



Health Sciences Librarians: Talking Points & Issues

Licensing of Electronic Books, Journals and Databases - Benefits & Planning for a Health Sciences Library, November 2004

Benefits

Access: Electronic access significantly expands availability of books, journals and databases

- 24/7, campus-wide, for all hospital staff (or as limited by license).
- Via passwords or IP authentication with hospital's computer system
- Off-campus access to electronic resources is possible, depending upon technology infrastructure.
- Users have ease of use, time-savings with one-stop-shopping.
- Access benefits encourages greater utilization of clinical resources.
- After-hours access helps libraries meet JCAHO requirements.
- Electronic books are available to many users while a print book, when on loan, is accessible to one person at a time.

User Expectations: Electronic resources permeate the 21st century.

- Clinicians and medical academicians use peer-reviewed journal articles and textbooks as the preferred source of information.
- The scholarly scientific, technical, and medical journals, books and databases have undergone tremendous change and placed additional pressures upon medical libraries.
- Print and electronic journals, books and databases have steady price increases (greater than CPI), an evolution of electronic formats, pricing structures and licensing options.

Value-added: Electronic resources are often better research and clinical tools.

- Include audio, video, interactive applications, relevant links rather than printed static text and two-dimensional graphics.
- References cited can also be linked directly to the full-text (requires license to that source)
- Can be associated with other online services. (i.e. newsletters, conference reports, e-mail links to authors/researchers, discussion groups)
- Provides access to the 'many' electronic titles at one time, instead of one print title at a time.

Level Playing Field: Group 'consortia' licensing often makes digital resources more affordable.

- Most groups offer a variety of licensing choices so that larger and smaller libraries can purchase according to local needs.
- Small libraries can purchase resources often unaffordable without a group discount.

Planning

Costs: Budgets for electronic resources are new money, not saved money.

- Electronic journals are often more expensive than print, sometimes significantly so. The industry is evolving, however and there are publishers that discount print subscriptions if an electronic subscription is purchased.

- Some publishers pricing models require subscribers to maintain the print subscription but others do not. Librarians need to determine on a title-by-title basis the importance of keeping both print and electronic formats.
- Initially, electronic resources may not present a savings at all or the savings might be insignificant. Nonetheless, the publishing and information industry are creating new economic models for this new type of publishing. Over time, as the publishing models evolve, many agree that there may be a savings on print subscriptions, especially when purchasing from a publisher or aggregator *who also owns the intellectual property or publishing house of the licensed resources*.

Ownership: Licensing is not ownership, unlike a print subscription. It is contractual.

- Licenses provide access to electronic titles via contract terms for a specified time period and can be more restrictive than fair use provisions within copyright law.
- Contracts require review and authorized signatures and often take time and coordination to go through administrative approvals.
- Licensing contracts determine the extent of resource sharing internally and externally and Librarian review is necessary. The use of model electronic licensing language is highly recommended, including the most advantageous interlibrary provisions. Carefully consider contractual limits on fair use and *digital* resource sharing. (Resources: *Liblicense Standard Licensing Agreement* <http://www.library.yale.edu/~llicense/modlic.shtml> Yale University Library and the John Cox Associates site <http://www.licensingmodels.com>.)
- A checklist of language and items to look for when reviewing e-license agreements is under development by the National Library of Medicine's E-Licensing Working Group.

Sources: No "one" source licenses all electronic journals and books, thus evaluate and compare vendors and licenses carefully.

- **User Needs Evaluation & Collection Development:** The best starting point is a collection development policy and an evaluation of user's current library usage and needs as well as overall facility-wide assessment of needs.
- **Publishers versus aggregators** – Both publishers and aggregators provide licenses to electronic books and journals. Publishers both publish and license their titles. Aggregators only license publishers' titles. Licenses for each should be evaluated according to local needs.
- **'Bundled' Packages versus titles** - Some, but not all publishers or aggregators, sell packaged 'bundles' of titles. Some sell titles individually. It is sometimes more advantageous to a content provider to package titles than to sell them individually. Libraries generally prefer to choose only the titles needed for purchase. Libraries may need to purchase more titles than needed with 'packages' in order to acquire the part of the package needed locally.
- **User interfaces vary by source** - Search interfaces should be compared and tested thoroughly via free trials prior to purchase. Functionality, display and printing, as well as how quickly the resource is updated are all important factors in choosing what is best for a library. One interface may be significantly better or more preferable to another and pricing may reflect that value. Libraries need to evaluate this on a case-by-case basis.

Library Administration: Resources don't manage themselves.

- Electronic resources can't maintain themselves; they require librarian expertise and management.
- Electronic resources should be evaluated regularly against needs.

- Bibliographic control can be time consuming, technically complex or costly, depending upon local needs. Library considerations: journal title listings, online card catalogs and PubMed or other database links to the licensed resources of a library, for end-users.

Training: Electronic library resources require end-user training for the most optimal user satisfaction.

- Like any information system, end-user training of the system facilitates optimal user satisfaction, thus librarians should provide regular instruction on the features and effective searching of resources.
- For end-users, generally, basic features are user-friendly, however complex features require librarian instruction with any one of a variety of teaching methods.
- Systems change continuously; regular librarian training is essential to remain up-to-date.
- Librarians should communicate to users about significant improvements to licensed resources.

Back Issues: Caveat Emptor!

- Many publishers will not allow access to the back issues of a journal if the current electronic subscription is cancelled, unlike a print subscription.
- Some publishers allow you to retain electronic access to back runs if you cancel an online subscription as long as you continue to pay for access to their basic service.
- If a publisher cannot guarantee back issue access after you cancel a title you need to determine need on a title-by-title basis and examine whether a microfiche or print subscription should supplement electronic access and research needs of library patrons.

Timeliness: Not all licenses to titles offer current issues, believe it or not.

- Some aggregators of publishers do not make the current year or more of a journal available. Delays in availability of current issues are called embargoes.
- If purchasing journal subscriptions in “bundled packages” awareness of embargoes is needed.
- Check if embargoes exist on a title-by-title basis and consider continuing a print subscription.

Technical: Technical issues come with the territory of electronic licensing

- Library should work collaboratively with the IT department and the vendor regarding technical issues, examples of which include: firewalls, IP authentication, Intranet availability, proxy servers.
- In a typical health sciences library, electronic resources are accessible to hospital staff by IP authentication, hospital-wide via the hospital’s Intranet; or, access is provided via password, and select departments/staff are issued access. There are other access methods and these two predominate.
- Librarian can assist the IT department by making staff fully aware of user and library needs and expectations for access to electronic resources.

Developed with the assistance of the Health Sciences Library Association of New Jersey Group Licensing Task Force, Kerry O'Rourke, Campus Library Director, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, New Brunswick, Patricia Reusing, Medical Librarian, Bayshore Community Hospital and Catherine Boss Coordinator, Library Services, Jersey Shore University Medical Center.