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E-CONTENT SUPPLEMENT
TO JUNE 2013

THE MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION



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I'm Crazy for Ebooks

by Alan S. Inouye

We have made progress. I know this because I now experience the condition of ebook derangement syndrome. In early 2012, the urgent questions revolved around why the Big Six wouldn't do business with libraries or, for those publishers who did, why the terms were so unfavorable. We focused on these issues last year and into 2013, and while we've made some headway, more remains for us to do.

In 2012, and with increasing intensity into 2013, our understanding of the larger ebook context developed. Self-publishing, interoperability of library systems for digital content, library as publisher, ebook archiving and preservation, and other concepts became more prevalent in ALA's work. These issues and others are critically important for the future of libraries and demand heightened attention. But, of course, addressing the basic challenges the Big Six pose remains a priority. There is a necessary balance between two contrasting ways to view the ebook problem.

This third *American Libraries* supplement on ebooks and digital content reflects this balance. We begin with a review of ALA's efforts and plans, as synthesized by ALA President-Elect Barbara Stripling, Marijke Visser of ALA's Office for Information Technology Policy, and Digital Content and Libraries Working Group (DCWG) cochairs Sari Feldman and Robert Wolven in "[ALA, Future of Libraries, Digital Content, and Ebooks.](#)"

In "[Working Directly with Publishers: Lessons Learned.](#)" Rochelle Logan of Douglas County (Colo.) Libraries (DCL) discusses her positive interactions with publishers eager to place ebooks in libraries. In a sidebar, librarian and attorney Mary Minow and librarian Angeline Nalepa of South Suburban College in South Holland, Illinois, offer cautionary advice about signing (or not signing) nondisclosure agreements that come with ebook licenses.

We then turn to the larger context. In "[Ebooks in 2013: Promises Broken, Promises Kept, and Faustian Bargains.](#)" Clifford Lynch, executive director of the Coalition for Networked Information, articulates some of the problems that the rise of ebooks has caused libraries. James LaRue, director of DCL, is more upbeat in "[Wanna Write a Good One?](#)" in which he envisions a bigger role for libraries as publishers. Peter Brantley, director of scholarly communication at Hypothes.is, explores in "[The Unpackaged Book](#)" the technical and business possibilities of a bestselling ebook. These possibilities could catalyze opportunities for readers and libraries if we can only find a way to get beyond the modest functionality present today in mainstream ebooks.

We conclude with the observation that communication, cooperation, and collaboration within the library community are more important than ever. In "[Librarians Working Together.](#)" ALA President Maureen Sullivan, ALA Executive Director Keith Michael Fiels, and I provide a rationale for this observation and discuss how the library community is responding. ALA certainly does not possess all the answers in this regard, but we offer goodwill in terms of working with other players in the library ecosystem. ■

—Alan S. Inouye, director of ALA's Office for Information Technology Policy and program manager of ALA's Digital Content Initiative

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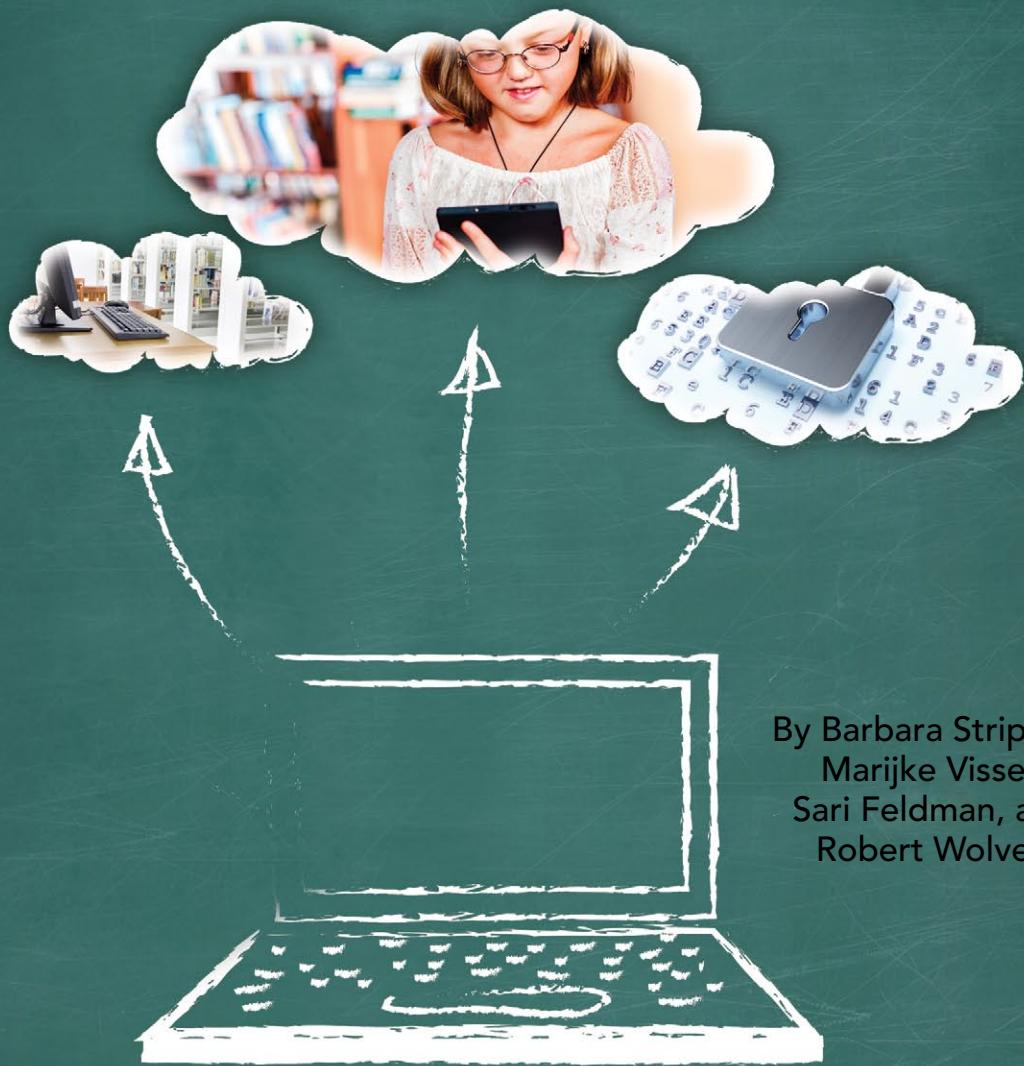
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ALA, FUTURE OF LIBRARIES, DIGITAL CONTENT, AND EBOOKS

The push for expanded ebook access continues



By Barbara Stripling,
Marijke Visser,
Sari Feldman, and
Robert Wolven

Just over a year ago, the ALA Executive Board [directed](#) the Digital Content and Libraries Working Group (DCWG) to pursue more aggressive strategies to get ebooks into the hands of library patrons at a reasonable cost and under reasonable terms to libraries.

This was to take the form of developing stronger messaging with the media, looking at collection-development alternatives to buying ebooks from the Big Six, and building a broader support base among stakeholders. At the same time, ALA still seeks mutually beneficial partnerships with publishers around a common goal of bringing authors and readers together and supporting literacy, as well as a lifelong love of reading and learning. While there is no consensus among publishers (or in some instances, librarians) about the “correct” way to enable library ebook lending, there has been positive movement.

On the heels of a [price increase](#) from Hachette Book Group, ALA President Maureen Sullivan issued an [open letter to America’s publishers](#). It called on all publishers to allow library access to their ebooks and singled out three of the Big Six publishers that, at the time, did not provide access to their ebooks in US libraries: Simon & Schuster, which has never [consistently](#) let its ebooks be available through libraries; Macmillan, which at the time was developing a pilot program that has since [begun](#); and Penguin, whose pilots were only in [select](#) US cities but have since expanded. Sullivan was also invited to [speak](#) at a September 2012 Association of American Publishers meeting where she encouraged continued dialogue but also made it clear that ALA would be undertaking stronger and more strategic action to persuade publishers to deal with libraries fairly. Libraries, ALA, and other library organizations would work to strengthen our collective position in multiple ways in coming months.

Educating and engaging librarians

Engaging librarians at the grassroots level and making sure they are well apprised of the range and depth of ebook issues grew more important as ALA and the DCWG became more assertive. One of the most challenging issues is to better understand the various terms through which

libraries can license and lend ebooks made available to them. As licenses are contracts, libraries receive only the rights articulated in agreements with publishers and/or ebook distributors. To help librarians navigate this issue and strengthen their ability to negotiate, DCWG first published “[Ebook Business Models for Public Libraries](#),” then followed with the ebook business model [scorecard](#), which allows librarians to compare and weigh the variables to come up with the most favorable terms for their libraries. These tools help librarians be proactive in any license negotiations that may need to take place to ensure the best deal for each library. An accompanying [survey](#) of librarians will in turn inform DCWG advocacy with publishers regarding what attributes are most essential and whether those attributes vary significantly by library size or other demographic characteristics.

Because librarians often ask, “What can I do?” DCWG also set about developing an [ebook media and communications toolkit](#). Librarians can now use the guidelines

and templates to engage with local media and inform the public about what’s going on regarding library ebook lending. They can also use the toolkit to persuade the press to bring attention to libraries’ plight. Local news coverage continues to grow and become more nuanced about the issues as more libraries add their voices to the conversation.

