

## Assessing the shared usage of collaboratively acquired ebooks within the Borrow Direct network

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### Abstract:

*Established in 1999, Borrow Direct (BD) is a partnership of nine independent U.S. universities and the Center for Research Libraries providing expedited delivery of print materials. As such, it has facilitated the delivery of nearly two million items to patrons at these institutions. The rapid emergence of e-books has posed a challenge to this successful resource sharing venture as member institutions have expanded their acquisition of this type of content. How does one “borrow” an ebook from another institution and avoid the need to purchase one’s own copy? Different models are emerging to tackle this issue. Under the aegis of Borrow Direct, Engineering Librarians at seven member institutions have engaged in a pilot project to explore the collective purchase of ebooks via demand driven acquisition (DDA). While neither consortia ebook purchasing nor DDA are unique concepts, what is novel is that this pilot was undertaken without the benefit of a central organization to coordinate this endeavour. This paper will describe the evolution of this project, assess the group’s usage of the purchased titles, and draw comparisons between the level of sharing activity of print engineering materials and the newly formed ebook collection.*

**Keywords:** Borrow Direct, Demand Driven Acquisition, ebooks

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## **Assessing the shared usage of collaboratively acquired ebooks within the Borrow Direct network**

### **Borrow Direct - Historical Background**

Interlibrary loan (ILL) is a well-established service libraries provide to supplement access to materials beyond their individual collections. While benefiting patrons, ILL has grown increasingly complex to manage. It has required the incorporation of many workflows and systems to engage with multiple suppliers in order to handle increasing demand for a wide variety of formats.

The Borrow Direct partnership began as a pilot project in 1999 between Columbia University, Yale University and the University of Pennsylvania to leverage technology into streamlining at least part of this process, the delivery of print books and similar physical items (Krall, 2000). Key advantages of this pilot included unmediated patron searching and selection of materials from a joint catalogue, timely delivery from a smaller network of partners with large research collections, and wider engagement of lower level staff, freeing up higher level staff for more challenging transactions (Collins, 2012). As a result of its initial success, the partnership quickly grew to include seven, and eventually eleven, partners with Brown University, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Princeton University, the University of Chicago, and the Center for Research Libraries joining the original three members. Particularly striking is that these are otherwise independent, competitive institutions collaborating on the underlying system with minimal administrative staffing; an assistant program manager and senior manager, both based at the University of Pennsylvania, overseeing day to day management and communications (Nitecki, Jones and Barnett, 2009).

With an effective delivery system in place, senior administrators at the partner institutions have encouraged their subject librarians to collaborate on collection development initiatives to find new ways to promote access and share the burden of acquisitions. In 2007, music librarians established a joint effort to distribute acquisition of materials by composers at each participating institution to effectively broaden the amount of unique materials available to the whole group (Collins, 2012). In 2009, engineering librarians from eight of the member schools began collaborating to find a solution to a rapidly growing challenge to traditional ILL of monographs: ebooks. We describe that process here.

### **Impact of the transition to ebook format on the lending activities of BD**

Muller (2012) has very eloquently made the point that the idea of “lending” books is a carryover from the analogue world and applies only to the distribution of tangible objects, i.e. printed books. Libraries must embrace the legal concept of “reproduction” as the fundamental principle which applies to the transfer of ebooks from library to user. According to Muller, libraries must lobby their legislatures to create new legal instruments that will enable libraries to provide ebook access to their users, but this is a complex issue with no short term solution forthcoming. In the meantime, research libraries need to find measures which address their present needs, while at the same time ensuring that the solutions adopted meet their long-term collecting needs. The library community is waiting with anticipation to see how the Occam’s Reader implementation piloted right now by GWLA and Springer will change and influence the lending practices for ebooks (Howard, 2014).

It has become widely accepted that the primary driver for Borrow Direct's existence, the expedited lending of monographs among our institutions, needed to evolve as ebooks gain greater acceptance in academia. As such, the engineering librarians from eight Borrow Direct members were tasked with exploring models for building a shared ebook collection. The Engineering team engaged in this project with two general directives. The first was to approach aggregator vendors rather than individual publishers with the intent of jointly purchasing to own ebooks. The second was to incorporate demand driven acquisition (DDA) as the primary means of acquisition.

