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Against the Grain

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"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

What's the Use? Perspectives on Usage Statistics Across the Information Industry

by **Rossi Morris** (Media Relations Coordinator, EBSCO) <rmorris@ebsco.com>

Librarians are dedicated to making sound collection development decisions that are in the best interest of the communities they serve. But with the explosive growth of electronic resources and widespread budget and staff cuts, collection development has evolved into a laborious and complex process for librarians tasked with providing the most valuable resources to their users.

In response to these increased demands, innovative tools have been created and new standards have been established to help librarians better measure the value of the resources within their collection — and gathering and analyzing usage data are the staple measures for making well-informed collection development decisions.

The role of usage in collection development is not news. What is noteworthy and worth discussing, however, is the story behind each collection development decision — the challenges, the successes.

Usage remains part of the ongoing dialogue on discussion lists and blogs, and there is no shortage of conference tracts and sessions focused on how to manage, collect, and base decisions on it. When I approached *Against the Grain* Editor **Katina Strauch** earlier in 2012, my goal was to share with *ATG* readers how **EBSCO** continues to work alongside librarians to help them get a better handle on usage gathering, loading, and reporting so they can devote more time to building a collection that will meet the objectives of their institutions and meet the research needs of their end users.

Katina had a bigger idea, however. Her suggestion: for the September 2012 issue of *ATG*, pull together a collection of articles with usage as the prevailing topic. It could feature articles from individuals in the various information industry sectors — libraries, vendors, and publishers — all of whom would provide unique perspectives about usage and the role it plays in their day-to-day functions. It also could include results and commentary from a survey of *ATG* readers on a variety of topics concerning usage.

This issue aims to do just that. It goes behind the scenes to show what librarians are doing to make well-founded collection development decisions, particularly in terms of usage analysis. It explains some of the motivating factors for beginning a usage-analysis strategy and the groundwork necessary for implementation. It also notes what librarians are measuring and why, in addition to collection goals; the challenges encountered; and the tools, methods, or systems employed to track usage and gather data. Ultimately, this issue aims to reveal what librarians do with this data after it is collected — and the benefit it provides to the library and its users.

If Rumors Were Horses

Fall is getting off to a great start! Lots of Rumors to report!

Did y'all hear about **Roger Schonfeld** getting stuck in an elevator in Manhattan? This happened August 28, 2012. Talk about dramatic! The **New York Fire Department** had to break through the side of the elevator to get him out, and it took 45 minutes. And like superman **Roger** had to jump to get out! Gosh! Here is a link to **Roger**'s **Facebook** page. Scroll down to August 28th (can't send a direct link to that date) and there are several posts and pictures. Thanks to **Leah Hinds** for keeping us informed. And glad you are... out of the elevator, **Roger**!

http://www.facebook.com/roger.schonfeld
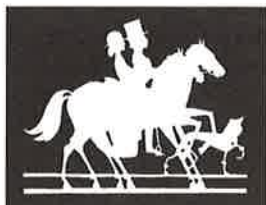
I was shocked to hear that the awesome **Francine Fialkoff**, editor-in-chief of *Library Journal* is leaving *LJ* effective September 1 (Yikes, that was yesterday!). **Francine** has been at *LJ* for 35 years including 15 as editor-in-chief. Under her watch, many significant changes have taken place at *LJ*. She started **Movers & Shakers**, **Library by Design**, **Best Small Library in America**, the *LJ* **Teaching Award**, **Librarian of the Year** and **Library of the Year**, to name just a few innovations.

Effective immediately, *LJ's* executive editor **Michael Kelley** <mkelley@mediasourceinc.com> will take over as interim editor-in-chief. **Francine** plans to stay in the library world and can be reached at <ffialkoff@gmail.com>. Her final editorial will appear in the

The Benefit of Getting Everyone on the Same Page When it Comes to Usage Statistics

by **Russell Richey** (Marketing Research Manager, EBSCO Industries)

As a part of this special issue of *Against the Grain (ATG)* focusing on usage statistics, Editor **Katina Strauch** asked me to collaborate on a survey of *ATG* readers regarding the role of usage statistics in the library.

