

Market of (Un)Limited Possibilities and Building e-book Collection in an Academic Library (a Case Study)

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Abstract: *In response of needs and demands of students of Courses in English Language organized by The University of Technology in Wrocław, Main Library of the University of Technology in Wrocław undertook creating a base of e-manuals. This paper presents a project of building E-books Collection as well as realisation of the project. Paper brings also a short description of e-book market in Poland – Suppliers offers and their commercial and economy policy. A lot of attention has also been paid to law issues, the usage of correct terminology, problems and relations between Suppliers and Library.*

[...] I spent the afternoon in a bookstore. There were no books in it. None had been printed for nearly half a century. And how I have looked forward to them, after the micro films that made up the library of the Prometheus! No such luck. No longer was it possible to browse among shelves, to weigh volumes in hand, to feel their heft, the promise of ponderous reading.

The bookstore resembled, instead, an electronic laboratory. The books were crystals with recorded contents. They can be read the aid of an opton, which was similar to a book but had only one page between the covers. At a touch, successive pages of the text appeared on it. But optons were little used, the sales-robot told me. The public preferred lectons - like lectons read out loud, they could be set to any voice, tempo, and modulation. Only scientific publications having a very limited distribution were still printed, on a plastic imitation paper.

Thus all my purchases fitted into one pocket, though there must have been almost three hundred titles. My handful of crystal corn - my books [...]

from *Return from the Stars*, by Stanislaw Lem, 1961

Digital (r)evolution – about e-books at a glance

Lem's vision of future book, cited in introduction, began to come true in 70's last century (decade after *Return from the Stars* first publication). In 1971 Michael S. Hart initiated at the University of Illinois program called *Project Gutenberg*, that for the purpose of its activity took digital archivization of printed books. First document, which was transferred into the memory of the computer was *United States Declaration of Independence*. Nowadays, Hart's initiative is being continued. According to data from 2010 - 33 thousand volumes have been digitized yet.

Another milestone in e-book's history was founding of *Voyager Company* in 1985. The firm had been selling content on CD's (including fiction literature such as Michael Crichtons *Jurrasic Park*). Since 1993 books have also been available on floppy disks. They were issued by *Digital Book Inc.* (texts were saved in dba - digital book format). Five years later, pioneering e-book readers - *SoftBook* and *Rocket EBook* - have entered the market. At this time also first online bookstore (*eReader.com*) and online library (*NetLibrary*) were launched. Soon, in response to the growing interest of "digital literature" among the readers, Harper Collins and Random House have expanded their offer with the electronic versions of their books.

In the following years, gradual improvements in devices for reading electronic publications could be observed. Their own e-readers released: *Sony* (*Sony Reader* - 2006), *Apple* (*iPhone* - 2007, *iPad* - 2010) and *Amazon* (*Kindle* - 2007, *Kindle2* - 2009, *Kindle3* - 2010).

The history of "future book" is now forty years old. In fact, however, last ten years were most important for the development of e-books and brought the most cutting-edge solutions¹.

There remains the matter of defining the electronic book. The proper terminology, like the object of the definition has not yet been definitively shaped. That's why, we can use *Wikipedia's* definition of e-book:

*is a text and image-based publication in digital form produced on, published by, and readable on computers or other digital devices (ex. e-reader)*²,

its basic features are:

- availability "anytime",
- hypertextuality,

¹ History of e-books on the basis of Infographics from *Ebook Friendly*. [available on-line 8 April 2011]. Available: <http://ebookfriendly.com/2011/02/27/40-years-of-e-books-infographic/>.

² *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. [available 8 April 2011]. Available: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-book>.

- convenient navigation and searching system,
- very good readability,
- access to the Internet (providing timeliness of information),
- ability to archive.

Situation in the electronic book market in Poland. Publishers, suppliers and libraries

Since 2004, the Main Library of the Wrocław University of Technology systematically enriched its collections with electronic books available through commercial platforms and distribution companies. At that time, the market of suppliers of e-publications in Poland has grown considerably. New aggregators have appeared suggesting new services, and even the publishers themselves have begun to recognize the possibility of cooperation with institutions from this part of Europe. Wider range, beyond the obvious benefits (such as a larger selection of titles, lower prices or better quality of service) also had caused Polish libraries previously unknown to them problems and difficulties.

