

**E-Books for IAMSLIC?
Testing the waters in 2001**
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E-books are an exciting technology presenting libraries with opportunity -- and a host of new challenges. Are the marine and aquatic sciences currently covered by e-book vendors in such a way as to ensure benefit worth the necessary investment of time and resources? Libraries currently utilize a variety of electronic resources -- databases, e-journals, and computer files (some of which are called 'books'), which are LAN-mounted or accessed via the WWW and which allow multiple simultaneous users.

The E-books considered in this study are confined to those monographic electronic titles which are restricted to use by one patron at a time and that are somehow charged to that user for a given loan period.

E-book publishers aim their products at individual buyers, requiring the use of either e-book readers (purchased separately) or proprietary e-book reader software. Content is usually of the best-seller-list variety. For libraries, cataloging and circulation issues abound! A library alternative, the NetLibrary model, presents a package of e-book material geared to libraries and accessible via the WWW. While some circulation and cataloging issues remain, this model makes e-books much easier for libraries to assimilate. Records may be purchased for batch loading.

NetLibrary (www.netlibrary.com) provides libraries with a shared collection (available to all subscribing libraries) as well as an opportunity to custom create a 'private' collection of unique titles selected by each library.

- Access is via the WWW, but each title may be 'charged' to only one patron at a time.
- Loan periods vary from 15 minutes to several weeks, and are determined by the library.
- Material is not simply of the best-seller variety, although literature and the classics still predominate.

It seems generally true at present that the sciences are under-represented in the e-book marketplace. In an effort to determine whether or not libraries specializing in aquaculture and the marine sciences might want to venture *at this point* into the still but deep waters of e-books, a small cross-section of e-book vendors and NetLibrary were searched for relevant material.

Of the 20 e-book publishers surveyed by means of keyword search for marine science related material:

- 15 had no relevant marine science research material
- 4 had fewer than 5 titles for marine science researchers
- Only 1 (Ebookshoppe.com) scored greater than 10 titles that were relevant

NetLibrary was surveyed, based on the collection purchased by the University of Connecticut libraries (shared and private collections). Of 24 'hits', only 6 appear to be material relevant to research in aquatic and marine science. It should be noted, however, that this assessment is based on the collection purchased by the University of Connecticut. NetLibrary will run keyword searches on demand for libraries interested in obtaining further information on their available titles. While their holdings are not extensive in the sciences, some scientific material is available for selection by libraries for their private collections.

The E-book environment is changing rapidly, and the future may hold more promise for science and specialized libraries interested in e-books. Meanwhile, there are still some interesting options for specialized science libraries. Trends to watch:

Questia (www.questia.com) is an online library which provides full text resources to individuals (not to libraries) for a cost. The site is worth a visit for its content, searchability, and for the innovative approach. Questia invites librarians to use its catalog (which is freely searchable) for bibliographic information and as an emergency resource for patrons who are willing to pay for the privilege. Individual researchers with well-funded projects may want to take advantage of this option.

Columbia Earthscape (www.earthscape.org) presents a wide range of Earth resources online. Holdings include journals, databases, and e-books. While this is a full-text subscriber service (rather than an e-book vendor), the choice of material is encouraging. It may be a cost-effective resource for some libraries.

Online Books Page at the Univ. of Pennsylvania (onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu) presents a well-arranged listing of electronic books available full-text free of charge via the WWW, as well as some helpful tips on other resources available.

In conclusion, the e-book market for marine science related research is not robust at the present time, although emerging trends and innovative solutions are worth watching.

For details on this study and some simple title lists of resources found in the most promising sources searched, please contact Mary Heckman by email at Mary.Heckman@alum.conncoll.edu.