The Impact of Physical Book Displays on E-Book Use

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ABSTRACT

This longitudinal study examined the effectiveness of a promotional display for increasing use of business e-books. The authors created three topical book displays of business titles and compared the average use of the display titles to the average use of titles in the general business collection in the same format. The overall rate of use for all display e-books (12.3%) was slightly lower than the average rate of use for non-display e-books (14.4%), suggesting that promotional displays are not effective tools for increasing business e-book use. However, one display had a significantly higher average rate of e-book use (26.6%), suggesting that while simply increasing visibility is insufficient for increasing business e-book use, increased visibility along with other factors may result in increased use.

Keywords: e-books, marketing, book displays

For some time, business has been identified as a discipline which was quick to adopt and adapt to e-books and e-resources (Simon, 2011). Business is sometimes cited as having the most available e-book titles (Lannon & McKinnon, 2013; McLure & Hoseth, 2012; Sprague & Hunter, 2009; Langston, 2003), and business titles are also known for high rates of use (Nicholas, Rowlands, & Jamali, 2010; Bailey, 2006; Dillon, 2001).

However, our anecdotal experiences along with recent studies suggest that a substantial number of users are still not aware that their academic libraries offer e-books. The 2012 Library Journal report on E-book Usage in Academic Libraries found that unawareness of e-book availability continues to remain a top barrier to e-book access. Cassidy, Martinez, and Shen (2012) studied both users and non-users of e-books at Sam Houston State University and found lack of awareness of e-books as a primary reason for non-use. A 2009 survey at the Royal Roads University by Croft and Davis (2010) noted that "a lack of awareness of RRU library e-books remains the top reason cited by students for not using them" (p. 563).

Current efforts at building awareness of e-books at the University of Colorado Boulder include adding MARC records to our catalog, maintaining a page on our library website explaining where and how to access our e-book collections, linking to e-books in online research guides, and mentioning relevant e-books in information literacy instruction sessions. Presently, there is no formal marketing plan or strategy for our e-book collections.

When a large bookcase became available at the William M. White Business Library, we decided to test the impact of visibility on e-book use, through topical book displays which included print books and e-books together. Our topical book displays were not marketed in any way (for example, through our website or library social media); instead we relied solely on the displays themselves to test how increased visibility would impact the use of our e-books. Previous book displays in the Business library had resulted in circulation rates as high as 47%. We hypothesized that marketing business e-books (a

semi-invisible resource) would improve awareness of their existence, resulting in increased usage. Specifically, our study aimed to answer the following question: is the rate of use for e-books in physical book displays higher than the rate of use for e-books not included in displays?

Literature Review

Marketing/Promotion

Marketing of academic e-books has received some attention in the literature (Vasileiou & Rowley, 2011; Lonsdale & Armstrong, 2010), but there is not yet an evidence-based best practice for promoting academic e-book collections. In regards to commercial e-books, Amazon, Apple, and Barnes & Noble have done the job of marketing the idea of the e-book as a convenient and enjoyable reading format, allowing for immediate access of electronic texts which do not strain the eyes. However, the e-book experience of the commercial market (and even the public library) is quite different from that of the academic library e-book experience. For this reason, promoting e-books in an academic library has more than one hurdle to overcome: first, to inform the user that these invisible collections are available to them; second, to mitigate commercial-vendor-level expectations regarding e-books' usability. For a thorough treatment of marketing e-books in academic libraries, see Blummer and Kenton's (2012) review of the literature.

Vasileiou and Rowley (2011) conducted 25 interviews on the marketing and promotion of e-books with librarians at seven libraries. Although many librarians were knowledgeable about tools for marketing and had plans for future promotion of e-books, none of them had a comprehensive strategy for marketing e-books in their libraries. A variety of marketing tools were mentioned by interviewees. The library website and information literacy sessions were the most frequently mentioned tools, used by 21 respondents each, and the OPAC was mentioned by 20 interviewees. Physical tools were also mentioned, including posters (9 interviewees), newsletters and flyers (3 interviewees each), announcement boards (2), and bulletins and display screens (1 each). Vasileiou and Rowley suggested

that innovation was needed in the promotion of e-books. Interviewees most commonly mentioned two challenges to promoting e-books (each mentioned by 8 interviewees): lack of time and raising of expectations, alluding to the concern that if e-books are marketed, users will expect them to be accessible and available, which is not always the case.