One of the questions that currently librarians ask themselves in the context of e-books are: what to buy? which database will satisfy needs of our readers? Answers to these questions may be given by the test accesses. Service usage statistics form the basis for a final decision to purchase. However, it doesn't dispell all doubts. During the test access (for example - one month) most readers want to read the entire contents of the platform. That generates high statistics of its use. There are no guarantees that after the purchase, the base will be arousing so much interest.

At this point it is worth to make the general characteristics of e-books services on the Polish market. The first platforms of electronic books purchased by libraries took the form of closed multi- or single subject collections. They consisted both of popular titles with high substantive value - the so-called "locomotives", and less known publications, which can be diplomatically described as "trolleys". The model of "rigid package of titles, however, is slowly disappearing. Aggregators increasingly demonstrate greater flexibility and allow libraries to create their own collections or exchange unpopular e-books for another. Market also offers for libraries e-book rentals (based on the *OverDrive system*³). They are acting very much like the traditional ones - the reader gets temporary access to the title, and when the deadline passes, publication is being blocked. For fear of falling sales, many publishers,

however, don't agree to place their works in these types of services. Quite wrong - apart from the obvious promotion of e-reading, libraries are in fact able to increase the share of suppliers in the market (thereby reducing the influence of competition, which does not support the *OverDrive system*⁴).

Fear of loss of profits can probably also be an explanation for the reluctance of publishers to place on the platforms (even their own) electronic versions of news. This applies also, and perhaps above all, the latest issues of academic textbooks.

So far, before purchasing a database of e-books, the Main Library of the Wrocław University of Technology took into account the following criteria: the content of the collection, consumer reviews and price⁵. Currently, equally important is the demonstration of electronic acquisitions in the *ALEPH* integrated catalog. Only these e-books that are property of Library (or the titles included in the service subscribed by it constantly) are placed in catalog. The presence of electronic books in the catalog allows to show actual possession of the Library. It also helps the reader to reach the desired content, he does not have to search separately for each platform (decreasing the number of "clicks").

The ownership of e-books causes some confusions. This is due to irregular legal situation of electronic publishing. Both publishers and aggregators offer libraries the ability to enter into possession of such works (as opposed to the temporary subscription). How do the things look like in practice? E-book is a specific product, without a physical form. It is therefore not regarded as a traditional paper book, but rather as a service, which doesn't have an accession number. In addition, the purchase agreement entered into with contractors does not sufficiently protect the interests of libraries in the event of suspension or termination of services. Obtaining a warranty, other than the written assurances and declarations of the rights of ownership of e-books, turns out to be unrealistic. The Main Library of the Wrocław University of Technology during the implementation of a project - *E-books for English language study* - attempted to enforce from supplier security agreement in the form of a DVD containing copies of all purchased titles. Unsuccessfully. More about the project later in the paper.

The procedure for the purchase of electronic books, not only from the above-described reason, is more complicated and difficult than the acquisition of printed publications.

³ Lalik, E. *Used e-paper, e-books in libraries*. Spider's Web. [available: 14 April 2011]. Available: <http://www.spidersweb.pl/2011/03/zuzyty-e-papier-czyli-e-booki-w-bibliotekach.html>

⁴ Ibidem.

Especially if library needs don't coincide with what the market offers and none of the existing collection of e-books can fully satisfy its requirements. Some aggregators are prepared to bring specifically for the customer titles that aren't available on their platforms. That, however, extends the term of the contract. Purchasing individual publications from various suppliers (as well as directly from publishers) seems to be unprofitable. Libraries would then need to conclude separate agreements with all aggregators (or publishers), and - in most cases - carry annual fees for the use of their servers. It would look like a multiple paying for a product that is already owned by the library.

Academic library's position in negotiations with the contractor could be increased by participation in consortium set up to achieve specific purposes. Libraries have practiced this way of working for years. Consortia associate libraries with similar needs (and usually similar financial possibilities) to purchase electronic titles.

