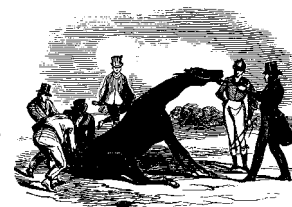


# Selecting and Acquiring eBooks: So Many Choices, So Many Processes



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## Introduction

eBooks offer a variety of purchase models, from annual subscriptions to title-by-title purchases with annual access fees. Each of these models requires a different process for selecting and acquiring eBooks. This article will present a brief overview of the purchase models offered by popular academic library eBook vendors, including **ebrary**, **netLibrary**, **Ebook Library (EBL)**, **Knovel**, **Safari** and **Books 24x7**. Then, appropriate collection development and acquisitions processes for the various purchase models will be discussed. The practices discussed are applicable to most types of eBook purchases, regardless of vendor. The article will focus on Web-based eBook content and will not discuss portable eBook reading devices.

## Overview of Purchase Models

**netLibrary**, the trailblazer in the eBook market, has stood by its original purchase models, which are based upon title-by-title selection. Much to libraries' chagrin, it has also stuck to its one book-one user access model, which duplicates the disadvantages of print book circulation. **netLibrary** offers two primary purchase models: libraries can subscribe to an eBook by paying the list price of the book, plus an annual access fee of 15% of the list price; or libraries can "own" it by paying the list price plus a one-time access fee of 55% of the list price. **netLibrary** has also worked collaboratively with publishers over the years to experiment with new purchase models. Most notably, it promoted an IT collection in 2004 that offered subscription-based pricing and simultaneous access by multiple users. The experiment was unsuccessful and **netLibrary's** original purchase models have remained in place for its standard collection. It continues to develop special promotions, usually in collaboration with a single publisher, that feature new purchase and access models.

Although **ebrary** is often thought of as an eBook provider, **ebrary** CEO **Christopher Warnock** asserts that **ebrary** has never been in the eBook business; that **ebrary** offers much more than just eBooks. It licenses both its aggregated content and its technology platform. **ebrary** offers annual subscriptions to its databases that are priced according to libraries' FTE and allow for simultaneous access by multiple users. Various subscription packages are available; libraries can purchase a subscription to the **Academic Complete** collection or to various subject subsets. Collections from single publishers such as **Datamonitor** and **D&B** are also available. **ebrary** does not currently offer title-by-title selection; however, the company is planning a major announcement in January 2005 about its plans to offer a virtual library portal, which will most likely change or expand its purchase and access models.

**EBook Library (EBL)**, the newest entrant into the eBook marketplace, has worked closely with librarians and publishers in hopes of creating eBook products and services that improve upon those offered by existing vendors. **EBL's** initial content focus was upon science, technology and medicine (STM) eBooks, but its collection is rapidly expanding into other subject areas, including the social sciences and humanities. **EBL's** eBooks can be used in reserves and course packs, and can be used simultaneously by multiple users through its non-linear lending model. **EBL** allows libraries to purchase the eBook content and the reading platform separately. Its titles are purchased individually, and can be purchased directly from **EBL** or through **Blackwell's Collection Manager** in the US, and **Dawson's** in the UK. eBook title pricing is based upon the print list price, but is set by the publisher, and any titles that a library purchases are owned in perpetuity. The eBook platform currently costs \$5,000, or \$6,000 if paid in increments. After purchasing the lending platform, libraries must pay an annual hosting fee after a one-year grace period. **EBL** also offers a "short-term circulation" option, which can be thought of as an eBook rental. Libraries may consider this option as an alternative to Interlibrary Loan. The cost increases according to the length of the circulation period, which can range from one day to four weeks. Libraries utilizing short-term circulation do not have to pay for the lending platform, but instead pay an access fee of 15% of list price for each title.

A handful of other library eBook vendors are worth mentioning here. **Knovel** (STM), **Safari** (IT) and **Books 24x7** (IT and Business) have cultivated eBook collections that tend to have a narrow but deep subject focus. **Knovel** and **Books 24x7** offer annual subscriptions to their databases of eBook content priced according to the collection(s) purchased and the number of simultaneous users. **Safari** has a unique title-by-title purchase plan that is based upon "slots" and the number of desired simultaneous users. A library purchases a group of slots, and each eBook in the **Safari** collection fills up between one half and three slots, with most filling one slot. The library then selects titles to fill the purchased slots. A given eBook must remain in the collection for 30 days, but after that point, it can be swapped out for a different title. Thus, the eBook collection can be kept current and relevant without purchasing new titles. **Knovel** stands out as a vendor that has created an innovative product that transcends other current eBook offerings. **Knovel's** eBook database features innovative search tools and an array of other complementary interactive tools that facilitate the research process.