Over the 20-plus years I've spent as a marketing researcher, I've had the privilege of conducting studies across a fantastically diverse range of industries and product segments: hunting equipment, kitchen appliances, health-care providers, and sports teams, to mention a few.

So often in conversation, say, over lunch with friends, the question "What are you studying these days?" will come up. Frequently, the subject matter is relevant, if not dear, to those at the table, and it can set up lively discussions during which I get serendipitous, qualitative research insights — and someone may pick up the meal tab, as well!

Over the past few months, though, when friends or family have asked about the studies I'd been conducting and I mentioned that one really interesting project involved, basically, collecting statistics about how people use statistics, the universal response was a blank stare along with a commiserating response: "Wow ... sorry to hear about that."

What my well-meaning sympathizers may not have realized is just how relevant usage statistics are to their everyday lives — from having an impact on the resources available to their college-attending daughters and sons to providing the information scholars and scientists depend on for research that ultimately shapes the consumers' world. Indeed, the study of usage statistics is significant to far more than most people think. And, actually, studying statistics about statistics is fairly fascinating. Here's what our recent survey of *ATG* readers revealed.

Survey Methodology and Demographics

The survey questionnaire was developed by the **EBSCO** Corporate Communications department and *ATG*, with input and advice from **National Information Standards Organization (NISO)** Executive Director **Todd Carpenter**; **Counting Online Usage of Networked Electronic Resources (COUNTER)** Project Director **Peter Shepherd**; and **EBSCO Information Services** Chief Strategist for E-Resource Access and Management Services **Oliver Pesch**.

ATG's subscriber base was invited via email to participate in the Web-based survey. In all, 2,469 invites were sent, and 333 respondents answered; only practicing librarians were allowed to participate in the survey project. In the initial survey question, those who identified themselves as publishers, vendors, and consultants were redirected to the end of the survey, where they could still register for the survey prize-drawing: one of two Nook Tablets.

The survey was fielded from June 6, 2012, to June 18, 2012; 272 qualified respondents participated (not all respondents answered all survey questions, however), for a general margin of error of +/– 5.6% at a 95% confidence interval.

## Study Participants Were Experienced and Knowledgeable

Almost nine in ten respondents (86%) were college- or university-based, with the remainder being a cross-section of library professionals working in medical, law, corporate, or government environments. These librarians reported a range of user-base sizes, from smaller user bases ("0 – 2,500 users," 16%) to large institutions ("more than 25,000 users," 27%).

Those answering the survey were highly experienced: 71% had spent 10 or more years as a library professional. They also represented a variety of roles, including director or assistant director, serials librarian, e-resources librarian, acquisitions librarian, and collection development or collection management librarian. The group also was quite experienced with online journal collections: 65% either were "solely responsible" or "shared responsibility" for online journal purchasing and cancelation decisions, while another 26% indicated that they provided "input and feedback" to decision-makers regarding online journal purchasing and cancelling decisions.

What Are Librarians Analyzing — and Why?

Most of the librarians responding to our survey (80%) are analyzing at least a portion of their online journal holdings, with 37% indicating that they analyze usage statistics for "75% to 100%" of their holdings and another quarter (25%) noting that they analyze usage statistics for at least "50 to 75%" of their holdings. (See Figure 1, below.)