DCWG member James LaRue, director of Douglas County (Colo.) Libraries, and his staff developed a monthly [price comparison chart](#) of the ebooks available to them. Besides documenting obvious price differences between what consumers pay and what libraries pay, the charts contain some glaring empty spaces representing ebooks that libraries cannot obtain at any price.

Similarly, the State Library of Kansas captured attention when it [launched](#) a Facebook page that lists ebook titles that publishers refuse to sell or license to libraries. The

Engaging librarians at the grassroots level and making sure they are well apprised of the range and depth of ebook issues has grown in importance.

approach uses a highly visible platform to educate the public and build a large, sympathetic audience of library patrons and community supporters.

Pierce County (Wash.) Library System rallied community action through its timely fall 2012 [Scrooge campaign](#). The library system posted the email addresses of several publishers, along with a draft message urging publishers to stop overcharging libraries for ebooks.

These examples illustrate how coordinated local action can shed light on the impact of limiting the public's access to digital content. DCWG members routinely present at state association conferences, international venues, and through writing opportunities in local and national media to alert everyone to the concerns of the library community and to explain why the public should also be concerned. These presentations, in addition to programs at ALA conferences, allow librarians to voice their concerns and ask questions. They can also stay informed by reading *American Libraries*' [E-Content blog](#) and *AL*'s weekly e-newsletter, [AL Direct](#), which has an e-content section. And if you're looking for other ALA resources on digital content, visit [Transforming Libraries' Ebooks and Digital Content](#) website. Keeping ALA membership engaged and informed remains a critical goal for DCWG.

School libraries in the mix

While hoopla in the public library arena drove DCWG's initial focus, our recent focus has also included the school library digital content market. Encouraged by early meetings with the Big Six trade publishers, ALA leadership met in fall 2012 with executives from [Scholastic and Rosen Publishing](#) to learn about major trends

and issues for the school library market and establish a long-term working relationship. Issues for school librarians have a few important distinctions from those of public librarians.

Though the school library may have similar ebook needs for student-selected books, K–12 librarians also have to support teacher-directed reading. Classes often demand a license that allows for simultaneous access by a large number of students.

For example, an entire 8th-grade class may need ebook access for two weeks while students read *Lord of the Flies*. In addition to the issue of simultaneous access to copies, K–12 students are likely reading backlist titles like *Catcher in the Rye* that aren't always available digitally. So the school library ebook market has a larger number of variables to address when attempting to describe the ideal ebook system. On the flip side, many publishers have a dedicated focus on the school market, providing greater leverage for the libraries they serve than exists between public libraries and bestselling trade press.

The fall meeting with Scholastic and Rosen was the first foray into what has become a strong interest of DCWG and ALA leadership. What began as a discussion about ensuring that students have access to ebooks has now grown to include something bigger: the value school librarians bring to the K–12 ecosystem and future trends in the school library and youth market (such as interactive and multimedia nonfiction texts).

The collaborative conversation goes beyond ALA's New York meetings with publishers. Last fall, ALA staffer Marijke Visser and DCWG member Christopher Harris attended *School Library Journal*'s Leadership Summit, where conversations with several intermediaries and publishers provided further insight into the trends in



the K–12 market, including what amounts to a pay-per-use model through [Brain Hive](#). While this model is a relatively new entrant, such an approach is one that DCWG members have considered as one of the ebook business models they have put forward. Could the Brain Hive model be a case study for consideration beyond the K–12 community?

It is clear that the relationships between school libraries and school publishers and aggregators have particular characteristics that could inform the work DCWG undertakes with trade publishers and in the self-publishing sphere. School libraries are already accessing ebooks using a variety of business models, including annual subscriptions, pay-per-use, perpetual licensing, and single-user reading. Though some characteristics are different, successful models from schools can help inform public library ebook discussions, as well.

Building on a firm foundation

The many activities that took place in 2012 and the beginning of 2013 laid a solid foundation on which to build in the coming months. ALA has a deeper appreciation of the various players in the ebook ecosystem and the range of issues and interests each brings to the marketplace. By establishing new relationships, we've generated greater understanding of library concerns and opened channels for creating new, mutually beneficial arrangements. Through our discussions, meetings, resource development, blog postings, and member feedback, we also know there is more work ahead.

As 2013 proceeds, ALA leadership and DCWG members will be exploring the following areas:

- The exploding phenomenon of self-publishing;
- Opportunities to make more mid-tier and smaller publishers' works available at libraries and thus to the public;
- Effective practices in how libraries support patron discovery of new e-titles; and
- Improved integration of multiple third-party systems with library catalogs and websites so patrons can more easily navigate and access library resources across vendors.

The start to 2013 showed that the publishing and ebook landscape continues to shift, with the proposed [merger of Penguin and Random House](#) topping the news. As of this writing, it is unknown how the merger will directly affect the library ebook market, but perhaps it will lead to an opportunity to move forward with some licensing scenarios and more aggressive pilots. We also note the positive developments from Penguin, Simon & Schuster, and Hachette Book Group in the springtime.

The DCWG and ALA leadership will continue to pressure the larger publishing houses in the coming year, but

plans are also underway to broaden the conversation and the focus. An important lesson from previous meetings with publishers is the importance of looking at the entire ebook ecosystem, which includes aggregators, intermediaries, literary agents, authors, and readers. Rather than wait for the tide to turn in libraries' favor with the large publishers, what progress can ALA make with these other stakeholders?

Engaging authors and readers directly may prove an effective tool toward increasing pressure on larger publishers, even as, possibly, libraries add new titles to their collections from self-published writers and smaller publishing houses. Exploring, documenting, and disseminating successful library practices for supporting discovery of these authors and new e-titles will increase our value in the ecosystem as well. To encourage exploration, how does your library translate readers' advisory and face-out displays of physical books into the digital age? Stepping even further into evolving areas, DCWG has begun to explore the possibilities for libraries to market, provide access to, and facilitate the production of digital content.

What else is underway in 2013? The lack of a systematic means to archive and preserve ebooks is a serious problem (as [Clifford Lynch describes in his article beginning on page 12](#)). Under current Big Six licensing terms, libraries cannot fulfill their mission of preserving the nation's cultural heritage. A careful look at the privacy issues involved in providing digital content and accessibility concerns for people who have barriers to accessing digital content—such as visual impairments or physical limitations—are also on the 2013 docket.

A clear message heard at the 2013 ALA Midwinter Meeting was that the work of DCWG is far from over. Not only do we need to see more progress with large publishers, but we need to also explore new opportunities beyond the Big Six—and perhaps even beyond the ebook as we know it. (See [Peter Brantley's article on page 22](#).)

A bumpy road still lies ahead, but with some solid work and useful tools in place, the future challenges are ones DCWG is prepared to meet. ■



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By Rochelle
Logan



Working Directly with Publishers

Lessons Learned

Building relationships and collaborating are often the best approach

Not all publishers are created equal. It seems publishers are becoming the bad guys because many of the biggest companies have placed various restrictions on our use of their content. However, lumping all trade, reference, and scholarly publishers together is not fair to those who have been willingly to work with librarians. Nor is it accurate to say that most publishers don't value what we do for the nation's book culture.

We need a dialogue with publishers to find a way to do business together. At Douglas County (Colo.) Libraries (DCL), we talk directly to publishers to purchase their ebook files to place on our Adobe Content Server. We have the opportunity to hear their points of view and to gain a better understanding of the struggles they face in this new environment. When the Big Six made it clear to us they didn't want to sell directly to individual libraries, some of the medium-sized and small presses were receptive to doing business with us.

The first lesson learned during our journey: Some publishers are innovative and willing to explore the idea of selling directly to libraries. They want a dialogue, and they want to understand what DCL is doing and how it would benefit them. At an initial meeting or phone call with a publisher, we explain that we want to buy their ebook files to put on our Adobe Content Server. We assign digital rights management (DRM) to each book so it can be checked out to our patrons only one at a time. We promote their books in our catalog and in our libraries, and we put a "buy now" link in our catalog. This latter

feature gets their attention. Trade publishers are looking for more direct-to-consumer connections. Libraries can offer that with "buy now" links so a patron who doesn't want to wait for a book that is already checked out can find and purchase it easily.

Our second lesson learned: Publishers are willing to give us a discount. That may come as a surprise to many in the library community, particularly with all the publicity regarding Random House raising prices. But we use the same philosophy we have used all along with print books: Because we are buying in bulk—often purchasing a publisher's complete catalog on one purchase order—we ask them for 45% off retail price. And we often get it. Since the transaction with us is direct, with no distributor taking a cut or advertising budget needed, it makes good business sense for publishers to sell to libraries.

Our third lesson: We have something to learn from working with small- and medium-sized independent presses. For many years, collection development librarians paid little attention to independents as they made their selections. We read reviews, looked at the subject matter that our patrons wanted, and always bought as much as we could get of the big-name authors. At DCL, we've learned that there are many publishers whose main business is with libraries, especially children's content presses. Not everyone is in the business of trade publication. Medium-sized reference and nonfiction publishers tend to understand public library processes and our mission. Trade houses concentrate more on the consumer market and are, therefore, less focused on selling to us. They rely instead on distributors and online book sales as well as neighborhood bookstores.