In their 2013 article, Semenza, Koury, and Gray from Idaho State University asked the question, "How does one promote e-books and encourage serendipitous discovery when e-books do not exist in the physical world?" Drawing on the potential for QR codes to connect users directly to electronic resources, a team at their library created physical representations of over 1,000 titles from the Gale Virtual Reference Library, created QR codes linked to the individual items, and integrated the dummy books into the reference stacks, thus making the invisible collection both visible and browseable. The project was time-consuming and involved a substantial amount of labor, but did result in remarkable increase in usage of the GVRL e-books: compared to the previous year, September and October usage quadrupled and tripled, respectively. However, libraries with limited shelf space, budget, and staff will likely be unable to undertake this type of project.

Book Displays in Academic Libraries

The literature on book displays in academic libraries is not extensive, but there is enough to show that the impact is generally positive in regard to circulation of physical items (Camacho, Spackman, & Cluff, 2014; Crenshaw, 2014; Jones, McCandless, Kiblinger, & McCabe, 2011; Baker, 2010).

At James Madison University's East Campus Library, Jones et al. (2011) had success with thematic book displays situated near a reading area. Books that were featured on display circulated at a rate of 27%, while 17% of the collection at large circulated during the same time period. Additionally, the library's leased collection of popular fiction and nonfiction titles experienced a phenomenal increase in circulation (up to 142%) following an improvement in visibility of the collection.

Regarding the business discipline specifically, librarians at Brigham Young University observed a

significant increase in usage for books featured on display shelves (Camacho et al., 2014). In this

experiment, the display shelves included signage identifying the titles as "Recommended Books" in the

following subjects: accounting, entrepreneurship, finance, economics, and general business (e.g.,

"Recommended Accounting Books"). Online, lists of the displayed titles were available both on a

webpage created for the display and within the guides for the corresponding subjects. The online lists

included links to available e-book versions of the recommended titles, but e-book usage data was not

specifically included in the results. In the analysis, the authors used the average number of checkouts

per month for both the year prior to the display and the display period. By this measure, the overall

average checkouts per month increased by 58.2%, with the highest change being general business

(100% increase) and finance (83% increase).

Regarding interactive elements embedded in an academic library display, Baker (2010) reported

on the success of a QR code-enhanced display at Abilene Christian University Library. The display was

based on the school's First Year Program common book activity, and a theme from that book:

community service. Combining books, posters, and other objects with the mobile QR codes, students

could link through their phones to find more books on the topic or even volunteer opportunities in the

area. The display ran for three months in Fall 2009, and "Of the 62 books featured in the exhibit, 95%

were checked out, far surpassing the circulation percentage from any other book display" (p. 25).

Featuring electronic resources in book displays is an area which needs further evidence-based

research. Responding to a decline in circulation of physical items (books and CDs) and in database usage,

Crenshaw (2014) experimented with several activities to promote music resources at the Crouch Fine

Arts Library at Baylor University. He created a small display area near the service desk to promote a

rotating selection of newly acquired books and CDs. Two experimental groups were promoted: one

group selected by the librarian for content and visual appeal, the other group was randomly selected. As

a way of comparison, similar items from the CD collection were identified as a control group. Promoted

items were found to circulate more than their non-promoted counterparts, and the items selected by

the librarian had more use than the randomly-selected items. Additionally, four databases were

identified for promotion by two or three of these four means: signage, a post on the library's Facebook

page, a banner ad on the library's website, and a shortcut on the computers in the computer lab. With

these mixed methods, it is impossible to say which activity impacted use with certainty. However, usage

continued to decline for three of the four databases during the experiment. The one database that did

show increased use was the only one that had a large, visually appealing poster displayed in a prominent

location for half the academic year.

A key takeaway from Crenshaw's research is the critical importance of identifying which

marketing activity works, and for which type of material it works. This will not be an easy task, but by

controlling as many independent variables as possible, we can start to form a picture of what specifically

has the greatest impact on use. It may be increased awareness through visibility, clickable or interactive

elements, or tying the content to current campus events. Camacho et al.'s research at BYU combined

online promotion (through subject guides) and implied value (through the use of the term

"recommended") to increase visibility and use of the business and economics collection. Baker's display

at ACU was created around an activity familiar to the incoming freshman and transfer student

population: the common book activity. Additionally, the element of interactivity (QR codes that linked to

videos, volunteer opportunities, etc.) may have been enough of a novelty to encourage students outside

of the common book program population to explore the display. The best example from the academic

literature regarding the one variable of increased visibility is Jones et al.'s research, which did not

include e-books. Our experiment sought to build upon these results by focusing on one variable

(visibility) and observing its effect across three different thematic displays.