FIGURE 1: Percentage of Online Journal Holdings Currently Being Analyzed Using Usage Statistics or Other Metrics

- 75% – 100%
- 50% – 75%
- 25% – 50%
- 0% – 25%
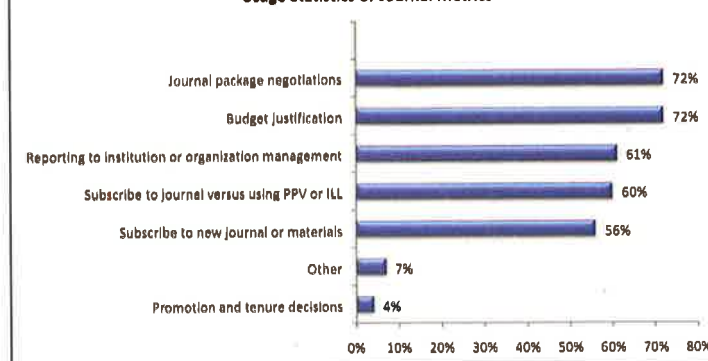- Do not analyze online journal holdings
- Don't know
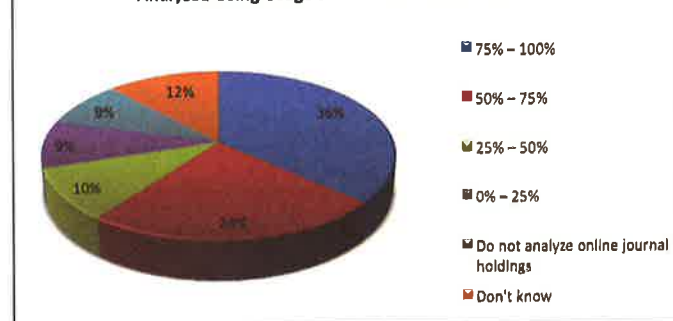
Respondents were asked an open-ended question about the factors driving the level of current analysis. Those whose libraries had lower analysis levels across their online journal holdings often reported that many of their online journals did not provide readily-accessible statistics or offered no statistics at all; others cited a lack of personnel resources or low institutional interest in usage statistics analysis.

The qualitative feedback from these librarians about their motivations for analyzing usage statistics also reveals the need for deeper understanding of the value of the holding. One librarian explained that the goal of analysis was to "prove to our stakeholders ... that we are good stewards of the money and that we actually use the materials."

And in this era of tight budgets, most libraries clearly aren't likely to offer free rides to journals that don't demonstrate an acceptable performance for the expenditure. "We analyze to make sure our journals are being used," another librarian noted. "If they are not, we consider cancelling them to get access to journals that will get used."

The new paradigm of performance accountability for journals is evidenced by the decisions or actions of librarians in light of usage statistics or journal metrics. Among respondents to our survey, 98% reported that their library used usage statistics to make "cancellation and/or renewal decisions," 72% indicated that they employed usage statistics for "journal package negotiations," and 72% said usage statistics were factored into "budget justifications." (See Figure 2, below.)

FIGURE 2: Decisions Made with the Input of Usage Statistics or Journal Metrics

Decision	Percentage
Journal package negotiations	72%
Budget Justification	72%
Reporting to institution or organization management	61%
Subscribe to journal versus using PPV or ILL	60%
Subscribe to new journal or materials	56%
Other	7%
Promotion and tenure decisions	4%

The statistic — or metric — most used by librarians who responded to our survey was "COUNTER-compliant reports for full-text requests" (90%), with "cost per use" being a close second (87%). Other metrics frequently used for usage analysis by our respondents: "interlibrary loan/document requests" (68%), "non-COUNTER compliant full-text requests" (58%), "Journal Impact Factor" (39%), and "Journal Citation Reports" (31%).

Significantly, while a variety of statistics and metrics are increasingly being employed to help make online journal holdings decisions, a qualitative component is still important: 80% of study participants reported that "faculty recommendations and/or input" was used to make decisions about online journals. (See Figure 3, below.)