## **Project Background and Timeline**

The Borrow Direct Engineering Ebook Pilot seeks to establish a new way of building shared collections among the member libraries. The BD Engineering team collaboratively developed a request for proposal (RFP) consisting of an outline of the desired elements of the program and a shared subject and non-subject parameter collection profile in the fall of 2011. The RFP called for a pilot that would primarily employ a DDA model of acquisition, but had the option for selectors to add agreed upon titles that did not meet the profile, primarily if the titles were over the specified price ceiling. It should be noted that we developed the RFP with the intention of adding to our collective research collection by purchasing to own material. We did not pursue a model of merely providing access, but not necessarily owning content, commonly offered through options like Short Term Loans. However, this is not to say that this model doesn't merit future consideration for the consortium.

The RFP was presented to the four main aggregators; ProQuest/ebrary, Ingram/MyiLibrary, EBL (at the time, a separate company), and EBSCO. YBP was also included in discussions as they serve as a distributor for three of the platforms and could potentially play a role in maintaining the collection profile and manage our shared funds. The primary question, we all agreed, was to what extent would publishers participate? We were confident that smaller publishers would be amenable, but less so about the participation of any of the big commercial publishers of interest to engineering.

There was also initial concern about the impact this pilot would have on member schools that already purchased or had future commitments for purchases of ebook collections. In the end, we had one major STEM publisher agree to participate, while others refused any meaningful engagement. Should this pilot prove feasible for the long term, it may be worth investigating direct negotiations with these publishers.

The vendors in general could easily address the technical aspects of our RFP. One issue that could not be overcome without using available Short Term Loan options, and thus adding to the overall cost of any given title, was a purchase trigger mechanism that involved use by more than one campus. The predominant trigger mechanism involves either a set amount of time spent in a title, or if the user takes some action with the content: printing, downloading, or copy/pasting.

Another issue that emerged as we progressed through our negotiations was how publishers would view and define a "shared" collection. In the end, what publishers agreed and we settled on, is a buying club model of acquisition where each institution would receive a discrete copy of a given title at a significantly discounted rate. With one exception, we did not see what would be considered truly an option to share titles, that is, fewer actual

purchased copies that all of our campuses would have access to. In one sense, though, this greatly simplifies the issue of consortia ownership as each campus would own a copy of a title should the pilot be discontinued.

After reviewing responses to our proposal from all four vendors, the Engineering team recommended moving forward with ProQuest/ebrary/EBL. A number of factors went into this decision:

- ProQuest/ebrary/EBL by far has made the most progress in bringing publishers on board with this pilot at terms and multipliers that were closest to what we anticipated.
- While common among the vendors, the relationship between ProQuest/ebrary/EBL and YBP was seen to lend itself toward easing the method of joint purchase and management of materials via a single deposit account with YBP.
- The group believed that the announced merger of ebrary and EBL under ProQuest may provide an opportunity to actively inform and participate in the development of the new platform.

Below are highlights of the ProQuest/ebrary/EBL response to the RFP:

- The predominant purchasing model this vendor has arranged with publishers is that of a “buying club.” Where authorized by the publisher, for each purchase triggered, we pay X times the list price and each BD Library receives one SUPO (single-user-purchase-option) copy for their campus. Only one publisher has signed on with a truly “shared access” model, where they have agreed to a model where BD would be charged X times the list price for four SUPO copies that patrons at any BD institution may have access to. This model resembles the more desirable multi-user access to a given title at any one of our campuses.
- Proquest/ebrary/EBL will deposit a digital copy of each ebook in a secure archive protected and maintained by ebrary or a reputable third party (in their standard license). Before receiving access to an archived digital copy of a purchased ebook, the library may be required to certify that it is capable of securing and restricting use of the ebook as required under the agreement; that the library is unable to access the ebook through the Proquest/ebrary/EBL website; and that the library is willing and able to pay the costs of file transfer, if any. Archived digital copies do not include InfoTools or other platform-based functionality provided by the vendor through its hosting services. The library will only make copies available to end users through a hosted service with commercially reasonable access and security limits and controls at least as protective as those imposed by ebrary.
- The trigger of a DDA purchase is based on patron usage. Any of the following events will cause the purchase of a title:
  - ◆ 10 concurrent minutes of viewing book pages within a single user session
  - ◆ 10 consecutive pages viewed within a single user session, TOC and index are not included in this count
  - ◆ Printing of any book page
  - ◆ Copying content from any book page

- ◆ Downloading any of the book content
- Upon exhaustion of the committed funds, the pilot may be extended if mutually agreed in writing. Otherwise, the pilot ends and access to un-purchased ebooks will be discontinued.