Method

Both print and electronic books were included in the display. We decided to look at the usage of

the print titles as a way to rule out topic as an influencing factor, thinking that if both e-book and print

books were not used at all, it would suggest that the topic wasn't popular, or that a variable other than

format was impacting use.

We planned for three topical displays: Social Entrepreneurship, Job Hunting & Career, and

Business Analytics. Social entrepreneurship is an area of focus in the Leeds School of Business, and the

business analytics display coincided with the introduction of a new business analytics master's program.

The job hunting titles were displayed during the end of the Spring semester and into the summer, when

students might be planning a job search. Each display was active for 4 to 5 months.

Display topics and titles were selected by either a liaison librarian, who is active in Business

instruction and collection development, or by a new member of the business library staff, who had not

yet been involved in instruction or collection development at the library. The topic and titles for the first

display, Social Entrepreneurship, were selected by the business liaison. The topic and titles for the

second display, Job Hunting & Career resources, were selected by the staff member. The final display

topic (Business Analytics) was chosen by the business liaison librarian and titles were selected by both

the liaison and staff member.

The display e-books were hosted on the following platforms: Books 24x7, EBSCO, Knovel,

MyiLibrary, ProQuest, Safari, and Springer. The Social Entrepreneurship display included books from

three platforms and the other two displays included books from five platforms. Publication dates ranged

from 2002 to 2014 and 22 publishers were represented. The Business Analytics display included six titles

that were available separately on two different platforms; instead of treating these as duplicates, each

instance of an e-book on a platform was counted as a separate e-book, for a total of twelve e-books.

Table 1: Business Library Book Displays

Display Topic	Display Dates	Total e-books	Total print books	Total books	Median e-book Publication	Median print Publication

					Date	Date
Social Entrepreneurship	11/01/13 - 03/31/14	15	44	59	2012	2011
Job Hunting & Career	04/01/14 - 07/31/14	21	34	55	2009	2006
Business Analytics	08/01/14 - 12/31/14	29**	41	70	2012	2012

**This includes duplicate copies of the same title on two platforms. Unique titles total 23 in this display.

We created physical representations of each selected e-book title by printing full-color images of the book covers and attaching them to cardboard backing. We printed 1"x1" stickers with the same icon used in the OPAC to indicate "e-book" as a format, and attached those to the printed e-book covers. These e-book analogs were then incorporated into the topical display along with physical books. Each display included a poster-sized title sign and at least one poster-sized full-color infographic related to the topic. The displays were located in the lower level of the business library near a popular quiet study area. For the Social Entrepreneurship display, we also printed a brief summary taken from the publisher's promotional material for each e-book and attached that text with the cover image. However, the Job Hunting & Career and Business Analytics displays included higher numbers of e-books and there we abandoned this practice in order to keep the area from appearing cluttered and to save time in preparing the display.

Figure 1: Image of Business Analytics Book Display

In order to gain a baseline of rate of use, we calculated the percentage of business titles on the display platforms that had been used at least once in the past three calendar years. A two year average was used for the Springer platform, due to a loss of usage data that occurred after the migration from the previous Springer platform in late 2012. We limited our comparison to the platforms with titles that were used in the display.

Table 2: 2012-2014 Number of Business E-Books and Use by Platform

Platform**	2014 titles used	2014 total titles	2014 Rate of use*	2013 titles used	2013 total titles	2013 Rate of use	2012 titles used	2012 total titles	2012 Rate of use	3 year average rate of use
MyiLibrary	761	3248	23.4%	634	3037	20.9%	509	2685	19%	21.1%
Springer	482	2870	16.8%	398	2218	17.9%	-	-	-	17.4%
Books 24x7	465	9644	4.8%	414	8744	4.7%	383	7844	4.9%	4.8%
Total										14.4%

* Rate of use is calculated as follows: (Annual titles used / Total titles)

** Only platforms with display titles used during the displays were included in this analysis.

Business e-book title lists and usage reports were downloaded from vendor websites. COUNTER-compliant usage reports (Release 4, Book Report 2: Number of Successful Section Requests; by Month and Title) were available from two vendors, while a COUNTER-style report was available from the third vendor. Title lists and usage reports were loaded into a Microsoft Access database, and titles were matched with usage using the ISBN as the match point. Then, the number of titles with at least one use was divided by the total number of business titles available on that platform to calculate an average percentage of titles used (rate of use) within a calendar year. This figure was then averaged across multiple years. We then compared this rate of use to the rate of use in the displays.