Independently owned bookstores were suffering until recently, which meant trade publishers and their distributors also took a hit. Because of the downturn in business, publishers are very careful about making any false steps in the digital environment. They don't want a book-industry version of Napster. They want to protect their authors and their bottom lines and are usually surprised to receive our two-page [Statement of Common Understanding](#) (SCU) rather than a full legal contract. The SCU explains in simple terms what DCL is doing. Of the many publishers we have on board, all but two used the SCU. The two who didn't were the first publishers to do business with us even as we were designing the DCL Model and before we had considered how to efficiently manage the "agreements."

Each ePub or PDF file we purchase is assigned DRM, which gives publishers comfort. Publishers are looking for ways to promote their authors without losing sales. We

NONDISCLOSURE CLAUSES

BY MARY MINOW AND ANGELINE NALEPA

A nondisclosure or confidentiality clause sometimes appears in digital licenses for e-content. Should you sign?

Such a clause may stop the library from sharing the price paid, as well as the terms of the license itself, including how content is accessed, used, or monitored.

Think twice before signing. State and local sunshine laws may require public institutions to disclose this information to the public on request. If that applies to you, it is essential to tell the vendor you cannot sign unless that clause is deleted.

For the rest of us, it is still a bad idea. Nondisclosure clauses hinder the ability of librarians to openly discuss prices and terms and may help keep unfair business practices in place.

The Association of Research Libraries [passed a resolution](#) in 2009 to discourage member libraries from signing such agreements, either individually or through consortia. Cornell University Library has taken a [strong position](#) that it will not enter into vendor contracts that require nondisclosure of pricing or other information that does not constitute a trade secret.

The International Coalition of Library Consortia issued a [statement](#) against nondisclosure clauses back in 2004.

Do not confuse the term “confidentiality” with patron privacy. The term may refer to either, so read the fine print.

Libraries should ensure the license has a clause protecting users’ personal information to an extent equal to or greater than that imposed by state privacy law or library policy. [Examples are offered in Tomas Lipinski’s [The Librarian’s Legal Companion for Licensing Information Resources and Services](#) (ALA, 2013).]

Libraries need transparency to be able to promote fair pricing, fair access, and development of digital collections that are valuable to their users and mindful of budgets.

Let’s not forget Pete Seeger’s old chestnut, “Do you know the difference between education and experience? Education is when you read the fine print. Experience is what you get if you don’t.”



MARY MINOW is the Follett Chair at Dominican University and a member of ALA’s Digital Content and Libraries Working Group. ANGELINE NALEPA is a librarian at South Suburban College in South Holland, Illinois.

believe we help book sales and give authors exposure in our libraries. Some publishers we talk to want more data from us so they know how well their books are circulating, and we are willing to send them high-level numbers, but nothing that reveals individual patron preferences.

Our fourth lesson: The library process of selecting, purchasing, receiving, and cataloging a book is all very foreign to publishers. What is a MARC record? Why do we care about ISBNs? How will the library know when new ebooks are available for purchase? It takes a certain amount of hand-holding to introduce publishers to the process of library book acquisition in this environment. We send many emails back and forth to complete a transaction. Examples of what we’ve experienced include receiving 455 ePub files that don’t match the 432 cover images sent; receiving a list of titles for collection development that doesn’t

include subject categories or prices; and receiving a publisher’s metadata file, but no ePubs.

Squaring away the metadata has been one of the biggest hurdles. We can categorize the publishers into three groups based on how easy or difficult it is for our catalogers to get metadata that can be “crosswalked” to MARC:

- Publishers who are accustomed to working with libraries are the easiest. They include Lerner, Marshall Cavendish, Rosen, Crabtree, and ABDO. They tend to contract with MARC processing companies to send us MARC records. Our catalogers like those publishers because we receive, up front, good metadata based on traditional cataloging standards. As a result, the time required to get the records into Horizon and then into our VuFind discovery layer is short.

- Then there are the publishers that provide us ONIX files. One of our catalogers said, “We have learned more than once that all ONIX files are not created equal.”

The library’s process of acquiring and processing a book is foreign to publishers.

Cataloging staff members have built crosswalks from ONIX to MARC. They make adjustments to the crosswalk to account for different publishers' use of ONIX and are generally able to automate this process.

■ Our least preferred category? Publishers that provide Excel spreadsheet data. I asked Nancy Kall, DCL senior cataloger, to explain the process when we receive data in this format. "While the translate function we make use of is good, it is very tedious to set up and change, and sometimes we are thrown a curve in the spreadsheet that we aren't aware of until we look at the generated MARC records," she said. "We are then faced with the choice of either adjusting the translator function, manually adjusting the spreadsheet metadata, or manually making adjustments to the output MARC records, which is doable if a large number of titles aren't involved."

Libraries of all types that want more e-content for their patrons should try to walk in our publisher partners' shoes.

Libraries that want more e-content should try to walk in our publisher partners' shoes. Knowing what is important to the other party will help you meet your goals.

Gain a better understanding of their process and goals.

Coming to the table wearing an adversarial hat will not move us forward in negotiations to get more great content. Knowing what is important to the other party and communicating with them about our goals will help fulfill the mission of both libraries and publishers. We've had this relationship for a long time. Moving into the virtual environment doesn't mean we can't continue to find common ground.

At DCL, we enjoy working with publishers that are willing to try new things and to learn from the process. The future looks bright. ■



ROCHELLE LOGAN is associate director of support services at Douglas County (Colo.) Libraries.

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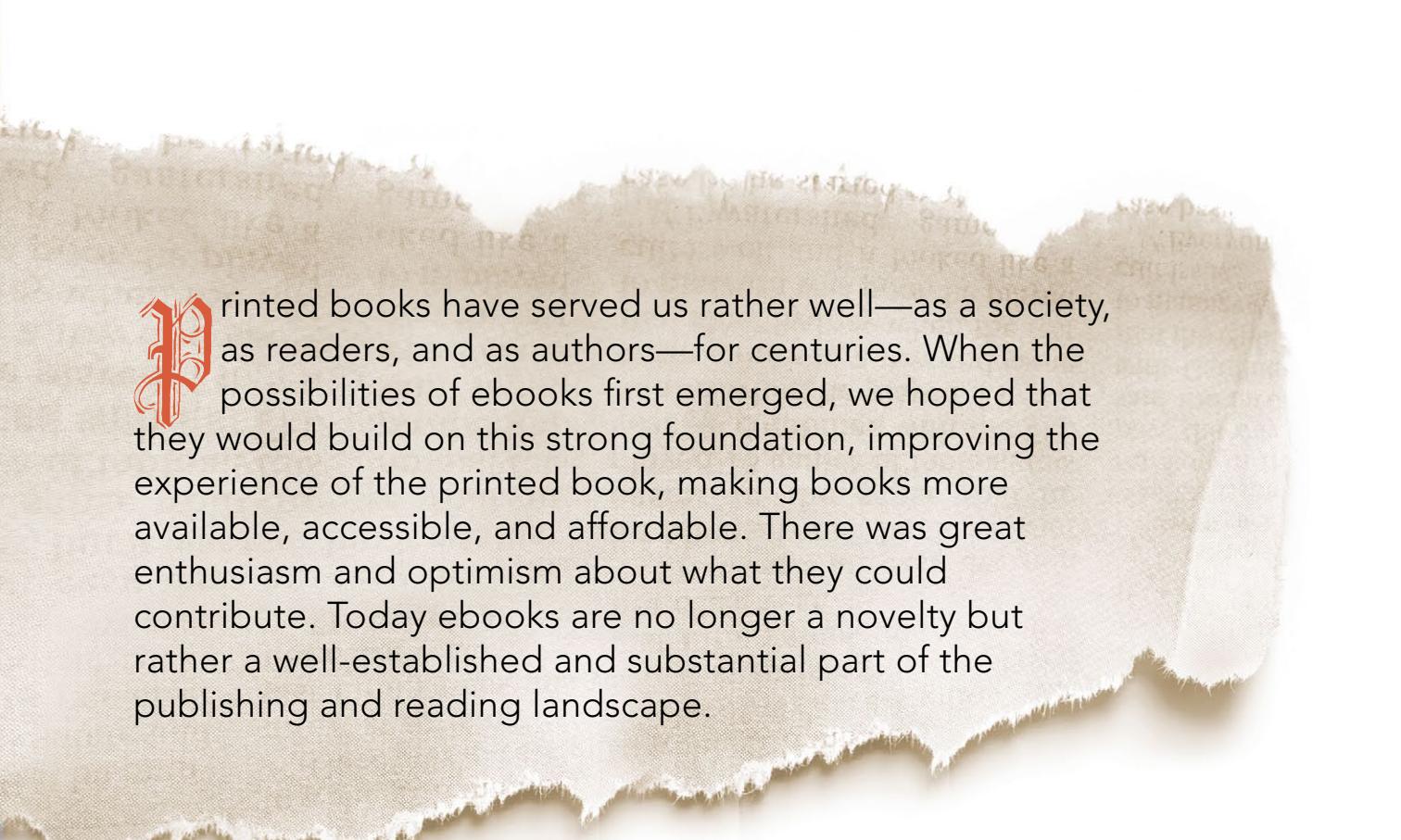
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Ebooks *in* 2013

Promises broken, promises kept, and Faustian bargains



By
Clifford A. Lynch



Printed books have served us rather well—as a society, as readers, and as authors—for centuries. When the possibilities of ebooks first emerged, we hoped that they would build on this strong foundation, improving the experience of the printed book, making books more available, accessible, and affordable. There was great enthusiasm and optimism about what they could contribute. Today ebooks are no longer a novelty but rather a well-established and substantial part of the publishing and reading landscape.

