooks into library catalogues.

FUTURE OF E LENDING

While digital may be different, libraries are not. As the ALIA position paper demonstrates, libraries’ core values remain the same, regardless of print or digital content. The ALIA e lending initiative and others like it throughout the world demonstrate that libraries will play a role in the rapidly evolving book industry. Unfortunately, whether they will be able to meet the demand for ebooks from patrons will require further negotiation with publishers.

RESOURCES

- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) ebooks and e lending page: <http://www.alia.org.au/advocacy-and-campaigns/advocacy-campaigns/ebooks-and-e-lending>.
- NSW.net from the State Library of NSW: <http://www.nswnet.net>.
- State Library of Western Australia Policy and Research ebooks in libraries advocacy: <http://ebookadvocacy.wordpress.com>.
- IFLA Principles for Library eLending: <http://www.ifla.org/node/7418>.
- LIANZA e-books and digital content resources: <http://www.lianza.org.nz/community/group/e-books-digital-content>.
- National Library of New Zealand ebook overview for schools: <http://schools.natlib.govt.nz/21st-century-literacy-inquiry/sources-resources/e-books-and-issues>.
- Swedish Library Association ebook access campaign: <http://www.biblioteksforeningen.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Folder-Say-hello-120906.pdf>.
- Canadian Urban Libraries Council/Conseil des Bibliothèques Urbaines du Canada work on ebooks and public libraries: <http://www.culc.ca/knowledge/ebooks>.

- ReadersFirst consortium: <http://readersfirst.org>.
- Society of Authors (UK) on payment of authors for ebook library loans: <http://www.societyofauthors.org/soa-news/authors-underpaid-ebook-library-loans>.