Our methodology had a few limitations. First, we chose not to assign or display a shortened URL (such as bit.ly) or any other method of directing users (such as a QR code) directly to the display e-books. Including an element like this would result in more accurate tracking of display usage. However, the intent was to simply analyze the impact of visibility on use, not the impact of convenience. Additionally, this study did not include turnaway data. Depending on the numbers, that data could have been used to determine whether usability or access issues impacted the use of display titles. Lastly, our methodology was limited by the selection of titles for the displays. Had the same number of titles been included from each platform in each display, the comparison across displays would be more consistent.

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

Out of all display e-books, eight (12.3%) were used at least once during the display periods. Compared to the use during the display, in the three years before the display period, 41 display titles (63%) saw no change in use. Seven (10.7%) showed increased use. Seventeen (26%) saw decreased use. Twenty one (32.3%) of the display e-books had been used at least once before the display. Of the eight titles that were accessed during the display, the majority (62.5%) had been used at least once prior to

the display.

At least two e-books were used during each display. The Job Hunting & Career and Business

Analytics displays each had two titles used, and four titles were used during the Social Entrepreneurship

display.

The majority (87.5%) of the display e-books that were used during the display had been

published between 2012 and 2014. One title with use was published in 2009. The titles accessed during

the display were on these platforms: B24x7, MyiLibrary and Springer.

Table 3: Display E-books Used, by Number of Display Section Requests

Title	Display	Platform	Publication Date	Pre-display section requests (BR2*)	Display section requests (BR2)
Mission; Inc.: The Practitioner's Guide To Social Enterprise	Social Entrepreneurship	Books 24x7	2009	9	38
Data Warehousing in the Age of Big Data	Data Analytics	Books 24x7	2013	1	29
Flawed System, Flawed Self	Job Hunting & Career	MyiLibrary	2014	0	19
Startup Communities	Social Entrepreneurship	MyiLibrary	2012	326	13
Predictive Business Analytics: Forward Looking Capabilities to Improve Business Performance	Data Analytics	Books 24x7	2014	6	9
Democratic Governance and Social Entrepreneurship	Social Entrepreneurship	MyiLibrary	2013	0	5
Challenge Social Innovation	Social Entrepreneurship	Springer	2012	1	2

Hormones, Talent and Career	Job Hunting & Career	Springer	2012	0	1

* The BR2 reports defined a "section" in the following: Books 24x7 - Section or Chapter, MyiLibrary -

Page, Springer - Chapter

Table 4: Display E-book Use and Number of Display Titles by Platform

Platform	Total display titles*	Total titles as a percentage of total display e-books	Display Titles Used	Rate of Use**	Rate of use as a percentage of total display e-books use
Books 24x7	32	49.2%	3	9.4%	37.5%
MyiLibrary	17	26%	3	17.6%	37.5%
Springer	5	7.6%	2	40%	25%

* 65 titles from 7 platforms were included in the display; the chart shows only the platforms with use

during the display

** Rate of Use was calculated in the following way: (Number of display titles used / Total number of

titles displayed from the same platform)

The display rate of use was higher than the three year average rate of use for Books 24x7 and

Springer. For Books 24x7, the three year average rate of use was 4.8% and the display rate of use was

9.4%. For Springer, the two year average rate of use was 17.4% and the display rate of use was 40%. For

MyiLibrary, the three year average rate of use was 21.1% and the display rate of use was 17.6%.

However since the number of titles from each platform was not consistent across all displays, it's

difficult to make any platform-specific conclusions based on this data.

As a comparison, there were 119 print titles in the displays, and 15 (12.6%) were checked out at

least once during the displays. The Social Entrepreneurship display included 44 print titles and eight of

those titles were checked out at least once. The Job Hunting & Career display included 34 print titles,

two of which circulated during the display period. The Business Analytics display included 41 print titles

and five of those titles were checked out from the display shelves.

The overall rate of use for print books in the Business Library stacks was 7.6% in 2014, with a 2012-2014 average of 8%. Compared with the average, two of the displays showed a higher rate of use, but one display showed a lower-than-average rate.