FIGURE 3: Metrics Used to Help Make Decisions Regarding Online Journal Holdings
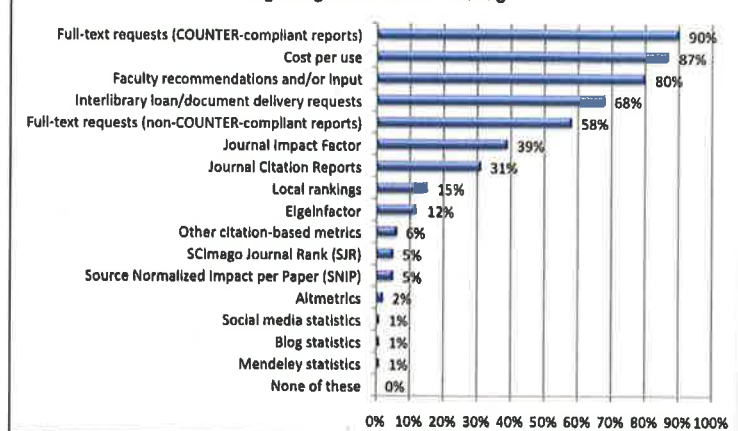
It Takes a Village to Dread It

The task of collecting usage data falls to a variety of job roles within the libraries of our survey respondents. It's no surprise that those with an "e-" in front of their job title are likely to be cozy with usage-stats spreadsheets, as 49% of participants reported that an e-resources librarian was responsible for collecting usage statistics. But at least some responsibility is shared by librarians in many other roles, including collection development and collection management librarians (26%), administrative staff (16%), serials librarians (12%), a director or an assistant director (11%), acquisitions librarians (9%), and third-party providers (8%).
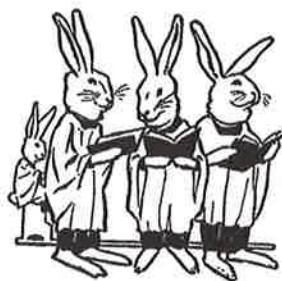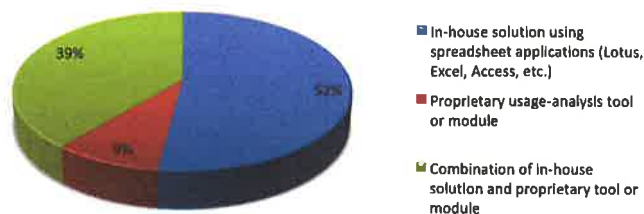
While the collection development and/or management librarians were most often cited (56%) as being responsible for analyzing journal-usage data, a wide range of job roles are sharing in the role of analyst. E-resources librarians (41%), directors or assistant directors (31%), acquisitions librarians (17%), and serials librarians (14%) all may be involved in analysis. Survey participants indicated that a multitude of others also may analyze data: open-ended responses to specify "Other" (22%) included teams and committees of various designations (electronic resources committee, collection development team, library collection council group, etc.), as well as individuals, such as subject librarians and faculty/departmental liaisons.

Homegrown Analytics Solutions Doing the Heavy Lifting

To process, analyze, and report online journal-usage data and statistics, most respondents reported that their libraries depend on an "in-house solution using spreadsheets" (52%) or a combination of in-house means and a proprietary usage-analysis tool (39%), such as **Swets** Scholarly Stats, **Serials Solutions** 360 Counter, or *EBSCONET Usage Consolidation*. (See Figure 4, top right.)


FIGURE 4: Primary method used to process, analyze, and report on online journal-usage statistics and metrics

- In-house solution using spreadsheet applications (Lotus, Excel, Access, etc.)
- Proprietary usage-analysis tool or module
- Combination of in-house solution and proprietary tool or module

Those using only a commercial, spreadsheet-based (Excel, Access, Lotus, etc.), homegrown solution to crunch and report usage data seem to be divided as to the effectiveness of this method. While 35% "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement "I'm satisfied with the in-house solution that our library currently uses," 20% either "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with the same statement and 18% at least "somewhat disagreed."

Respondents who reported using a proprietary usage-analysis tool seem to be somewhat underwhelmed by the performance of third-party systems, with only 5% indicating they were "totally satisfied" with their proprietary usage-analysis tool and another 51% saying they were "satisfied." However, the lack of high levels of overall dissatisfaction — 10% were "somewhat dissatisfied" and only 6% were "totally dissatisfied" — suggests that while proprietary solutions are not yet perfected, they do perform a job that librarians certainly value. (See Figure 5, below.)

