

Pricing models: what works for Murdoch?

Sue Dowling, Murdoch University Library

Some background

Our initial venture into ebooks involved a handful of reference works to which we either subscribed, or purchased, or in some cases received as a CD accompanying the print copy. We still purchase a small number of these titles, preferably without annual update costs. We like the Elsevier model of being able to replace a purchased reference work with a later edition when and if available with a discount for common content.

Our collection grew significantly with the purchase of 200 ebooks from NetLibrary in 2003-4 as part of a CAUL deal whereby we committed to buying at least 200 titles and also gained access to the titles purchased by the other libraries participating in the deal at the same time. Also as part of the deal, we received and loaded MARC records for all these titles plus around 4,000 out of copyright titles.

The NetLibrary platform proved rather unpopular with library staff (I never really understood why, apart from not liking the single user model) and so we've purchased almost none since.

We tried buying directly from the publisher as title-by-title selections when this was first offered by publishers, mainly Wiley and Elsevier.

However, we found it took a lot of time and effort for:

- Liaison and reference librarians, to select their titles.;
- Acquisitions staff, to keep track of who had ordered which title(s); and
- Supervisors, to follow up with the librarians who hadn't replied by the due date.

And it was another variation on our selection and acquisition workflows.

Once ordered we had to get the MARC records into the catalogue. The records were supplied by the publisher, but as with everything e, it was an alternative to our usual workflows and involved working with the relevant staff to make it all happen.

Finally, we had to keep track of, and follow up on, the small number of titles that we'd ordered, and paid for, but for which publication was delayed.

We've bought no more, partly due to the above factors and partly due to the greater availability of titles from these and other major publishers via aggregators such as EBL and MyiLibrary.

We subscribe to a small number individual titles (eg SYB) and collections, primarily Oxford Reference Online, Safari Tech Books Online and OECD iLibrary. So far we've been able to afford to continue to subscribe.

The multidisciplinary nature of ORO makes it a popular and useful place to start research. Plus individual Oxford Digital Reference Shelf titles, when purchased, are available with the ORO titles – this makes them much more findable.

For Safari we have only 100 titles so we have to pick and choose each semester – this is a long and drawn-out process but the academics do like it, and it's a rapidly changing subject area so good to get the latest content. However, it would be nice if we could afford the whole collection!

We subscribed to OECD iLibrary and so far, thanks to the CAUL pricing, have been able to continue the subscription. We also have access to some titles in the aggregators to which we subscribe - ProQuest, Academic OneFile, Hospitality and Tourism Complete and Hein Online. We didn't subscribe for the monographs, but it's useful to have them.

We looked longingly (and still do) at many of the publisher packages as they came out, but they were too expensive for us, especially Knovel Springer. We get some requests for individual titles from these publishers, and it's annoying that they can't be purchased title-by-title. We did purchase some Referex collections on the Engineering Village platform in 2006, but since then have struggled to find the money to purchase the annual updates as they became available.

In 2007 we purchased CRC Press' NANOnetBASE, and now pay the annual updates. This has worked well. At first identifying new titles as they were added was messy, but now we use Serials Solutions' ebook MARC record service for this collection and this has simplified the process. There are other netBASE collections we'd like, but weren't been able to justify, until late 2010 when we were advised of a huge price increase from 1 November 2010 so we quickly bought WATERnetBASE. I don't think we'll be buying any more netBASE collections!

In 2009 we purchased a small collection of mathematics education titles, Math Solutions. These weren't expensive, and they have been popular. No sign of any more titles, unfortunately.

In 2010 we purchased two Palgrave Connect collections – Media & Culture, and Business & Management. These weren't expensive, but if the annual updates grow in size too much, purchasing updates to these collections may be difficult.

Increasingly we are now buying individual ebook titles as required from our two monograph vendors, YBP (was Blackwells) for access on EBL, and Coutts (for access on MyiLibrary). This has the major advantage of fitting in with the selection and acquisition workflows used for print titles. We've been buying EBL titles this way since 2006. We started with MyiLibrary in 2010.

In August 2008 we implemented our EBL demand-driven acquisition service. It took a while to refine our profile to an affordable level, but we now seem to have it about right. In 2009 and 2010 we did suppress all the non-owned titles in December as a way of reducing expenditure a little. We've recently updated our profile and loaded a set of 4,000+ titles. So far, we feel DDA on EBL has worked well, and it helps that EBL staff are so responsive to our needs. We haven't implemented DDA services from any other provider or publisher, for budget reasons.

So, what works?

Demand driven acquisition with a tightly controlled profile.

Purchase, either individual titles or as packages if they don't cost too much.

Subscription, for regularly updated content.

Selected free/open access - we provide access to collections such as Project Gutenberg via our databases pages, but don't include records in our catalogue for them.

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Pricing models for ebooks

What works and doesn't work for Murdoch

Sue Dowling



- How we started with ebooks
- Then came NetLibrary ...
- And then title by title, direct from the publisher



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- So what works?



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Thank you



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