Sadly, ebooks have not only failed to deliver on much of their promise, they have become a vast lost opportunity. They are becoming a weapon capable of considerable social damage; a Faustian technology that seduces with convenience, particularly for those who consume a great many books, but offers little else while extracting a corrosive toll on our social institutions and norms. The failure here is not primarily one of technology but of the way that rights holders have chosen to apply the technology, and perhaps even of the legal and public policy frameworks that have allowed this to take place.

Introduction, definitions, and scope

Ebooks are a vast subject, and here I can cover only a few points selectively and in little detail. Important topics like the fate of bookstores and the trends toward consolidation in purchasing channels are not discussed. My concern here is with the broad ecosystem of electronic reading platforms—ranging from dedicated devices like the Kindle and the Nook to software that runs on general-purpose laptops and tablet computers—that provide content to these platforms, such as Amazon and OverDrive, and with the publishing industry. All of this is shorthanded by the term “ebooks.”

I exclude new genres of digital content that cannot be reduced to printed form without losing much of the essential content or character of the work (though this is where many of the real long-term revolutions may lie, and

some of the most fascinating developments are to be found; for elaboration, see [Peter Brantley’s article on page 22](#)). Rather, I am thinking of traditional books presented on electronic reading platforms. I focus on mass market materials rather than, say, scholarly monographs. When I speak of libraries, while public libraries are most directly affected, I speak too of research libraries, which also collect and preserve much of the broad cultural record.

I want to be clear that, at least when dealing with the major publishers, nobody *buys* an ebook; one licenses it under typically very complex terms that constrain what you are allowed to do with it. The notion that you *buy* an ebook or *own* an ebook is a great marketing lie. The license constraints are enforced by a mix of technological and legal mechanisms. While technology is readily available to circumvent most of the technological enforcement mechanisms (though perhaps beyond the technical skills of the average reader), its use is often at best legally ambiguous. And ample pirated content can be downloaded without technical constraints on use and reuse. But here I will focus on the world of ebooks as offered in the standard consumer marketplace.

Promises kept and broken

The ability to adjust fonts and type size and to employ text-to-speech technology on reading platforms promised much greater access for visually challenged readers—many more than for people who are legally blind. Much of the technology is in place, and more continues to be refined, though certainly much more still can and should be done, and some reading platforms are much more hospitable

than others. Sadly, the Authors Guild and publishers have successfully insisted that the right to have a text read out loud is a separate feature that doesn't come routinely when you license an ebook, thus limiting the extent to which one key adaptive technology can be employed.

Ebook technology promised the ability to carry a large collection of books in a light, compact portable form. This promise has been delivered and is indeed one of the great attractions of ebooks to regular readers, particularly those who travel frequently.

Ebook technology eliminates the need to print, warehouse, store, ship, maintain and pay tax on inventory, and transport physical copies of books. One expectation is that ebooks would be more easily and rapidly available—no more waiting for special orders to be shipped, or driving from bookstore to bookstore. One would simply download the title in question. For books acquired by consumers from commercial sources, this has clearly been realized, and downloading is usually quite straightforward. A second expectation was that ebooks would be “greener.” It's hard to evaluate this, as one must consider the ecological footprint of the manufacture of the reading platforms and the delivery infrastructure and amortize it appropriately. I'm not aware of a good analysis of this.

A third, related expectation is that ebooks would be cheaper than printed books. This is complicated: Are ebooks cheaper from the consumer's perspective, or do they offer larger profit margins than printed books, which are distributed in some fashion among the distributor, author, and publisher (some of whom may win, and some of whom may lose)? While most current ebooks from major publishers are cheaper than the equivalent list-price hardcover on, say, Amazon, they are often more expensive than Amazon's discount price on that hardcover and are sometimes more than the paperback edition, if there is one. And usually used print copies are cheaper than all the other alternatives. (There's a very complicated story here about the pricing of new books, involving something called “agency pricing,” a US government lawsuit against Apple and the major publishers related to price fixing, and publisher strategies to prevent Amazon from taking over their world.) It is also worth noting that in the ebook ecology, established authors can leave their publishers and sell directly through channels like Amazon, charging lower prices than commercial publishers and perhaps

A much more efficient and responsive public library—circulating much of its most popular material digitally to patrons with e-readers via networks—is certainly among the promises many saw in ebooks. The reality has been appalling.

making greater profits. New authors can go directly to the public through these same channels, and often charge only a few dollars for their ebooks. In both of these cases, the consumer sees genuinely and substantially lower prices.

Finally there are issues—I don't want to call them promises, exactly—about privacy, data collection, and reading as a social activity rather than a purely individual one. Clearly, ebook reading platforms can collect hugely detailed (though not necessarily entirely reliable) data about readers'

habits and practices on an individual basis. Market channels like Amazon and Apple can collect this data and resell it or provide it as part of their agreements with publishers, perhaps in anonymized and/or aggregated form. In theory, the data might even find its way back to authors (see the very provocative story [“E-Readers Track How We Read, But Is the Data Useful to Authors?”](#) on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, Jan. 28, 2013).

It's not clear what's going on here, or who is holding what data for how long, or how available this data is to various government agencies, but we seem to be increasingly in a world where, if data can be collected, it will be collected. I sense there's a smoldering discomfort here, perhaps as a consequence of greater awareness that consumers' lives and activities are grist for a “big data” world.

The notions of social reading—shared annotations and the like—are still very experimental and in their infancy. It's hard to tell how popular they will be among readers (some of this may depend on how they are balanced with privacy), but they are surely developments to watch.

Libraries and ebooks

A much more efficient and responsive public library, circulating much of its most popular material digitally to patrons with ebook readers via networks, is certainly among the promises many saw in ebooks. The reality has been appalling.

A view among some publishers (and indeed some authors as well)—most commonly expressed when they are talking privately among themselves—is that circulating libraries are thieves. They say each circulation takes a sale (or at least some fraction of a sale) from their revenues. Under the law, there was no way to avoid selling printed books to libraries, or to charge them differential rates. With ebooks and license agreements, they can essentially opt not to do business with libraries (by not allowing circulation as a permitted activity under the license of-

fered) or charge libraries at differential (much higher) rates, as well as manipulating availability (for example, no bestsellers in the library till a year after consumer release). All of these things are happening today: Some major publishers severely constrain which titles and libraries have access to their e-titles; some are charging very high prices or renting books to libraries for a limited number of loans or a limited time period, or both. Douglas County (Colo.) Libraries has prepared informative data showing how many titles on various bestseller lists are available to libraries in ebook form (a pathetically small portion), and what a library would pay in comparison to a consumer. While there may be some argument for limited differential pricing, the current situation, which essentially puts the library's long-term ability to carry out its mission at the mercy of publishers, should be sounding alarms in the public policy arena. The general public is largely unaware of what is happening here, and it is vital that libraries bring public scrutiny to the situation.

Even when libraries can successfully license ebooks, delivery is another disgrace. Consider how easy Amazon has made it to buy books from many different publishers and have them delivered to your Kindle reader (or to Kindle software running on a tablet). Contrast this to the embarrassing and byzantine complexity that confronts a library patron trying to locate and borrow an ebook from his or her library. One comes away from watching such an interaction with the sense that while there are problems everywhere—the systems, the user interfaces, the help, and tutorials—publishers and platform providers have no intention of, or motivation for, making this experience comparable to the ease of a consumer purchase. I suspect that, for most readers, this reflects badly on the library and the author. The other actors in the chain who are most culpable are not terribly visible to the average reader.

It's also interesting to note that the music industry has basically abandoned digital rights management (DRM) software after realizing it was accomplishing little except for infuriating customers and blocking innovation. Clearly this is a lesson the publishing world has yet to learn because its insistence on DRM is a substantial part of the problem.

Ownership and permanence

Books have been some of our most cherished possessions, lasting hundreds of years. They are passed down from generation to generation within families; they cross centuries in the collections of research libraries, collectors, and

used-book stores. They are genuinely part of both the heritage of individuals and families and of our culture collectively.

Ebooks put all of this at risk. Individuals cannot resell or make gifts of their ebooks in most cases because under the license agreements, they do not actually own the books and the licenses are not transferable. Despite Amazon's recent astounding patent on an electronic "used-book store" (this is an invention?) most current license agreements preclude this. Indeed, many common social practices—sharing books among friends, inheriting books from one's parents or grandparents—don't apply to ebooks in meaningful ways, unless the license agreement makes special provisions to allow it, and service providers like Apple and Amazon made the appropriate provisions. If you try this, you'll face technical obstacles and, very likely, potential civil and criminal liability, with astonishingly harsh penalties, particularly if you try to get around the technical obstacles.