FIGURE 5: Satisfaction with Library's Primary Proprietary Online Journal Usage-Analysis tool or Module

- Totally satisfied
- Generally satisfied
- Niether satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Totally unsatisfied
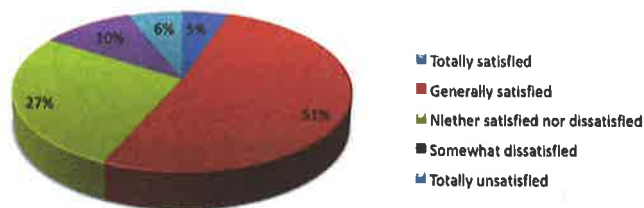
The Future of Usage Statistics: This All Better Get Better

It's evident to the librarians participating in this survey that library serials-collection decisions will be increasingly driven by usage statistics and other metrics. It's equally believed, however, that the complexities of collecting, processing, analyzing, and reporting data remains problematic and burdensome. Nonetheless, librarians appear to be shifting from a mindset of "something is better than nothing" to one of "I want more, and I want it to be more usable."

When participants were asked in an open-ended, wind-up question about what they envision for the future of usage statistics and metrics, one librarian from a large university offered the following observation: "It still needs to improve. The work involved in gathering, compiling, and analyzing stats is tremendous, and it needs to be simplified."

Experimentation is evidently the norm for many librarians, as they seek to successfully capture and leverage usage information, and they want relief from the frustration of speculative efforts. One law librarian said, "I hope that this will become more integrated with the resources and that we won't have to try so many different ways to capture statistics for different publishers."

Pelikan's Antidisambiguation — Size, Money, Risk

Column Editor: **Michael P. Pelikan** (Penn State) <mpp10@psu.edu>

The rise of the **iPad** has had a shaping influence on the business of publishing and selling digital content, among which reading material still has a role to play. I think it's too much to say that the **iPad** has defined the device market, insofar as it was, itself, produced in response to other devices that scooped out sections of beach, creating tidal pools. **Apple** took a look and thought the water looked pretty good. So, yes, the **iPad** (and its joined-at-the-hip little brother, the **iPhone**) have showed up at the beach, carrying a big shovel, and stomping with big feet across the carefully-created castles, aqueducts, and moats created by the smaller kids.

Apple can dominate, but it doesn't always initiate, despite the popular folklore. Nevertheless, once on the scene, all must respond, work around, or find some way to weather the presence on the playing field of the supremely confident rich kid.

Rich kids sometimes like to make their own rules. The 30% cut on any content sold through their boutique is a nice example. For the matter, so is the exclusivity of that boutique itself. True, while the other e-matter retailers compete with each other by offering service, storage, access, etc., to persuade you to "eat in" rather than "take out," only **Apple** never lets you leave the mall. For those who are willing to invest the time to learn a few rudimentary stitches, making movable the content one has licensed from these other boutiques is fairly simple. Perhaps I'm old-fashioned, but the idea of locally-held backup copies of content I've "purchased" quiets the mind. Now again, to be precise, I really don't mean "purchased" — we hardly purchase anything anymore — at least not digital stuff — I mean content for which I have paid a licensing fee and to which I therefore have access.

But back to the story. The tablet market existed before **Apple** did its can-

nonball into the pool. It just wasn't particularly fashionable. A tablet was functional, ideally-suited to certain kinds of uses, but nobody saw it as a fashion accessory. It wasn't the **iPad** that changed all that, however. It was the **Kindle**. For a couple to a few hundred dollars, you could have a very elegant, nicely-made device that could carry your entire library, consolidated into a single, slim device. Even better, you could buy a rainbow of covers and accessories to personalize your **Kindle**, to make it really say something about who you are. And best yet, at least from **Amazon's** perspective, you could shop for, purchase, and download new content anywhere, directly to the device, at impulse purchase pricing. All in all, a really good deal for everybody, even the publishers, once they gave up the fight and agreed to do it **Amazon's** way.