Table 5: Number of Circulations of Print Display Books, by Display

Display	Number of Titles	Titles with Circulation	Rate of Use
Social Entrepreneurship	44	8	18%
Job Hunting & Career	34	2	5.8%
Business Analytics	41	5	12%

Table 6: Comparison of Print Rate of Use and E-book Rate of Use, by Display

Display	Print Rate of Use	E-book Rate of Use	Total Rate of Use
Social Entrepreneurship	18%	26.6%	20.3%
Job Hunting & Career	5.8%	9.5%	7.2%
Business Analytics	12%	6.8%	10%

Discussion

Characteristics of a Successful Multi-Format Display

From this study, we identified three factors that may contribute to the success of a multi-format display. The Social Entrepreneurship display had the highest rate of use for both print and e-books. Aside from topic, this display differed from the other two displays in three significant ways. First, the ratio of print to e-book titles was twice as high as that in the other two displays. Secondly, the e-books did not rely on their titles and covers alone to attract use. Similar to what a browsing patron would find on the back cover or printed in the dust-jacket, a brief summary or similar text was provided with the Social Entrepreneurship e-books. Finally, the topic and titles were selected solely by a subject liaison

librarian who was active in Business instruction and had observed an increased interest in social

entrepreneurship.

E-book titles included in the Job Hunting and Business Analytics displays showed a lower rate of

use compared with both the multi-year average and the Social Entrepreneurship display. This suggests

that physically displaying cover images alone may not cause a significant enough increase in e-book use

to justify the amount of staff time needed to prepare them. However, further studies that utilize

tracking of shortened links or QR codes associated with the display titles could demonstrate a stronger

relationship between displays and increased e-book use. Additionally, further experiments involving

promotional text and the ratio of print to e-books in the display may support or refute our findings.

Currency of E-book Content in Book Displays

The majority of e-book titles used during the display came from titles published within the

previous two years. This trend was true across all three displays. This suggests that users have a

preference for more current e-book content when browsing book displays. Interestingly, the trend was

not as strong among print titles; two-thirds of the print titles used were published in 2010 or prior.

Better e-book use standards are needed

We initially planned to compare the number of section requests across the various display

platforms. However, with the release of COUNTER 4, we discovered that among our three utilized

display platforms, there were multiple definitions of a section in the BR2 reports. This made it

impossible for us to compare one section on one platform to another on another platform, because, for

example, one vendor defines a section as a page while another defines it as a chapter. Standards

organizations, such as COUNTER, vendors and libraries should work towards standards that allow

consistent comparison across platforms.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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Based on the high rate of use of our Social Entrepreneurship display books, compared to the

lower usage of the other displays, simply increasing the visibility of business e-books may be insufficient for their use. Instead, increased visibility along with other elements, such as providing abstracts for the books, selecting topics and titles based on knowledge about the needs and interests of the patrons, and selecting titles published within the past few years may result in increased use.

However, increasing our users' awareness of the availability of academic e-books is only one of our challenges. There remain significant barriers to e-book access, and despite a well-designed and curated book display these barriers continue to impede our users' use of this content. Issues with DRM, accessibility and usability all contribute to a user's decision to use or not use digital content, and we must remain cognizant of these issues when designing displays that include e-books.

For example, in attempting to access a book from our display, a user might encounter several dead-ends before being successful. They may start with a search engine, such as Google, perhaps typing "CU business library 'e-book title'." However, this may not work, as our catalog is not indexed by Google, and the e-book platform may not allow access via a search engine. The user might search in other known avenues, such as iBooks, Google play, or Amazon; however, library owned or licensed content will not appear in these results. Rather, the user must know to search the library catalog and how to interpret the search results. The user must also know that they may be prompted to enter campus credentials in order to access the content through our proxy server. If they access the title while on campus (for example, from one of the tables in the popular study area where the display bookshelves were located), then leave their browser tab open and try to continue reading from an off-campus location, they may or may not be able to access the content. Further, even without the non-library detours (Google, iBooks, etc.), the user could encounter four different interfaces throughout their search: the library website, the OPAC or discovery layer, the proxy login screen, and the e-book platform interface. This siloed process is far from seamless and this must be taken into consideration when evaluating e-book displays. Future displays, for example, might be more successful if they include

information or tools that offer easier routes for accessing e-books.

It is important for libraries to keep these usability issues in mind when building awareness of

their electronic collections. The current e-book ecosystem is far from perfect, from a usability

standpoint, but this challenge provides us with an opportunity to work with vendors and publishers in

order to improve e-books and work towards an experience that improves access to scholarly content for

all users.

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