Libraries concerned with preserving ebook content for the long term face similar problems. While it is possible to construct perpetual license agreements that make provision for digital preservation and to develop communitywide preservation mechanisms (as has been done with scholarly journals, where research libraries are usually the dominant part of the marketplace), we are far away from seeing such enabling terms and conditions in mass-market ebook licenses. There is, of course, mandatory copyright deposit at the Library of Congress, but it is neither reasonable nor wise to place all our hopes for preservation of the cultural record on any single library, particularly in an age of massive governmental disinvestment in scholarship and cultural heritage. The challenge—and burden—is simply too large. Even a more broadly based copyright deposit regime similar to what is found in the United Kingdom, while better, still centralizes too greatly the responsibility and the vulnerability.

The survival and the stability of ebooks are also tethered to the survival, continued interest, and good behavior of the providers. The ability to continue to use a book on a reading platform; to move it from one platform to another (say, in replacing an old reader with a new one); or to transfer a license, if permitted, all depend on the ebook provider continuing to exist and operating the necessary infrastructure to validate your license. (The details about how tightly these dependencies are designed vary

Many common social practices—sharing books among friends, inheriting books from one's parents or grandparents—don't apply to ebooks in any meaningful way.

across providers and platforms.) History is not encouraging here. Consider the problem of “orphan works”: books probably still within copyright whose current rights holders cannot be found in the print publishing world.

Good behavior is also an issue. Amazon, at least, has the capability to update or remove ebooks from a Kindle remotely whenever it “checks in,” as was memorably demonstrated a few years ago when it erroneously removed copies of Orwell’s *1984* from customers’ Kindles. Amazon has since promised to make more measured use of this technical capability, but I cannot shake the nightmare of an overreaching court order to “unpublish” some book, causing Amazon, Apple, and others to do mass deletions, which would include copies in both personal and library collections. Unfortunately, technical capabilities that exist tend to get used sooner or later. This is one that perhaps should never have been built, or should have been designed quite differently, at least if we are to think of ebooks as a genuinely long-lived and reliable means of preserving and transferring knowledge.

Ultimately, we *must* change ebooks from their current frame as highly controlled, experiential goods that are designed to exist within walled gardens. If they are going to become a viable *replacement* for printed books within our society, rather than an alternative format of convenience, they must be customer-owned (or perpetually licensed with reasonable license terms that mimic ownership), standards-based, non-DRM-protected digital objects that can easily be moved from one platform to another.

The coming crisis

Today ebooks are primarily a supplementary format, an option in the mass market, with the exception of the growing number of works that authors have placed directly into the e-distribution chains. If consumers choose to accept the Faustian bargains implicit in ebooks, if portability and convenience are paramount and the prices are acceptable, there is clearly no problem. I

worry, though, that most consumers honestly do not understand the nature of the bargain that they are making and think they are “buying” their ebooks.

Many reasonably affluent frequent readers have always purchased and subsequently discarded substantial numbers of “read-once” books and these may be genuinely more convenient in ebook format.

Libraries, and particularly public libraries, need to think carefully about why they are licensing ebooks and whether they are getting value for their investments (compared with printed books). They also face serious public relations problems as they are squeezed between the expectations of a growing number of their patrons and marketplace realities about price, availability, and qual-

ity of delivery services. Responsible libraries of all types must consider the preservation issues thoughtfully, even if they ultimately conclude (as many public libraries may well) that preservation isn’t the library’s mission.

The real crisis will come when we see substantial amounts of important material published *only* as ebooks, when ebook-only publications become a significant component of the cultural and intellectual record. There is a real and largely unaddressed need to better understand the changing nature of this record. One step that we should be taking is to develop a way to measure the amount of electronic-*only* publication that is happening in various markets each year as a collaborative effort among publishers, authors, distributors, and libraries.

Responsible libraries of all types must consider the preservation issues thoughtfully, even if they ultimately conclude (as many public libraries may well) that preservation isn’t the library’s mission.

There are already some disturbing indications. We are seeing a modest renaissance of the novella form enabled by the economics of ebooks; these are not being produced in print. There are a few very important author-published ebooks—Laurie Garrett’s *I Heard the Sirens Scream* is a good example—that limped into print only late in their distribution. The music industry has long been regarded as the canary in the coal mine for the content industries, and here we see digital-only works are rapidly gaining ground. The day of reckoning is likely not too far off.

At that point, if we have not come to reasonable terms about ebooks, both the access and preservation functions of our libraries will be gravely threatened, and as a society, we will face a profound public policy problem. It is in everyone’s interest, I believe, to avoid this crisis. ■



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EVALUATE EBOOK PERFORMANCE

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So the next time you ask yourself, “How are ebooks performing at my library?” — think collectionHQ.

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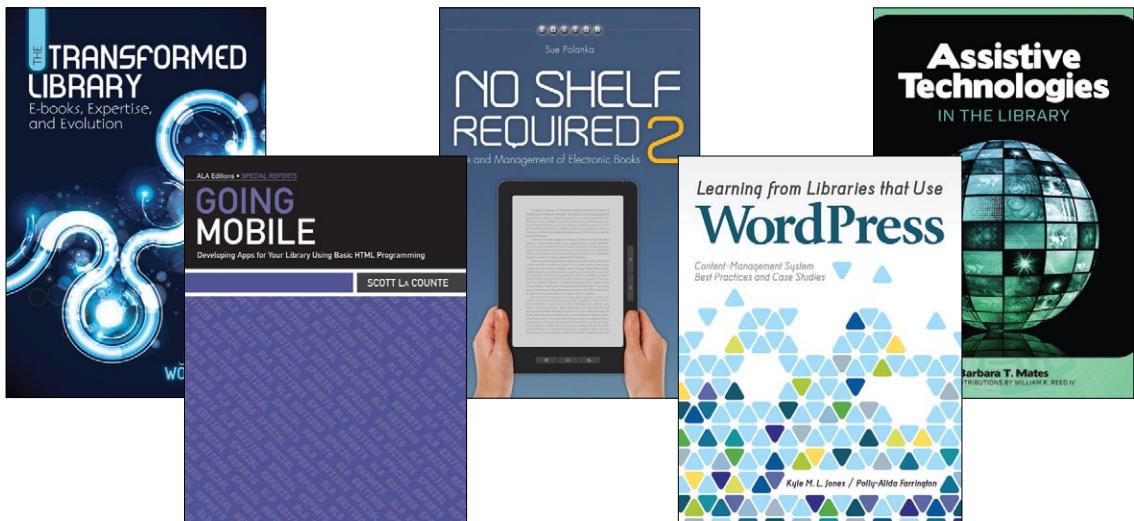
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Wanna Write a Good One? Library as Publisher

Envisioning a new model outside the Big Six

By James
LaRue

Children's departments began to appear in public libraries around 1900. Today, it's hard to imagine a public library without one. In many libraries, children's materials account for more than a third of circulation.

Now we have dedicated children's librarians, children's acquisitions people, and children's programming experts. We have a host of early literacy specialists using the latest brain research to help make our nation smarter, if anyone

can (and if anyone can, it's them). I'd like to suggest a new role for public libraries. I believe that 100 years from now, we will consider this role just as necessary, as indispensable to the mission and functioning of the modern public library, as children's departments are now. It's time for the library to step up as the nurturer of content creation.

There are several reasons public libraries might want to move in this direction. The first is pure opportunity. Once a library invests in the infrastructure to manage ebooks directly from publishers ([see the article by Rochelle Logan on page 8](#)), it finds that the same infrastructure allows it to be a publisher. That discovery, in turn, begins to suggest solutions for current business problems. A big one is the unwieldy explosion of self-published content and the lack of tools to manage it. Another might be the celebration and archiving of local history. Yet another might be the disappearance of local newspapers, and the



possibility of the library as an alternative news outlet.

The focus of this article, however, is on the first issue: creating new systems to discover, encourage, improve, and assist in the marketing of local authors.

Recruiting the author

Imagine this banner on your library's website: "Do you want to write a book? (If so, click/touch here.)" Here's what I have come to believe: *Everyone* wants to write a book.

So the patron clicks it. Now there's a new message: "Wanna write a good one?" That's different, isn't it?

Suppose the patron goes one level deeper. Then the message looks more like this: "Good for you! The world needs good writers. But like everything else, good writing takes time and attention. If you're serious, the library can help."

Then the library provides a road map to writing, complete with resources. There would be lists of current books

(in multiple formats), magazines, articles, videos, writer databases, blogs, and newsfeeds. The road map would certainly include lists of local writers groups, because nothing makes you improve faster than the incisive critique of your work in public. It would also include lists, rates, and rankings of local editors, because nothing screams "amateur" like poor spelling and grammar. There would be information on book-cover design (and directories of designers and rates) and schedules for workshops, author events, and lectures.

What happens when, after thousands of diligent hours, authors move from "Start here" to "My book is done"? Then they *give*—yes, *give*—a copy to the library! And why would they do that?

1. The library helped them write it.
2. The library will help them get it reviewed.
3. The library will attach some level of copy protection

to the file (if desired). Copyright remains with the author.