Interdisciplinary Centre for Mathematical and Computational Modelling, Warsaw University (ICM) supports Polish libraries. In addition to the role of the computing center, it is the principal national center to share databases and negotiate agreements with publishers. ICM coordinates *the Virtual Library of Science*, program implemented by *the Ministry of Science and Higher Education* to help Polish universities to get free access to commercial platforms of e-books and e-magazines⁶.

Commercial platforms of e-books in the Main Library of Wrocław University of Technology

The Main Library of Wrocław University of Technology currently provides its users with access to six services of electronic books - *Kirk-Othmer Encyclopedia of Chemical Technology*, *Knovel*, *Korpo.ibuk.pl*, *MyiLibrary*, *Safari* and *SpringerLink*⁷. Use of titles is available from and off campus computer network, after registering in the *system PROXY*.

First commercial e-books platform that Library had bought was *Safari Tech Books Online*. Subscription was launched in 2004, after a two-month test period, during which readers had free access to the base. Service gained their approval, as indicated in the statistics

⁵ Wojtasik, A. *Tradition and modernity in acquisition of foreign books in the Main Library of Wrocław University of Technology* [in:] "Tradition and modernity of academic libraries. Conference materials. Rzeszów-Czarna, 1-3 June 2005", s. 138-145. Available: <http://www.pbc.rzeszow.pl/Content/28/konferencja.pdf>

⁶ *Virtual Library of Science* - a project implemented by *the Ministry of Science and Higher Education* to support research, development and implementation in all areas of scientific knowledge and specialties in Poland. *Virtual Library of Science*. [available on-line: 11 kwietnia 2011]. Available: <http://wbn.edu.pl/>.

⁷ *Resources only for users from Wrocław University of Technology*. Wrocław University of Technology Home Site. [available on-line 8 April 2011]. Available: http://www.bg.pwr.wroc.pl/zasoby_wylacznie_dla_uzytkownikow_z_pwr.161.dhtml

of usage of books contained therein. At the moment, *Safari* offers over ten thousand titles from various publishers (including *Microsoft Press*, *Adobe Press*, *O'Reilly*, *Prentice Hall*), in such fields as computer science, management, marketing, etc. The platform operates as a lending library. Users decide which e-books can be borrowed (they can choose from the entire base resource⁸).

In 2006, the Library has purchased access to the database *Knovel*. The platform contains almost three thousand full-text publications from different publishers in all technical disciplines (total 22). It is very popular among readers, because of its multi-field nature and the fact that the entire collection is included in the *ALEPH* integrated library catalog.

In this catalog we can also find a specialized chemistry encyclopedia - *Kirk-Othmer Encyclopedia of Chemical Technology*. The Main Library of the Wrocław University of Technology has been subscribing the electronic edition of this work since 2008⁹. In March 2011, the Library has bought permanent access including the monthly updates.

In 2008, Library has also purchased the access on an annual subscription to the first polish electronic books base - *ibuk.pl corporate version*. The collection contains currently (as of April 2011) approximately 700 titles in the field of economic sciences, mathematics and natural sciences and information issued by publishers such as *Polish Scientific Publishers PWN*, *Mikom*, *Scientific and Technical Publishers* and *Transport and Communication Publishers*¹⁰.

Another database of e-books that can be used by employees and students of Wrocław University of Technology is *MyiLibrary*. Library has acquired so far ownership of 405 electronic books offered by the platform. The first purchase took place in 2008 (93 items), the next one in 2009 (91 items). In 2011 within the project E-books for English language courses 221 titles has been bought. Publications from the *MiL* base have been included in the *ALEPH* integrated library catalog¹¹ (like *Knovel*, and *Kirk-Othmer Encyclopedia*).

⁸ Wojtasik, A. *Tradition and modernity in acquisition of foreign books in the Main Library of Wrocław University of Technology* [in:] "Tradition and modernity of academic libraries. Conference materials. Rzeszów-Czarna, 1-3 June 2005", s. 138-145. Available: <http://www.pbc.rzeszow.pl/Content/28/konferencja.pdf>

⁹ Wojtasik, A. *User satisfaction with the use of commercial bases with foreign electronic books* [unreleased].

