The University Library and Online Technology Books

Susan Clarke
Research and Instructional Services
Steen Library, Stephen F. Austin State University
Nacogdoches, Texas, USA
sclarke@sfasu.edu

Abstract: Online full-text books have a valuable place in today's university libraries providing the student with access to newer, varied titles remotely. Marketing and monitoring of these services is a critical part of the librarian's new responsibilities in order to ensure the users know they exist and how to best utilize them. The Safari online technology book service is particularly useful for computer science and point of contact technology questions.

Purpose

There is an ever increasing challenge to provide the university student with the most current information possible in the field of technology. The many online web-based technology information providers are an important source of knowledge but computer science books have not been replaced. The rapid turn-over in computer-related software, hardware and other technology components makes traditional collection development options difficult. The average computer software manual may only be applicable for a short time before the newer version is introduced. The library has therefore spent a considerable amount of funds on an obsolete text. This paper describes a case study of how one library has used a variety of approaches to connect book and text resources to their user base, especially the distance education student.

Background

E-Books have been used in libraries for a number of years now and there is certainly literature in the field promoting its use and bemoaning e-books not living up to its potential. The University of Texas conducted an e-book evaluation and found that e-books had been "well received by those faculty and students that were aware of them ... nevertheless it had been a challenge to incorporate e-books into existing routines" (Dillon, 2001). There is only limited research however on the specialized technology e-book genre. Since this product is relatively new, few in-depth research papers devoted to its usage, strengths, weaknesses and future have been published. Most available reviews have been positive (Golderman, 2005, O'Leary 2003, Miller 2004) and additional studies should be forthcoming as the product matures and its usage grows. E-book barriers in education were examined in the 2003 Joint Information Systems Committee as to "what types of promotions they might require in order to gain better recognition and usage in education" (Bennett, 2005). The literature on e-books in academic libraries does suggest that while they are valuable products, much depends on marketing and the future development of online digitization projects like Google Book Library Project (Helm, 2005). Leo Appleton's paper on promoting and embedding e-books into the educational

experience highlights a number of salient points, he emphasizes how the delivery of learning has evolved and the e-books have, and will continue to have, an impact of the process. "Electronic information resources and virtual learning environments are two quite separate entities, yet they compliment each other very effectively" (Appleton, 2005). "Electronic Books in Libraries" website from University of Rochester evaluates e-book products including subscription services with handy fact sheets - http://www.lib.rochester.edu/main/ebooks/index.htm.

Technology E-Text
There are a number of vendors offering online full text books. NetLibrary (http://www.netlibrary.com) is well known for its full text access and large inventory, which can be customized for each library. Many university libraries subscribe to NetLibary through consortiums for price savings. It does have a good selection of technology books in its holdings, including "how-to" software titles and the more advanced computer science languages and programming resources. The titles are very current, most of them only a few years old. When a recent test search was done using the keywords "computer science" one hundred and fifty one titles were found and the first several pages of hits were all within the last two years. NetLibrary will sort the most current first, but does also include older works if a comparison or historical perspective is needed. Complete covers, title pages, etc. are presented for the book, so citations are not an issue. A handy clickable table of contents is presented in its own window so getting to the selected topic is expedited. There is no specific user login required to read the online books, but a login is necessary for checking out books or setting up a bookshelf. This can be done quickly on the user level. Steen Library has had the NetLibrary service for a number of years and we are trying to market it more aggressively through course specific classes and prominent web page locations. Tutorials are being developed in several different formats, such as Macromedia Captive or WebCT, to provide the user with electronic assistance. The expectation is to provide content modules that professors can add to their WebCT courses to direct students to online resources, such as e-books, to assist students in their research projects.

Safari Tech Books Online (http://safari.oreilly.com) is a newer service which the library added last year. Safari targets technology books particularly and it has a much more focused title list. It has a searchable database and a high degree of information technology reference content. The Computer Science department was very interested in acquiring access to this service. The high turn-over rate in computer science titles was an expensive part of the library collection with limited value for the long term. "IT books are often consulted rather than read through" (O'Leary 2003) and while there were some classic computer science titles that would be a valuable asset to the collection too many of them were simply out of date too soon and by the time the newer titles were acquired the cycle had started again. Safari Tech Books had the appealing feature of having a changeable list of titles and a large partner base of technology publishers, "the nature of reference books is, of course, that you want the most current and up-to-date content" (Miller, 2005). When a new version comes out the old one can be removed from the bookshelf and the new one added. Statistics can be checked and if a title is not used another can be substituted. This flexibility has proved very useful in the year we have

had this product. Due to cost factors a large number of titles were not initially purchased so each item has been carefully chosen with the specific needs of the university's users in mind. The Computer Science department has worked with the library to coordinate needs and pinpoint specific topics.