4. The library will display and make it accessible to the local community.

5. The library will buy multiple copies based on demand.

6. The library will make it possible for others to purchase it from the library catalog.

And why would the library do all this? For one thing, it would share in the profits of such purchases—let’s say 10% of whatever price the author sets.

Recently, I met with a group of authors to try to flesh all this out as an experiment Douglas County (Colo.) Libraries (DCL) could conduct in 2013. At first, they were thrilled to find a way to break into the library market. But then I explained that first we had to talk about the issue of quality. If the library suddenly started adding amateurish schlock to our offerings, that would make both of us look bad. How could we ensure at least a minimum standard of acceptability?

I was also quick to point out another problem. We can’t afford to pay people to serve as full-time local book critics. (Moreover, considering the burgeoning growth of self-publishing, there aren’t enough librarians in the world to do that anyway.) But perhaps this wasn’t so much a problem as an opportunity. What if we asked for help? What if we invited our whole community to join us in exploring and defining the most exciting time in the history of literature?

Community-sourcing acquisitions and review

There’s an old joke: Why do people rob banks? Punch line: because that’s where the money is. Why would we appeal to library patrons for help in assessing more books than we can possibly keep up with? Answer: because that’s where the readers are.

Every public library in the United States has a core group of “power users.” These folks swing by the library once a week or more. Often, they have commanding knowledge and insight in their areas of interest. In other words, we already have local expertise—people who are already investing the time to stay on top of new content. We just haven’t harvested their labor.

There’s another wrinkle. As documented in many places (see OCLC’s report [“From Awareness to Funding”](#)), libraries have seen a steady erosion of support even as their use has risen. Why is that? I think, in part, it’s because

we haven’t asked for that support in ways that engage funders’ hearts and minds. We ask only for money.

By appealing directly to local constituents to help us do precisely the things that most interest them—read, rate, talk about books—not only can we find new strength in a changing publishing environment, we can also grow an articulate and committed network of advocates.

Again: Our old process—reading professional reviews and making purchasing decisions on that basis—simply won’t work with the flood of new self-published content. So let’s flip it.

Here’s the draft process we came up with:

1. First, we recruit acquisition editors and reviewers. We run ads in the paper, in the library, and on our website. We require a résumé, cover letter, and something about applicants’ reading tastes. We interview them. If they meet our criteria, we bring them on as part of a volunteer team.

2. We train them. Working with experienced agents, we provide a mandatory workshop, then give our volunteers checklists to tell them how to (a) decide if something is worth putting in the catalog, and (b) create a short review and ranking.

3. Acquisition editors agree to handle some number of submissions per week—each typically consisting of just a key chapter and an outline or abstract. Eligible submissions come from someone who has a library card with us (hence, a local or regional author).

4. Within some time frame, acquisition editors ensure that the submission meets our standards: in English, proofed, and correctly formatted. There might also be some guidelines about unacceptable content: We won’t accept medical works by people without medical credentials; we won’t publish hate speech or libel. (Welcome to the new Wild West of intellectual freedom challenges.) But if someone is rejected at this point, we might offer the author a way to appeal.

5. Once the work is accepted, the author is directed to add the title to our catalog, either by direct upload, or by partnership with an e-publishing retailer.

6. We create brief records using a combination of metadata worksheets completed by the author, full-text indexing, and minimal professional review.

7. We add digital rights management, unless the title is distributed to us as Creative Commons.

8. Now the item is routed to community reviewers,



Every public library has a core group of “power users” who swing by the library once a week or more. We should appeal directly to their expertise to help us read, rate, and talk about books.

preferably matched up with their own reading interests (mysteries to mystery fans, etc.). The reviewer is asked to read the entire book, compose and post a three-sentence review, a ranking (of up to five stars), and any “read-alike” information (that is, “If you love Dick Francis, you’ll enjoy this horse-race-related suspense story”). Reviewers, who may themselves be ranked by the community, sign their names. A combination of all this enables our built-in recommendation engine to suggest titles of likely interest.

9. We incorporate these titles in a “stream” of local authors. That is, patrons can browse electronic carousels on library displays or through library apps to see what the community is creating. Alternatively, through subject and tag facets, this local content can be interfiled with other content.

10. Annually, the reviewers grant “best of” awards. Best New Author, Best Adult Fiction, Best Children’s Book. Or perhaps, Best Book Cover or Best Editor. The library hosts an award ceremony, with prizes. One prize might be support for national promotion of the ebook. In this way, we begin to boost our best writers up to national prominence. The next bestseller might come from our own backyard. The success story of 2012—*Fifty Shades of Grey*—didn’t originate in the commercial world. That’s why some publishers are now announcing their own self-publishing ventures. But why shouldn’t libraries create stables of promising new talent too?

Many of our readers will be content to sample broader cultural offerings. Others will be keen to see what their own community is thinking and writing about. Still others will make the move from consumers to creators. But in all these scenarios, the library is in the center, deeply engaging its community in intellectual content.

Backing up: How we got here

I have presented this vision as fully realized. At DCL, I think we really can roll this out in the coming year. But in truth, this represents the final step in a three-phase process.

Before a library can adopt this new role, it must first:

1. **Establish a technical infrastructure.** There are at least three approaches. First, a library might choose some vendor to host and enable the discovery of local content (Autographics has announced such a project). But do we need a middleman? Second, a library might choose to invest in its own hardware, software, and telecommunications capacity to do that. This is the Douglas County model, which is up and running, and Queens (N.Y.) Public Library is launching its own version of this. Third, libraries might team up to invest in such a setup together. This is what the consortium Marmot has done in Colorado, and Califa has done in California. For libraries that already operate their own servers and networks, this is a signifi-

cant but not prohibitively expensive task. For libraries starting from scratch, the assistance of state libraries and federal grants may be necessary. In any case, I think this phase is the work of at least a year.

2. **Build new systems of publisher relations, acquisitions, and workflow.** DCL has contracted for the development of an acquisition system to better integrate the compilation of catalogs from mid-list, independent, and small publishers not currently carried by our distributors. We’re beta testing it. When it’s complete, we hope other libraries will adopt it. We are eager to share all the data we have already harvested or created. But working directly with publishers is different than working through a distributor. It requires the thoughtful reconsideration of many longstanding processes. It’s fair to say that this deconstruction and reconstruction of workflow is worth a year in itself. But some of it may run parallel with the first phase.

3. **Manage demand.** To date, libraries mostly respond to demand, and that demand is dictated by the advertising budgets of the Big Six. But it seems clear that the annual output of new titles by independent and self-publishers is already at least twice that of mainstream commercial publishing. If libraries want to stay in the game of sampling the intellectual content of our times, we have to find a way to acquire far more than our current budgets allow. I believe what’s likely to work is a combination of the process I outlined above with a broad outreach to the small and independent publishers eager to work with us.

Opportunities ahead

Over the past year, my staff has spoken with hundreds of authors and publishers. The times are changing. And of course, there’s more to content creation than just books. There’s short-form fiction and nonfiction. There’s local journalism and local history. And there are endless vistas beyond print: music, video, collaborative projects yet undreamed.

Nonetheless, there is a burst of enthusiasm in the publishing world outside the Big Six—a chance to embrace the disruptive change, the creative destruction, that always precedes the establishment of a new and more inclusive order. In such a time, like the libraries of more than a century ago, we have the opportunity to claim important new status in the influence over and the curation of our culture. Will we take it? ■



JAMES LARUE is director of the Douglas County (Colo.) Libraries and a member of ALA’s Digital Content and Libraries Working Group.



The UNPACHER

Newspapers, magazines, and subcompact publishing

By Peter Brantley

Snow Fall. After several years of hypothetical discussion about the possibilities of transmedia, it took a sportswriter working for a newspaper to demonstrate the power of internet-based publishing. In a single blow, the *New York Times* reset the bar for interactive online narratives. *Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek* is a gripping story of a mountain disaster in the northwestern United States that claimed the lives of several experienced skiers.

A watercolor illustration of a snowy mountain landscape. The scene features rolling hills and mountains covered in snow, with several evergreen trees scattered across the slopes. The color palette is soft, with light blues, greens, and browns. The text 'RAGED' is overlaid on the upper part of the image.

RAGED

Book

Written by the *New York Times* sports reporter John Branch and made available as a “short” for purchase at [Byliner](#) (a digital magazine that publishes works that can be read in two hours or less), the story was simultaneously presented as a gripping web-based site with the involvement of the *Times*’ web development group.

As *The Economist*’s Lean Back 2.0 blog wrote, “John Branch’s article ... has been turned into a beautiful reading experience through the use of a clean layout, interactive maps, inlaid videos, and graphics that move as you scroll. The result is an online reading experience like no other.” The *Times*’ executive editor, Jill Abramson, wrote a letter to the staff saying, “Rarely have we been able to create a compelling destination outside the homepage that was so engaging in such a short period of time on the web.”

For lovers of books—and, more generally, stories—the future presents a growing cornucopia of representations for how we communicate with others. But they will not be books as we have known them. Like *Snow Fall*, they will inevitably trend in new directions. When the new journalism project Matter was launched in November 2012, designer Craig Mod quoted its developers as observing that Matter “isn’t quite a website, it’s not really a magazine, and it’s not exactly a book publisher either.”