¹⁰ Dudziak, D., Iwańska M. *Korpo.ibuk.pl – first polish service with electronic books for libraries* [in:] „Wrocław Meetings of the Polonia Librarians. Conference materials” 2008, s. 156-171. Available: <http://www.dbc.wroc.pl/dlibra/doccontent?id=2233&dirids=1>

¹¹ Starosta, B. *The use of bibliographic records of e-books from MyiLibrary in the Main Library University of Technology* [in:] „Second Wrocław Meetings of the Polonia Librarians. Conference materials” 2009, s. 195-203. Available: <http://www.dbc.wroc.pl/dlibra/doccontent?id=4051&dirids=1>

Library's electronic collection is complemented with *SpringerLink*. It includes more than three thousand titles issued by *Springer* in 2005, and acquired under a contract between the publisher and *the Virtual Library of Science (ICM)*.

Development of collection of e-books for studies in English

In the first half of 2010, Main Library of Wrocław University of Technology started a project - *E-books for English language studies*. The purpose of the project is to create an electronic textbooks database for the Master's degree courses in English. These studies are conducted under the program - *Development of potential and educational offer at Wrocław University of Technology*. This program is entirely funded by *the European Social Fund*. In the current academic year 18 specialties on 11 faculties have been opened, including, for example: Civil Engineering, Medicinal Chemistry, Refrigeration and Cryogenics, Internet Engineering, Mining and Power Engineering. Studies organisers have undertaken to equip each participant with a set of required course textbooks in the printed version. E-books purchased by the Library complement the educational materials offered by the creators of studies.

The first phase of building an electronic textbooks database was to draw up a preliminary list of desired titles. That list was compiled by the lecturers and tutors of courses. A group of potential co-ordinators was created on the basis of websites of individual departments and the information obtained from managers of the faculty libraries. Most of the chosen in this way people took part in the library initiative. In September 2010 an initial list of e-books had approximately 100 items.

The second phase of the project was to choose an appropriate base and supplier. The decision was influenced by the following factors:

- thematic compliance between platform's content and a list of suggested titles,
- preferred purchase model – the Library wanted to have these e-books to own; only that option guarantees freedom to dispose of the title (of course under a license agreement) and possibility of including publication in the Library collection and reporting it in the integrated catalog¹².

Two bases - *Ebrary* and *MyiLibrary* fulfilled these conditions. Project coordinators had to choose one of these services.

¹² Bejnar Ł. *Digital reader – futurists' dream come true* [in:] „Between a hybrid and digital. Conference materials - II Conference of Wrocław Librarians' Corporation”, 2010, s. 29-35. Available:

From 6 October to 6 November 2010, students and employees of the Wrocław University of Technology were able to use nearly 50 thousand electronic books placed on the *Ebrary* platform (*Academic Complete collection*). Throughout the trial period users (not only the project coordinators) sent their proposals of publications which they believed should be included in the library's e-resources.

In the case of *MyiLibrary* - access test was not necessary. The base is well known among customers of the Library (since 2008 the Library have bought items from this platform). Instead of the test access, coordinators received a full list of sorted by theme publications, available via the *MyiLibrary* to choose from. Coordinators could send their proposals of titles - as in the case of *Ebrary* - from 6 October to 6 November.

Readers and coordinators have chosen *MyiLibrary*. Most of the applications, which Library received, concerned electronic books from this service.

The next phase of the project was to draw the final list of e-books to purchase. It contained items from initial list and those that were sent during the trial period. The list consisted of over 400 titles. 221 remained after the selection. The Library rejected publications not available on *MiL* (but available on publishers' platforms).

Collection of 221 e-books from *MyiLibrary* was purchased in March 2011. All of the titles are already available to readers. Soon, these publications will be also included in the integrated catalog (the Library has received a set of descriptions of acquired titles in *MARC 21*).

Summary

Future belongs to e-books. The moment of final transformation of traditional and hybrid libraries into digital is not as remote as it seemed 10 years ago. Transformation will proceed smoothly and "painlessly" only if the legal procedures related to the purchase of electronic titles were simplified. Aggregators and publishers must be also able to customize their offerings to the capabilities and needs of libraries.