The project was initially funded by a contribution of \$5,000 from each institution; with an additional \$5,000 to be contributed by each should expenditures proceed more rapidly than anticipated. At the time of this reporting, there are still funds available from the initial contribution.

The group has recommended that any remaining funds will be rolled over, should the pilot be deemed a success and be continued past the initial year. If the pilot is cancelled at the end of its term, the balance would be refunded and divided equally among the participants.

### **Program Management Structure**

The BD Engineering Librarians established a joint collection profile of subject and non-subject parameters to base the Demand Driven Acquisition program on. Based on this profile, complimentary MARC records are available weekly from either Proquest/ebrary/EBL or YBP, depending on each member's preference and integration with their current ebook purchasing workflows. The records are tagged in a way to identify them as part of the pilot project. A Borrow Direct deposit account has been established with YBP and the \$5000 contribution has been collected from each participating institution. Monthly invoices for triggered purchases are processed by YBP and payments are drawn on the project deposit account. A trigger report is supplied by Proquest/ebrary/EBL detailing individual ebooks purchased, triggering institution, and overall use of each ebook by the group.

### **Current Status of the Pilot**

At the time of this writing, the BD ebook pilot is entering its sixth month. At its launch, the members agreed not to market the pilot to their respective communities to allow for the observation of serendipity in the discovery of these titles. Patrons merely find that they have seamless access to titles from the catalogue.

The collection has grown to two hundred fifty six available titles. Of those, forty six have been triggered for purchase by patrons, roughly a fifth of the collection. Given the collection's modest size, trigger reports, which were initially generated weekly, are produced at a less frequent rate to allow more time for measuring use of the collection. There is also a time delay from the point a title is triggered on the platform to when Proquest/ebrary/EBL invoices YBP for payment from the BD joint deposit account.

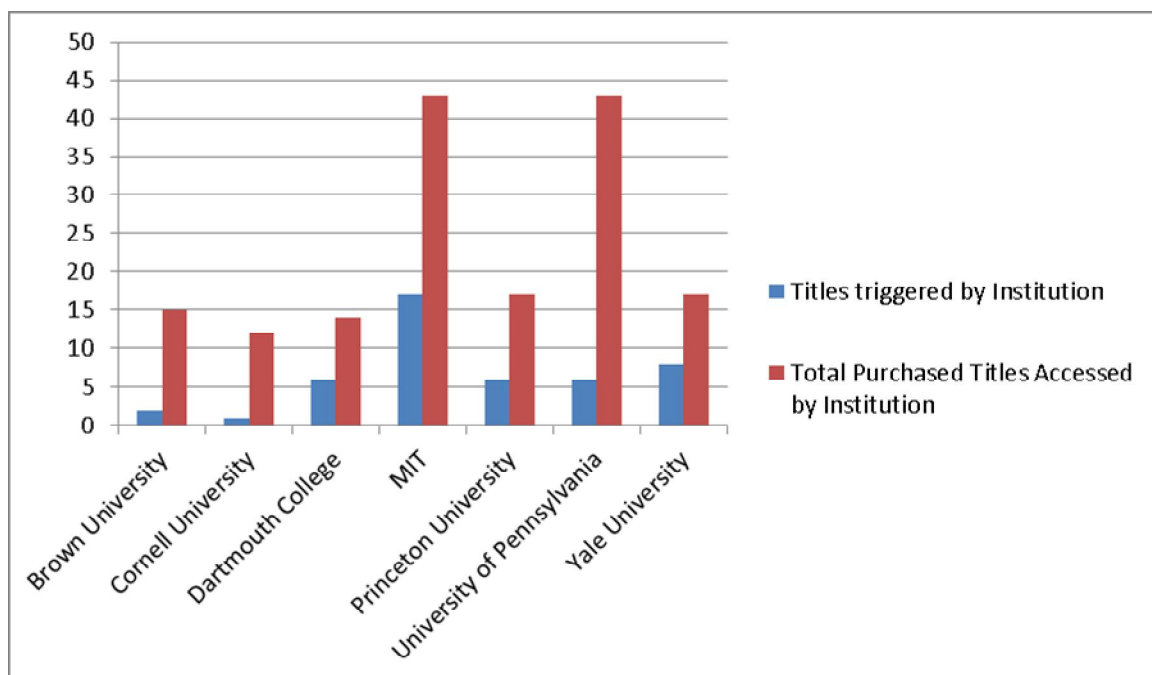
**Table 1. Borrow Direct DDA Expenditures as of May 2014 (46 Titles)**