An increasing number of publishers, including **Elsevier**, **Kluwer**, **Oxford University Press**, **Gale** and **Wiley**, sell and host eBooks

directly; some of these also have partnered with eBook distributors such as **netLibrary**, **ebrary** and **EBL**. Each offers a slightly different eBook purchase model, but all tend to bundle eBook titles in some way, usually as subject or reference collections. For these providers, title bundling is the most cost-effective way to sell and provide access to eBooks, and most publishers provide direct access to these bundled eBook collections via annual subscriptions.

## eBook Subject Areas

The current selection of eBooks from the large distributors such as **netLibrary**, **ebrary** and **EBL** spans most subject areas but is nevertheless concentrated most heavily in science, technology, medicine (STM), business and reference. This is due in part to publishers' initial focus on preparing eBook content that had a broad user base and thus high sales potential. However, in response to libraries' requests, these distributors have worked to acquire quality content in new subject areas such as education, sociology, history and literature.

There are also several new eBook initiatives in the humanities, most notably **Early English Books Online**, **Early American Imprints**, **Gutenberg-e** and the **ACLS History eBook Project**, that are very different from existing eBook offerings, both in their content and in their purchase models. It is likely that similar initiatives will emerge, tailored to particular disciplines. This will complicate eBook purchasing processes even further.

## Title-by-Title eBook Purchases

**netLibrary**, **ebrary** and **EBL** have partnered with **Blackwell Book Services** to integrate eBooks into **Blackwell's Collection Manager**, its online collection development and acquisitions system. The integration of eBooks into **Collection Manager** allows librarians the ability to quickly see when both eBook and print book versions are available. Integrating the title-by-title eBook selection process into a collection development ordering interface can also help librarians ensure that any duplication of eBooks and print books is intentional.

At the time of publication, **netLibrary** and **Blackwell's** had severed their relationship due to sales restrictions placed on **Blackwell's**, and **netLibrary** titles were slated to be removed from **Collection Manager**. **netLibrary** eBooks are still available through **TitleWave II**, **Baker & Taylor's** online ordering interface. Although **ebrary** does not currently offer title-by-title purchasing, it does offer a "preview" tool that enables **Blackwell's** customers to look at the full-text of eBooks with the goal of generating interest in its bundled collections. **EBL** just announced its partnership with **Blackwell** in mid-2004, and the titles are currently being

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loaded into **Collection Manager**. Libraries purchasing **EBL** titles in **Collection Manager** will have consolidated invoicing through **Blackwell's**. **Blackwell's** is also beginning to work directly with publishers to add their eBooks to **Collection Manager**.

In reality, eBooks are often released to eBook vendors after the print counterpart has been published, thus reducing the utility of these integration efforts. More publishers are beginning to publish eBooks and print books simultaneously, but they still may place an embargo period on eBooks sold through distributors, similar to the process of embargoing current issues of e-journals in aggregated databases. Both **Blackwell's** and **EBL** have been working collaboratively with publishers to find mutually beneficial arrangements that facilitate the early release of eBooks.

**netLibrary** has developed two of its own eBook ordering tools, **TitleSelect** and **TitleDirect**. **TitleSelect** is simply an online ordering interface for **netLibrary's** catalog of more than 70,000 eBooks, journal titles and other materials. Lists of titles can be shared among librarians before submitting an order. **TitleDirect** is a profiling tool that allows librarians to create eBook profiles based on subject areas, publishers and publication dates. Lists of new content matching the profile are emailed at desired intervals (every 30, 60 or 90 days). Although these tools aid librarians in navigating **netLibrary's** large collection, they require a separate process for eBook selection, which can be very time-consuming.

### Subscription-based eBook Purchases

eBook distributors such as **ebrary** and **Books 24x7** package eBooks in databases with annual subscriptions, creating a selection and acquisitions process very similar to that employed for aggregated e-journal databases (i.e., those provided by **EBSCOhost** and **Gale InfoTrac**). Many libraries purchase subscriptions to these eBook databases using serials funds and reevaluate the subscription each year. The utility and convenience of these eBook databases may outweigh the concern that eBook titles within the database are duplicates of titles in the library's print collection. Access to a collection of content that is constantly being refreshed may be the larger priority.

A growing trend among eBook vendors is to offer eBooks as part of mixed-format databases of e-content. Some vendors such as **Gale** and **Elsevier** are creating mixed-format databases that contain eBooks, e-journals, white papers and conference proceedings. **ebrary's Academic Complete** collection contains maps, sheet music, journals and reports, and **netLibrary** has subtly changed several occurrences of the word "eBook" to "eContent" on its search interface. As mentioned previously, **ebrary** will be making a major announcement in January 2005, about a new development that will enable libraries to create virtual library