Mod’s clean Bauhaus-style aesthetic of “[subcompact publishing](#)” has already started to influence new entrants in digital serial publications, such as *Maura Magazine*, a vehicle for music writer Maura Johnston. They join the prototype of “[mini-mag](#)” efforts such as *The Magazine*, created by Marco Arment, the developer of Instapaper.

In a December 2012 interview with TV host Charlie Rose, publishing pioneer Tim O’Reilly remarked, “I don’t really [care] if literary novels go away.” An English major and literature lover, O’Reilly made his remarks in the context of observing that “no one owes [publishers] continuation of the current players and business model,” and that we will find ways of using the technology we have at hand to tell stories to one another in the most compelling ways we can imagine. Inevitably, much of the old world of print books will be left behind. How quickly this will change, and how much it will matter to readers and authors, are not yet knowable.

The internet-based book

Once we started creating tools to make the construction of websites easier, it was only a matter of time before authors and storytellers started to reach for the same tools in their craft. The web bypasses several centuries of slow, plodding innovation in supply chain management focused on moving books from one place to another. More fundamentally, the web eliminates almost every major historical barrier to the selling and distribution of media. There are no trucks; no airplanes; no printing on paper or pressing of CDs, DVDs, or Blu-rays; no tape or film to

wind onto reels. No buildings to lease, rent, or buy to warehouse books and music; no clerks to hire; no parking lots to keep paved. All of that is gone.

Traditional publishers find themselves in a new world unlike anything they have encountered before. If, to use an analogy, they were in the automotive industry, it is not as if an upstart suddenly entered the market with a turbine engine more efficient and cost-effective than the gas piston engine, or it was realized that three wheels could be superior to four. This kind of innovation could be met with a response. Rather, it is as if suddenly it was possible to 3D-print personal flying machines, and the plans were being sold on Amazon and available on BitTorrent. That is a level of disruption wholly beyond the event horizon of automotive manufacturers, beyond their ability to competitively respond. And thus is the open web to Random House.

The new generation of publishing is being developed by software engineers and the technologically literate, born of a generation comfortable with the mobile internet, drawn to the challenge of telling stories with browsers and websites. This new publishing ecosystem owes little or nothing to entrenched industry players. The open web is whispering out of the shadows of the future, through stories such as *Snow Fall*, that trade publishers have lost their lock on how stories are built and shared. Already, academic publishing has seen highly successful start-ups such as F1000, Figshare, Hypothes.is (where I work), PeerJ, PLOS, and many others emerge that work around, instead of with, the existing publishing industry, creating their own greenfield network of partnerships and collaborations.

Dissolving into the web

Current ebook design presumes that all the contents of a work are loaded into a single file package, downloadable to a reading system that might be a smartphone, tablet, or dedicated e-reader. As publishers attempt to integrate more and more features into the ebook (such as audio segments, enhanced maps, or video interviews with the author), book packages threaten to grow to unsupportable levels. More and more often, publishers are confronting the desire to create books that have swollen from 300 KB to 600 MB—files so large they would threaten to overwhelm even a current tablet’s memory with a library as small as a 19th-century homesteader’s.

EPub and Kindle ebooks were never intended to be fully functioning websites, but rather utilized subsets of the web’s markup language in a file format that is divorced from the web’s heritage as server-based information, retrievable by remote client computers. Every ebook is its own broken website, an island unto itself, divorced from the web’s fabric.

In February 2013 the W3C—the web standards organization—held a two-day summit in New York in concert with the Book Industry Study Group and the Interna-

tional Digital Publishing Forum entitled “Ebooks: Great Expectations for Web Standards,” intended to discuss how open web standards such as HTML5, CSS3, SVG, XML, and RDF could be further integrated into ebook production.

The pressure to break the current packaging of books was notable in proposal entries by vendors such as Kobo, which noted this in [its abstract](#):

“It is Kobo’s view that having such functionality available only within a single ebook ... is not ideal, and that a better solution would be to package each self-contained piece of ancillary content in its own package. The main ebook could then have links to optional auxiliary packages to make use of their features, which provides a number of benefits to all involved.”

Kobo anticipates a near-term future where the current packaging of an ebook is retained *in extremis*, albeit one with links to external content that enhance the book at the reader’s election. Breaking apart the book in this fashion leads inexorably toward a book in pieces—ultimately, a book that exists in separate components bound together through hypertext links. Ultimately we can envision a book that cannot live comfortably as a central downloaded package with simple supporting outriggers of alternative or enhanced content. Publishing upstarts will design ebooks with features so dependent on web technologies that they can be read only with a full-fledged web-rendering engine—either a consumer browser or one embedded in a reading application.

The publishing platform of the future is the network. The integrity of the book will wind up broken apart as a by-product.

The library as web host

Libraries have been just as reliant as traditional publishers on the “thingness” of books, and whatever *Sturm und Drang* exists today on the matter of whether libraries can license or purchase ebooks to make them available to their patrons, the longer-term trends about that have far more impact on our understanding of what a library provides.

No library has ever accumulated the sum store of human knowledge. However, the world of printed books dangled the alluring possibility that any knowledge could be purchased at the library’s choosing, and then shared freely with its community. That Eden, rendered digitally, is the same one on which current libraries base their expectations for ebook availability. With apologies to Gandalf and Tolkien, this wistful presumption is a “far green country” that will remain forever obscured by “the grey rain curtain of this world.”

Ebooks of the future will be represented as websites; mini-mags that present serial narratives; and as geo-aware encounters that appear in our augmented reality (AR) glasses as we wander around our cities. These will not be

things that libraries buy or license from OverDrive; they won’t get checked out on Kindles; nor will they disappear in two weeks. These will be stories, lessons, and entertainment that cross media thresholds with an alacrity never before seen, and libraries will be able to “collect” such materials only with as much ease as they might collect the web. These materials will not be available for borrowing as we understand that term.

Libraries do subscribe to content, however. Magazines, periodicals of all stripes, databases, and online encyclopedias have all been made available through subscription licenses. To the extent that the stories within our books wind up being represented on the web, some portion of those may be available through subscription. It is not difficult to imagine Byliner or The Atavist making their content available to libraries by modifying a subscription model they already have in place for consumers. Likewise, it would be entirely imaginable for the *New York Times* to create a new payment model for accessing enhanced web narratives such as *Snow Fall*. This, too, could be made available to libraries.

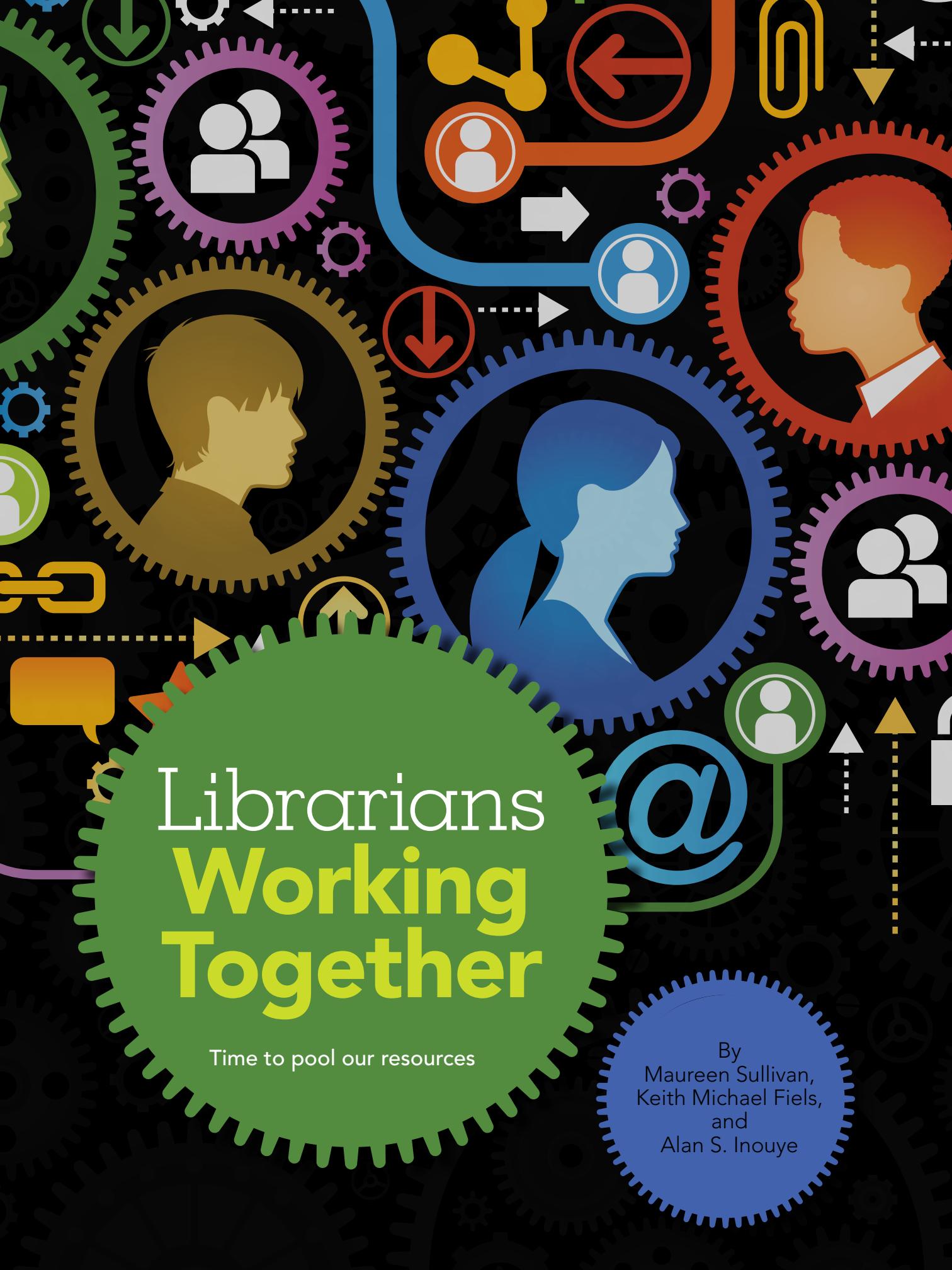
Libraries need to be heads-up through this transition. Although some amount of literature will persist in packaged components such as ePubs available through service providers like 3M, OverDrive, and Baker & Taylor, web-based literature has as little place for them as it does for Barnes & Noble bookstores. It is a good moment for libraries to engage directly with these new providers of literature such as the *New York Times*, *The Magazine*, and Matter. This generation of librarians must articulate a place for libraries amid the literature of the web.