Apple doesn't like not being the flashiest dress on the red carpet. If **Amazon** bared a shoulder, **Apple** was, by golly, going to show just how far a neckline could be made to plunge, and the laws of physics be damned.

Out came the **iPad** — the device that made it not only fashionable to carry a tablet, but made it mandatory, at least, if one wished to remain among the elect. Oh, and you content providers, we're offering you the most desirable address on the street, so a 30% cut to the store is a bargain — really it is, Dears, for after all, that's simply how the game is played, and we all know it.

Well, the **iPad** was nice, though a bit spendy for the consumer. Not professional laptop spendy, not quite, but a little more than consumer camera spendy. More than simply an impulse purchase, yet not entirely out of reach — so really, it was more like a life decision: one with a comparatively modest financial threshold for

entry, but promising proportionally great rewards from a lifestyle perspective. Really a no-brainer. One had to have one.

After all, it could do what the **Kindle** did, and so much more. Certainly, you could carry your entire library, but you could also surf the Web (in color, no less), buy music (from **iTunes**), and play games (purchased from **Apple**). Never mind that the **iPad's** battery life was measured in hours rather than weeks. Never mind that it was heavier than the **Kindle**, and bigger, too.

The vast and diverse capabilities of the **iPad** were a selling point, but there remained a market for devices centered on reading. The electrophoretic display of the **Kindle** was unsurpassed for readability, especially outdoors or anywhere the gleamingly shiny screen of the **iPad** became a liability rather than an asset. A friend of mine who was an early buyer of the **iPad** (but kept his **Kindle**) observed that the **iPad** was actually a multi-hundred-dollar mirror, which you could also use as a tablet under the right conditions.

Amazon, however, was quick to recognize the threat that the **iPad** represented — and so did **Barnes and Noble**, and **Sony** too, neither of whom I've actually forgotten to mention. In fact, it was **Barnes and Noble** who fired the first responding salvo with the introduction of the **Nook Color**. An **Android** device, actually, which brought **Google** into the story. **Google** has been there all along, really. **Android** smartphones had emerged as more than an irritant to **Apples** planned domination of the smartphone market — much more, in fact, a genuine threat. **Apple** wasn't the only player in the game in which smartphone users were using their smartphones like little tablets. **Barnes and Noble** and **Kindle** and **Sony** leapt in with **Android** apps, effectively turning your **Android** phone into a **Kindle**, a **Nook**, a **Sony Reader**, or all three.

Well, this was the point in the story at which the biggest pie fight in history (except

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The Benefit of Getting Everyone on the Same Page ...

The desire on the part of librarians for better access to COUNTER-compliant data from publishers was a standard echo across the feedback from the participants in our study. But some are looking beyond titles, packages, and publishers to discipline-level analytics. According to one subject librarian, the ability to integrate disciplinary data silos could, in turn, help eliminate budgetary silos.

Many librarians predicted a coming shift to pay-per-view models, which would reduce the need to rely on usage statistics analytics. A number of these librarians also noted that eBook usage statistics would soon be a key part of the overall conversation.

In addition, there seems to be ample room for vendors to improve proprietary usage-analysis tools. This vision was offered by a medical

school serials librarian, who summed up an ideal solution: "One day I could imagine the development of an integrated usage collection and analysis tool that relies on all the metrics described in this survey and can be used by librarians in determining journal value based on usage."

Some outlooks are a bit pessimistic. For instance, one collections development librarian foresees "continued spotty coverage, unreliable data collection, and lack of cooperation among vendors."

Despite the frustrations and challenges related to usage statistics and the means by which they are leveraged, the overall consensus is that improvement is inevitable in standardization and integration across the continuum. Where most agree, though, is that this evolution will require a partnering of libraries, publishers, and agents.

Ultimately, our *ATG* survey reveals that usage statistics will prove most useful — for librarians, students, researchers, and even my sympathetic friends — when all segments of the information industry get on the same page. 🐦