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### Heather Wicht

**BORN & LIVED:** Born & raised in Wisconsin, have lived in Colorado since 1998.  
**EARLY LIFE:** Loved animals, school and being outside with friends; wanted to be a writer; gave all my books spine labels with paper & scotch tape.  
**FAMILY:** Husband of 2 yrs and two yellow labs.  
**EDUCATION:** Bachelor of music from **Northwestern University** in 1996, MLIS from **University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee** in 1998.  
**FIRST JOB:** Babysitting...I probably babysat for 25 different families from the time I was 14 yrs. old all the way through grad school.  
**IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO:** Study and teach Irish stepdancing, travel, read, knit, walk with the dogs and do yoga.  
**FAVORITE BOOKS:** *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The Shell Seekers*.  
**PHILOSOPHY:** One day at a time; and The only way out is through.  
**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** Hopefully we will have implemented Shibboleth or a similar authentication method to move us beyond IP-authentication; electronic content will be aggregated and disaggregated in innovative ways to better serve users.



portals of e-content. The goal in amassing a focused pool of e-content with a common search interface is to create a tool that facilitates a more seamless research experience. It is clear that the eBook marketplace will continue to change and expand at a fast pace, offering libraries new purchase models that will further complicate selection and acquisition processes.

### The Cost of eBooks

Although eBook vendors are exploring new purchase models, eBooks can still deliver sticker shock. Is the cost justified by user needs and benefits such as full-text searching and anytime/anywhere access? eBooks purchased at the title level usually carry an annual access fee, and FTE-based subscriptions can be very expensive for medium to large libraries. On the other hand, eBooks can be easily and quickly made available to users, MARC records are often provided at no cost, and eBooks do not require shelf space.

Libraries have realized significant cost savings by participating in consortial eBook purchases. Consortial purchasing can work very well for subscription-based, bundled eBook packages. However, libraries participating in a shared collection built at the title level (such as **netLibrary**) may experience frustration at their reduced ability to tailor the collection to their own user community, and the process of building the collection can be a time-consuming effort.

### Considerations for eBook Selection

Fortunately, librarians are beginning to understand more about how patrons use eBooks. Usage statistics show that eBooks are being adopted at an increasing rate. As all types of readers encounter them in the online catalog and on the Internet, the demand has increased. Students appreciate the convenience of being able to access eBooks from their homes at all hours, while professors want the ability to include links to eBooks in course packs and use them in course reserves in the place of or in conjunction with a print copy.

Some important evaluation criteria should be considered in both title-by-title selection of eBooks and evaluation of bundled eBook packages:

- **User Expectations:** It is important to acquire eBook collection(s) that best serve your users' needs. Do you have a distance education program(s) to support? Does the faculty on your campus want to be able to use eBooks for reserves, link to them in course packs, or integrate them into Web instruction software such as **Blackboard** and **WebCT**? It is important to note that eBook vendors may limit or restrict these types of use.

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- **Currency:** How important is currency to each discipline? If currency is important, would an annual subscription to a database of constantly updated content be most appropriate? If currency is not important, would a collection of selected titles with long-term or perpetual access be better?
- **Long-Term Access and Archiving:** If an eBook is being purchased in place of a print copy, what are the ongoing costs for long-term or “perpetual” access? Do the vendors providing this type of access also provide archiving? If so, what type, and how much does it cost?


Some more specific questions to consider in the selection of eBooks include:

- **Searchability:** Is the search page well-organized, making the search options clear? Does the search engine increase users’ potential for success by suggesting alternative spellings, performing case sensitive searches, etc.? Are search tips included on the search screen? Can users browse subject areas to find relevant content?
- **Ease of Use:** Is the interface intuitive, allowing users to easily navigate to relevant content? Once a user is in an eBook, is it easy to navigate back to the results list? Is it clear how to print, copy and use tools such as full-text searching? Is the “help” section useful and easy to use?
- **Functionality:** Does the eBook interface offer tools that transcend the print book? Most eBooks feature full-text searching,

but are other features such as highlighting, linked tables of contents and indexes, and embedded dictionaries included?

- **MARC Records:** Catalog integration can dramatically increase discovery of a library’s eBooks. Are MARC records available from the vendor? Are they high-quality? Are they free?
- **Usage Statistics:** Most vendors now provide usage statistics to library customers. What level of detail do these statistics provide, and are they compliant with current standards such as ICOLC? Are the usage statistics easy to access? Can they be delivered to customers by email at regular intervals?
- **Access limits:** Does the vendor place limits on printing and copying and pasting? Are these limits acceptable?
- **Content:** Is the vendor limited in its ability to provide newly-published titles in eBook format? Are the eBooks missing content, including illustrations, due to rights restrictions?

**Conclusion**

As the very definition of an eBook continues to evolve, libraries have a myriad of purchase models, access models and content collections to choose from. With so many different types of products available, the processes of selecting an eBook vendor and selecting and acquiring content can vary widely. However, librarians can evaluate these resources using a common set of criteria. As the eBook marketplace continues to evolve, librarians will have to continue to refine selection and acquisitions processes and take advantage of new tools that can help streamline these processes. 

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