friendly guide to
COUNTER book reports

COUNTER

A guide for librarians

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contents

Libraries spend considerable amounts of money purchasing different types of online content to support their users' needs. User activity, in relation to this content, needs to be continually assessed to ensure that this money is spent as productively as possible. The COUNTER Code of Practice Release 4 helps librarians to demonstrate the value of electronic resources by facilitating the recording and reporting of online resources usage statistics in a consistent, credible and compatible way.

COUNTER provides libraries with a set of e-book usage reports that capture different aspects of user activity data. This guide presents a brief overview of each type of COUNTER book report, and demonstrates practical ways for librarians to employ these reports in ways that are relevant to their organization.
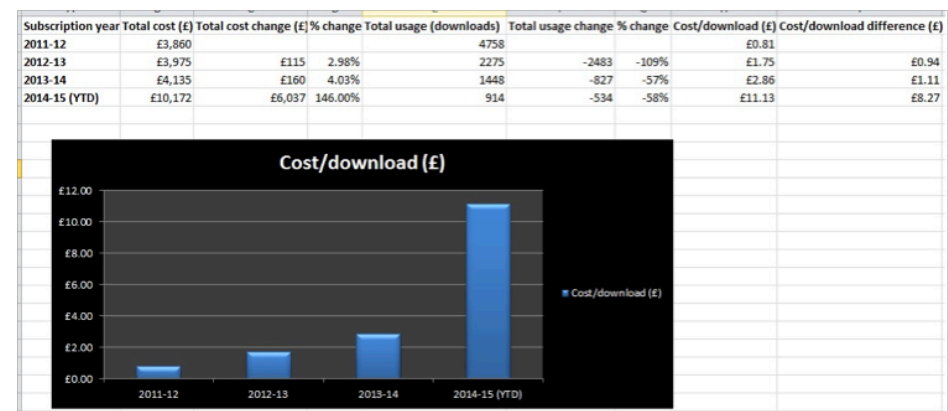
Book Report 1 (BR1) / Book Report 2 (BR2)

Publishers sell electronic book content to libraries using many different purchasing models. Institutions can buy e-books on an individual basis, through single or multi-user licences, or they can lease access to a larger number of titles bundled together in a full-text collection. As COUNTER supplies data for the total usage of e-books, across a selected time period, libraries can gain a valuable insight into which titles are popular/not so popular with their patrons. COUNTER Book Report 1 (BR1) reveals the total number of successful title requests by month and title, but data from this report should only be exported when the vendor provides the entire e-book as a single file. As the majority of publisher sites present e-book content at a 'section' level (e.g. providing book chapters or encyclopedia entries in individual files), COUNTER Book Report 2 (BR2) can be applied to run more relevant usage metrics. It measures the total number of successful section requests by month and title.

A high number of successful section/title requests for an individual e-book may indicate that the book is supporting teaching and research at an organization. On the other hand, a low number may act as a trigger point for library staff to investigate how easy is it to access that particular e-book, whether it requires additional promotion or whether they should add more concurrent users to an e-book licence (as individual e-books tend to be purchased in perpetuity). Low usage could also suggest that librarians should consider cancelling leased e-book content in a full-text collection.
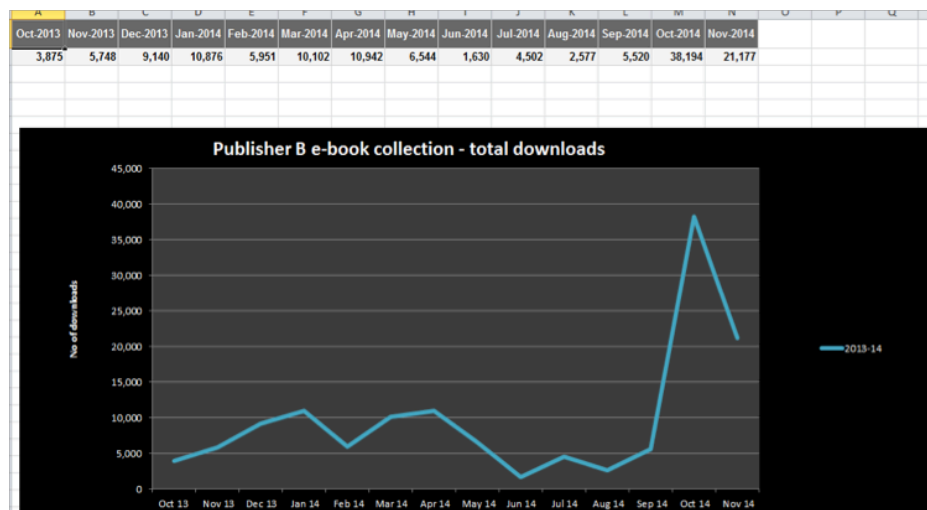

COUNTER BR2 data

Adding resource costs to COUNTER metrics can help librarians to attribute value to their e-book purchases. Cost per use can be determined by taking the total resource cost and dividing it by the total resource usage.

Representing cost and usage analysis visually using charts and graphs.

Representing COUNTER data outputs visually, in the form of a graph or a chart, can help librarians to spot and interpret usage and cost trends more easily. Ultimately, this will mean that they are better informed when it comes to making e-book purchase or renewal decisions.

An example of representing usage data visually by using a graph.