Some things must be given up, and others must be developed. The collection and preservation of the world’s literature is increasingly a job that will be performed by national and research libraries through web archiving, not demand deposit. Likewise, preservation will have to incorporate AR information layers such as Atlas Obscura as well as Twitter feeds, and game experiences that edge into holodeck-like encounters, à la *Star Trek*.

For public libraries, the emphasis must be on reimagining what it means to partner with a community, bridging the resources of the web with the needs, voices, and data from within the community. Ultimately, the new generation of publishing stems from the energies of our communities just as much as our libraries. We now have a new opportunity to join them. ■



PETER BRANTLEY is director of Scholarly Communication for Hypothes.is.



Librarians Working Together

Time to pool our resources

By
Maureen Sullivan,
Keith Michael Fiels,
and
Alan S. Inouye

The only certainty in the library community is that we live in uncertain times.

Buffeted by technological turbulence, the very roles and functions of libraries are up for reexamination and reinvention, as evidenced by the articles in this supplement. But the truly fundamental change is a shift in foundational relationships—[as is a hallmark in revolutions](#). We can, understandably, become obsessed with equitable ebook licensing terms and the integration of digital-content discoverability into library systems.



However, underlying these changes is the fact that significant aspects of the decision-making that library managers control have moved into the hands of the executives of publishing houses, distributor companies, and other organizations outside of the library community. This changing landscape necessitates that the library community develop fundamentally different ways of operating.

In the face of this uncertainty, we observe some movement toward increasing communication, cooperation, and collaboration among members of this community. In the world of ebooks, notable collaborations include the Digital Public Library of America, the ReadersFirst Initiative, OCLC's Big Shift project, and ALA's own Digital Content and Libraries Working Group (DCWG). Each effort successfully brings together many local library leaders as well as representatives from national and regional library organizations.

Also supportive of broader library efforts to collaborate is the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which was prescient in its strategy shift to em-

phasize the development of organizational infrastructure and collaborative capacity for the library community. The Edge public library benchmarks initiative is one such funded effort. The Digital Public Library of America also represents an important, visible, large-scale collaborative undertaking in the digital content space.

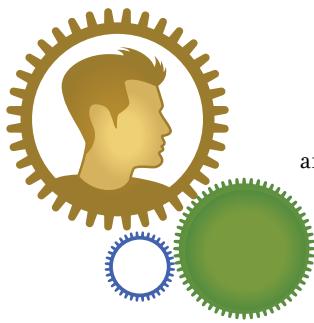
Our constituents need common expectations about their experience. Working in library silos will not lead to easy-to-use or effective services.

This collaborative movement is essential. The magnitude of what we need to do in the coming months and years (articles in this supplement characterize some of this work) is staggering. No one organization has the resources to lead, coordinate, or even meaningfully participate in every facet of the necessary work ahead. There is strength in our numbers, and we cannot afford to dupli-

cate efforts or work at cross purposes.

Library organizations are eclectic. We have different resources, core competencies, staff expertise, and constituencies. Some organizations have greater research capabilities, while others are better suited for external communications and advocacy. Some have staying power and offer better homes for longer-term efforts and sustainability, while others may be best at supporting targeted projects. We need to determine our roles carefully to ensure that we are doing work to which we are best suited. For example, in the past year ALA took on the national bully pulpit role, a natural fit for the largest library association in the world and a strong voice for libraries in both traditional and emerging media.

We are yet in the early stages of developing power collaborations. We need interoperability based on standards, best practices, and compatible work processes. Our constituents need common expectations about library services. It won't do for a user to encounter a radically different experience in going from one library to



another. Working in library silos will not lead to easy-to-use or effective services.

There are fiscal tensions. Communication, cooperation, and collaboration are not cost-free. Experience has proven that these costs can be substantial. Many cooks in the kitchen may lead to compromise and bureaucracy, potentially inhibiting creativity and innovation. Thus, we must be strategic and selective in how

we work together. However, while we players in the library community must work together and keep one another informed, we are not suggesting some kind of mega-coordinating central organization.

We are eager to continue our efforts to communicate through existing channels. We invite libraries, non-profit library organizations, and researchers to submit information and reports about their digital efforts to dcwg-input@ala.org; DCWG will use what has been provided to create posts for possible inclusion in *American*

Libraries' E-Content blog (americanlibrariesmagazine.org/e-content), the central communications mechanism of ALA's DCWG.

There has been progress. Since the [second American Libraries supplement](#) on ebooks and digital content was published in mid-2012, four of the Big Six publishers—Hachette Book Group, Penguin, Macmillan, and Simon & Schuster—have initiated pilot library ebook programs. It's true that these outcomes are far from ideal, but they are steps in the right direction. Home-grown endeavors within the library community continue to blossom and expand, with the seemingly tireless James LaRue, director of Douglas County (Colo.) Libraries, leading the way. But we must be realistic: In this time of exploration and experimentation, not every development will be in our favor and not every new initiative or project will succeed.

Let us remind ourselves of library values, which are at the core of our communities of practice. Librarians are among the most trusted professionals in society. Our mission remains critical, as evidenced by the numerous library supporters across the country who continue to stand with us. Technological advances provide, at least in theory, the potential for much improved library service in a world increasingly dominated by profit-driven information providers. For everyone's sake, we must figure out how to convert this theory to practice by strategically pooling and leveraging our strengths. ■

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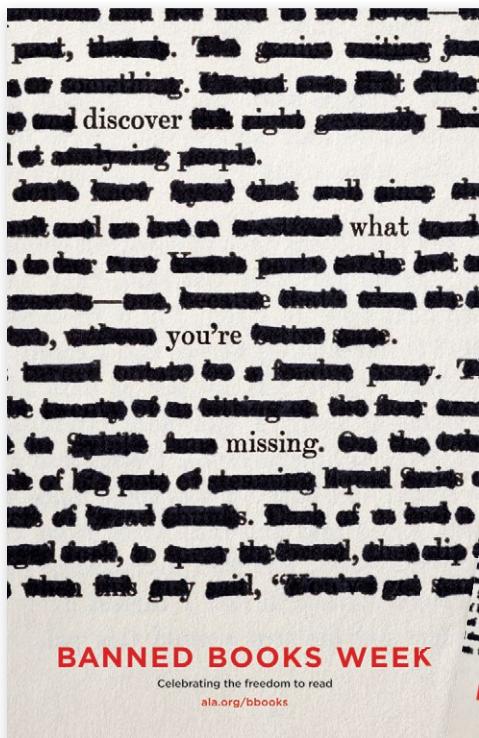
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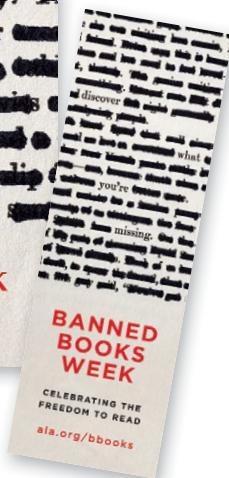
MAUREEN SULLIVAN is ALA president. KEITH MICHAEL FIELS is ALA executive director. ALAN S. INOUE is director of ALA's Office for Information Technology Policy.

Banned Books Week

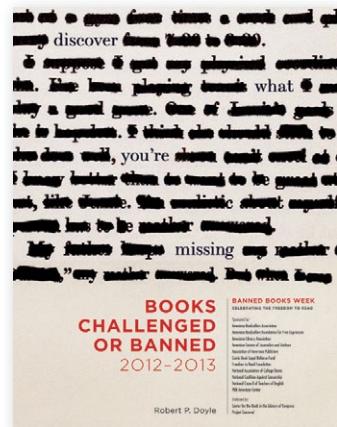
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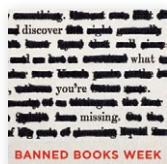
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