<b>Total expenditure for Pilot</b>	<b>Cost per Member Institution</b>	<b>Cost if purchased outside of Pilot</b>	<b>Percentage Savings</b>
\$18,512.06	\$2,644.58	\$4,782.00	45%

Table 1 shows the current expenditures incurred by the pilot to this point compared to the cost of the titles if purchased by any individual institution. While the monetary savings may

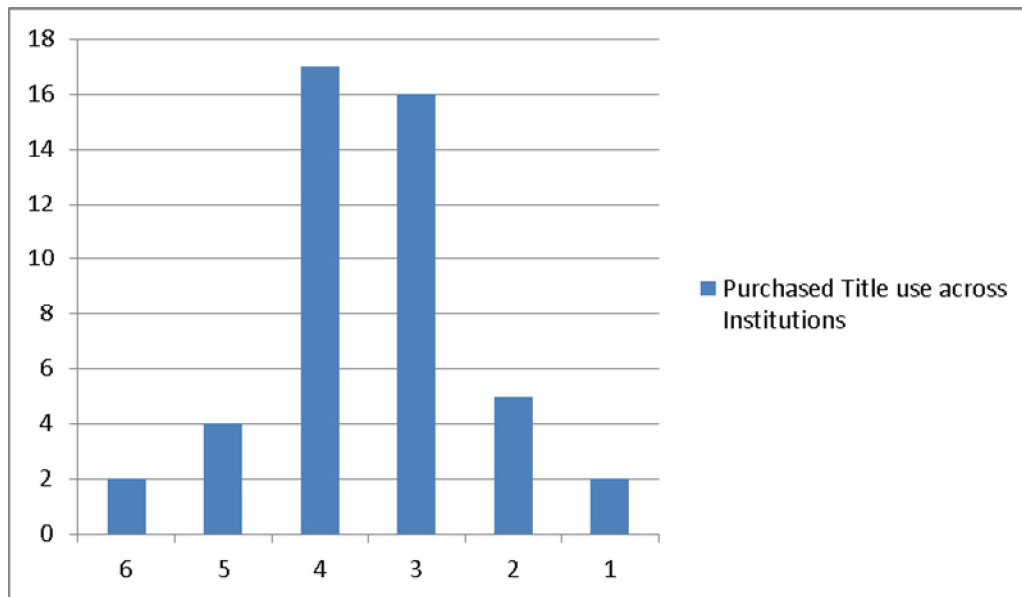
be impressive, what about the actual title usage? Are titles being triggered by every institution or only a few? Are triggered titles being used by more than one institution, as an indicator of the pilot’s viability to provide shared access to materials of common interest? Turning to the data in the most recent trigger report, a few observations can be made in determining responses to these questions.

Figure 1 shows both the number of titles triggered by each institution as well as the number of purchased titles accessed overall by each. The number of titles triggered by patrons ranges from a low of one at Cornell University to a high of seventeen by MIT. Usage data also shows that all seven institutions have patrons accessing more than just the titles their campuses triggered. Five institutions are fairly close together in numbers accessed, at around fifteen titles each. Two substantial outliers, the University of Pennsylvania and MIT, have each had patrons access forty three out of the forty six purchased titles.



**Figure 1. Triggered Titles vs. Total Titles Accessed by Institution**

Having considered title usage at the institutional level, let us examine usage across the group. Are titles of interest only to the campuses that trigger them, or do they see use elsewhere as well? Figure 2 shows title usage per number of accessing institutions. Of the 46 titles from this trigger report, 44 have been accessed by more than one institution. Forming a rough bell curve, a maximum of 17 titles have been accessed by at least 4 institutions with minimums of 2 titles accessed by 6 schools and 2 titles by a single BD partner. No title has seen use by all 7 partners as of yet, but this data does indicate that the pilot is providing access to material of interest to the community as a whole.



**Figure 2. Title Usage by Multiple Institutions.**

One particular challenge here is discerning actual use of the titles versus patrons simply browsing a given title from the catalogue. As a rough indicator of use versus access, page views can begin to differentiate between them. Our data indicates 161 instances of tracking of page view counts of all titles by all 7 institutions. Of those, 73 show page count views of 5 pages or less. Eighty eight show page count views of 6 or more, with 50 instances of 30 or more page views, with a high of 883 for a title at 1 institution.

