# The Patrons Demand, But What Do They Really Want?

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Responding to changes in users' information-seeking behavior and technology preference, the acceptance and adoption of e-books in libraries has gained considerable momentum. As platforms become more user-friendly, tablet readers proliferate, and, most notably, aggregators ramp up their marketing efforts through the aggressive promotion of patron driven acquisitions, libraries are racing to embrace electrons and jettison print. But does this always make sense? How well are users' needs being met by the e-book content made available by e-book aggregators?

As we at The College of New Jersey began to contemplate the transition to e-book collecting, a study was undertaken to create a methodology to identify our users' needs and explore how well currently available e-book content might meet those needs. Working on the assumption that circulation records and ILL requests are a fair gauge of patron demand, the study compared these title records over a three year period to e-book offerings of the major aggregators. A similar comparison was made using library historical browsing (i.e. in-house use) records gathered for books cataloged in the last three years. This study sought to answer two questions:

1. Is e-book acquisition able to meet the local needs of users? If so, to what extent?
2. Can monographic e-content offered by providers supplement or even supplant local print purchasing?

## Data and Methods

For this study, we used three data sources to investigate the correlation between local library use measures for print materials and their e-book availability: 1) circulation logs for General Collections (i.e., circulating print collections), July 2008 – May 2011; 2) ILL books request logs, July 2008 – May 2011; and 3) "Historical browse" logs (in-house use data for General Collections titles cataloged from July 2008–May 2011). The circulation data set (pulled from the local Voyager ILS) con-

tained 6,960 titles with ISBNs and 3 checkouts or more (accounting for more than 35% of the total circulation). The ILL data set (pulled from the OCLC Usage Statistics system) contained 3,821 ILL titles with ISBNs. And the "historical browse" data set (also pulled from the local Voyager ILS) contained 525 titles with ISBNs and 4 usages or more (accounting for 35% of all in-house use). The title lists were submitted to our vendors to be matched with available e-book equivalents using ISBN as the matching element in order to evaluate 1) the e-book availability of the heavily circulated "core collection"; 2) the proportion of traditional document delivery service that could be fulfilled by e-book format; and 3) the e-book availability of print materials heavily used in-house.

## Results

The resulting data were analyzed by subject and publication date. We found that e-book content which might meet our users' needs was not uniformly distributed across disciplines, with the social sciences (LC classes G-K) and hard sciences (LC classes Q,R,T) being somewhat better represented and the arts (LC classes M,N) less so. Unsurprisingly, we discovered that more recent publications, i.e. those books published in the last five to seven years, were more likely to have e-book equivalents. The highest percentage of e-book equivalents was found in our ILL study, suggesting that this might be the best place to begin e-book collecting.

The results suggest that that e-books may meet only a fraction of the demand for monographic scholarly output and that TCNJ cannot yet rely on e-book content to entirely supplant print, although e-book coverage is growing dramatically.