Remote Authentication

Both of these online book services, as well as other subscription services, at Steen Library are available remotely. Distance education is becoming a larger presence on our campus and the library is working to add as much value for that segment as possible. We have several methods of authenticating remote users. An EZ proxy server is located in the library that verifies which users are allowed to access our subscription services. The courseware product, WebCT, and the campus-wide MySFA service both connect through this proxy server when directed. There is also a place for login ID and password if the user does not wish to go through either of these portals. Authentication issue must be addressed at the initial implementation phase of any new product to ensure compatibility and the correct routing of the service. No login is necessary on campus, the IP ranges have been put in place to ensure access.

Marketing

Steen Library chose to market the electronic text products in a variety of ways. Care was taken in the design of the library's website to add a tab "E-Text" under each subject specific link. While NetLibrary is included on all subject pages, Safari, since it is specific to particular disciplines, is included only on pages that would need technology titles. Certain departments, inside of the library and on the campus in general were advised of the availability of Safari's technology books and how to access them. Departments that were particularly targeted were the Web Development Office, the Library Systems department and the Schools of Computer Science and Business. The Library Systems department decided to utilize the online books to try to solve an issue in the computer labs in the library. These labs and public stations represent around three hundred computers; there was a need to provide computer application assistance on demand. Safari was added to the desktops of the lab computers so users could click on the link and then connect to the service and pull up an online book to assist them with their questions on common applications like Excel, Word or PowerPoint.

Professors using the WebCT courseware can also either make a direct link to Safari so their students can utilize the online books or can direct them to the main library page from their course pages, with instructions on using a variety of the resources. Several of the librarians have been participating in the ongoing WebCT certification and training in an effort to connect to the incoming online professors and communicate the various resources that can assist them in the library.

In addition to the two subscription services links to other full text technology books sources such as "The Online Books Page" from the University of Pennsylvania - http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/subjectstart?QA can be utilized to direct users to books in their subject areas that are accessible online.

Conclusion

Utilizing online full-text electronic books can provide a valuable asset to libraries wishing to connect to their distance education or on-campus clients. E-books can provide easily accessible information within a few clicks of the mouse. The user doesn't have to worry if their source is reliable since it has come from the library sources and when going to the library to check out that book is not an option can provide an alternative to web resources only. The technology online books can be used for a variety of other applications, including saving the university money on staff and faculty computer how-to books purchases. Online books are in the news more these days with the GooglePrint - Book Search Digitalization initiative (http://books.google.com) and in the future our access points for e-text may be completely different, but whatever the access, the availability of online books should remain visible to faculty, students and administrators.

References

Appleton, L. (2005, Nov 1). Using electronic textbooks: promoting, placing and embedding. *The Electronic Library*, 23. Retrieved Mar 05, 2006, from http://www.emeraldinsight.com/Insight/ViewContentServlet?Filename=Published/ EmeraldFullTextArticle/Articles/2630230105.html.

Bennett, L., & Landoni, M. (2005). E-books in academic libraries. *The Electronic Library*, 23. Retrieved 12 13, 2005, from http://www.emeraldinsight.com/Insight/ViewContentServlet?Filename=Published/ EmeraldFullTextArticle/Articles/2630230102.html.

Dillon, D. (2001). E-books: the university of texas experience, part 1. *Library Hi Tech*, 19. Retrieved 3 05, 2006, from http://www.emeraldinsight.com/Insight/ViewContentServlet?Filename=Published/ EmeraldFullTextArticle/Articles/2380190202.html.

Golderman, G., & Connolly, B. (2004). Safari tech books online. *Library Journal, 129*, 26-27.

Helm, B. (2005). Google's great works in progress. *BusinessWeek Online*. Retrieved Jan 06, 2006, from http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/dec2005/tc20051222_636880.htm

Miller, R. (2005). Ebooks Worm Their Way into the Reference Market*EContent*, 28(7/8), 30-34. Retrieved 01 06, 2006, from Academic Search Premier database.

Miller, R. (2004). Safari Bucks Industry EBook Trend*EContent*, 27(4), 12-14. Retrieved 01 06, 2006, from Academic Search Premier database.

O'Leary, M. (2003). Safari/ProQuest Team Boosts E-Book Prospects*Information Today*, 20(3), 47-48. Retrieved 12 13, 2005, from Academic Search Premier database.