### **Assessment – Defining Success**

While the pilot is still underway, data collected thus far has provided useful insights into its relative success in contributing to the construction of a shared, research level, ebook collection. 96% of the triggered titles have been accessed by more than one institution. Each institution has had patrons trigger at least one title and use several others acquired by the group as a whole. The titles acquired cost roughly half of what any single BD member would pay if they were to purchase them on their own.

There are additional aspects of this pilot to be examined by the group to evaluate its continued viability and suitability for expansion into disciplines outside Engineering. These include:

- Number of publishers and terms as well as the potential for expansion
- Number of titles made available for DDA by the publishers
- Number of records loaded (total titles that met profile criteria and available for DDA)
- Number of titles purchased
- Duplication and circulation of equivalent print titles (where available)
- Number of print version requests when e-version available
- Average cost/title
- Total spent per institution
- Total project cost

There are some areas of concern. Of critical importance is the participation of publishers. Terms in these arrangements must be viewed as beneficial to them as well as to libraries. Can the prospect of greater direct exposure of their content to patrons via our catalogues be demonstrated to lead to more sales in addition to traditional approval plans and selection by librarians? Many appear to be taking a wait and see approach. The pilot began with only eight, but has recently grown to include three more. Proquest/ebrary/EBL has continued to negotiate with publishers on our behalf but it is proving to be a slow process.

Despite these publisher commitments, the number of titles actually made available for DDA by these publishers has been sparse outside of one publisher and its imprints. Proquest/ebrary/EBL has thus far not been able to determine why this is the case. There is a price cap on titles to be included within the profile, however, this does not appear to be the reason why titles are not showing up.

Managing the overlap of titles between the DDA pilot and the Proquest/ebrary Academic Complete subscription collection as well as print copies acquired through approval plans has been an issue for some of the BD partners. Princeton University is a case in point. To date, there has been an overlap of five titles between the pilot and Academic Complete collections. For these relatively few instances, the process implemented has been to suppress the catalogue record for the ebook profiled on the BD DDA project. One of the reasons for this decision is that the records for the BD project do not reflect a real item holding, until the particular title is purchased by one of the participating institutions, whereas the record for the Academic Complete title reflects a holding that is tied to the library's subscription. Should an item suppressed at Princeton be triggered and purchased by another institution, then that record will be made available in our catalogue and the Academic Complete record will be suppressed. Given the few titles involved, this process has worked well, but it is acknowledged that this process should be reconsidered if the project were to be expanded and a larger number of such duplications occur.

Up to this point, the duplication of content between the BD project and the traditional engineering approval plan at Princeton University hasn't been a major issue. Only 14 titles out of the 46 triggered purchases so far have also been received in print. This represents 30% of the purchased titles being duplicated in the print collection, but since we want to use this pilot to learn about our users behaviour and the effectiveness of our collection development efforts, we can interpret this duplication as a 30% match between the just in time purchases initiated by users and the titles selected by a librarian through a traditional approval plan. Two of the print titles had recorded one circulation transaction each, despite the fact that the ebook version was available. One of the two titles actually was borrowed by a BD partner institution, and the other was borrowed by a Princeton user. This data is too limited to infer any meaningful conclusion, but we will continue to monitor and compare the circulation of the print version with the use of the ebooks, during the course of the project.

## **Conclusion**

Libraries are seeking new paradigms to define resource sharing in the digital environment, particularly for e-books. With finite resources at hand individually, how can we jointly leverage access to a wider array of content when annually buying full collections from multiple publishers is simply not feasible? One of the unique features of this shared DDA pilot is that it was undertaken at the grassroots level by a group of subject librarians without the benefit of a central, administrative body coordinating it. As mentioned, Borrow Direct is



essentially only a partnership among its members to provide expedited ILL. It does not provide official, direct oversight over any other collaborative efforts by its members. The librarians received general guidance and advice from their respective Associate University Librarians for Collections, but were generally left to develop the pilot on their own. Sustained effort is required, though, not only among the partner libraries, but also in recruiting publisher support for alternate models of acquisition and providing wider terms of access for patrons. Whether or not this pilot project continues in its present form, it has demonstrated that cooperative collection development activities can successfully build collections to be shared by a traditional borrowing and lending cooperative, such as Borrow Direct.

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