More recent e-book purchasing models, like Evidence Based Acquisition (EBA), mean that libraries are even more dependent on evaluating user activity across their e-book provision. The EBA approach allows libraries to open up access to large sections, or even the complete run, of a publisher's e-book catalogue to their patrons. This access is for a set period negotiated between the library and the publisher, and usually involves payment in advance. At the end of the access period, librarians can analyse COUNTER book usage data, and make well-informed purchasing decisions for popular e-book titles available through the scheme.

Book Report 7 (BR7)

The COUNTER Code of Practice defines an e-book 'section' as the first level of subdivision of a book or reference work. The concept of an e-book 'section' is interpreted differently by vendors across the publishing sector and publishers use a wide variety of terms to define access at a 'section' level. A section request could therefore refer to a library user accessing an e-book chapter, play, verse, encyclopedia entry or even an individual page. As COUNTER needs to ensure that BR2 data covers all types of e-book structures, librarians face potential challenges when comparing usage data between different publishers (e.g. if publisher X is counting chapter views and publisher Y is counting page views). As long as service providers fully define the 'section' of an e-book that they are measuring, in compliance with the COUNTER Code of Practice, BR2 will capture user activity for librarians.

To help with the confusion that may arise from comparing BR2 and BR1 data between publishers, COUNTER will be providing a new optional book report for publishers to implement in 2016. COUNTER Book Report 7 (BR7) records the total number of successful unique title requests by month and title in a session. BR7 will reconcile BR1 and BR2 data by providing a total count of unique accesses for a given e-book title. Regardless of how many 'sections' (e.g. pages, chapters or an entire e-book) the user downloaded during a session, BR7 will count only one use.

Book Report 5 (BR5)

COUNTER Book Report 5 (BR5) outlines total searches by month and title, highlighting how many searches are performed by library users at an e-book title level. This mirrors data collected in COUNTER JR4, and highlights different ways in which users may engage with e-book content on a publisher platform.

Book Report 3 (BR3)/Book Report 4 (BR4)

COUNTER BR1 and BR2 (and the upcoming BR7) provide usage data for e-books that libraries either purchase in perpetuity or lease from a service provider for a given period. COUNTER Book Report 3 (BR3) and Book Report 4 (BR4) concentrate on a different context – access denied to e-book content. BR3 highlights access denied to content items by month, title and category while BR4 reveals access denied to content items by month, platform and category.

Book Report 3 (R4)		Access Denied to Content Items by Month, Title and Category										
University of J												
Publisher ID												
Period covered by Report:												
2015-02-19 to 2016-02-19												
Date run:												
2016-02-19												
Title	**Publisher**	**Platform**	**Proprietary Identifier**	**ISBN**	**ISSN**	**Access Denied Category**	**Reporting Period Total**	**May-2015**	**Jun-2015**	**Jul-2015**	**Oct-2015**	**N**
Total for all titles		Provider W					55	1	2	1	2	
Book 1	Publisher I	Provider W		ISBN		Access denied: concurrent/simultaneous user licence limit exceeded	1				1	
Book 2	Publisher K	Provider W		ISBN		Access denied: concurrent/simultaneous user licence limit exceeded	1					
Book 3	Publisher K	Provider W		ISBN		Access denied: concurrent/simultaneous user licence limit exceeded	3					
Book 4	Publisher K	Provider W		ISBN		Access denied: concurrent/simultaneous user licence limit exceeded	1					
Book 5	Publisher K	Provider W		ISBN		Access denied: concurrent/simultaneous user licence limit exceeded	1					

Using COUNTER BR3 data to view e-book turnaways

BR3 and BR4 usage statistics reveal an unmet demand for libraries to consider, as they reveal that users are clicking on e-book content that they cannot retrieve. This lack of access may be due to the library not having access rights, or to the number of concurrent users exceeding limits outlined in the e-book licence. This type of report may be helpful for librarians who are evaluating their library's current e-book provision, especially with reference to demand for limited-user titles. BR3 and BR4 data provides proof of user activity across unsubscribed/unlicensed, but potentially relevant, e-book content which may be a more appropriate financial investment for the organization.

Zero usage

Many librarians have requested reports on e-book titles with no usage at all and COUNTER has thoroughly explored this with vendors and publishers. It has not proved possible to run such reports for two reasons. The first is that e-book packages acquired by a given library are often unique to that library or to libraries within a particular consortium. The second is that in some cases the inclusion of zero-use titles would make Excel reports an unmanageable size. However, this issue is one that COUNTER continues to explore.

Book A non-serial publication of any length available in print (in hard or soft covers or in loose-leaf format) or in electronic format.

Book DOI A Digital Object Identifier (DOI) registered at the book level and used as a unique identifier for that book. The book's ISBN may be used for this purpose.

E-book A book publication in digital form, consisting of text, images or both, readable on computers or other electronic devices.

ISBN (International Standard Book Number) A unique 10-digit or 13-digit number used to identify a book.

Reference Work An authoritative source of information about a subject e.g. a dictionary, encyclopedia, directory, manual, guide, atlas, bibliography or index. Usually used to find quick answers to questions.

Search (Regular) A user-driven intellectual query, typically equated to submitting the search form of the online service to the server.

Section The first level of subdivision of a book or reference work. e.g. a chapter or encyclopedia entry.

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About the author

Mitchell Dunkley works as a Principal Information Assistant for De Montfort University (DMU) Library & Learning Services in Leicester. He is part of the library's Content Delivery Team, administering all things online, including the library's electronic resources portfolio.