

Message from CULC/CBUC eBook Task Force to CULC/CBUC Members / April, 2012

BACKGROUND OF PURPOSE

The CULC/CBUC Task Force on eBooks was formed in the Spring of 2010, when the issue was identified at CULC/CBUC as a long-term challenge that public libraries now face. The group has worked hard since then to bring the voice of public libraries to publishers. The task force has attempted to be transparent and keep as much of the activity posted on the CULC/CBUC website <www.culc.ca/ebooks>

STATUS OF ACTIVITY

Many of you are aware of the fact that CULC/CBUC has been engaged in talks with Canada's publishing community. We have, at various conferences and on the CULC/CBUC website, tried to keep people informed about these talks although, until recently, there was little progress or change to report.

There have been very positive developments recently and we are writing to provide members of the Canadian public library community with an update on these ongoing negotiations.

Canada's publishing community is represented by two agencies. The Canadian Publishers Council (CPC) represents international publishers who have Canadian operations. The Association of Canadian Publishers (ACP) represents Canadian owned and Canadian-based publishing houses.

CULC/CBUC has been conducting separate talks with each organization but these talks are beginning to merge.

There are compelling reasons why CPC and ACP members are willing to negotiate with Canada's public libraries, through CULC/CBUC. Canadian-based publishers, large and small, find that sales of their material through American channels are conducted in a way that detracts from the Canadian book industry. Canadian-based publishers are concerned that the models being developed for consumer purchase and for library use in the United States do not help the Canadian publishing industry and may, in fact, harm it.

Our first few meetings centered on gaining a better understanding of the issues publishers face and a better understanding of the issues that public libraries face. It is fair to say we had all made erroneous assumptions about the other's business and that once we corrected mistaken assumptions, it became easier to make progress.

It became clear that publishers, particularly the international publishers, are making decisions without evidence to support their beliefs about the impact of public library use on their sales.

CURRENT STAGE – A PILOT

We are now working to implement a pilot project that provides publishers and public libraries with an entirely different relationship for eBook purchasing and lending. We hope to launch the pilot system by January, 2013 and, once lessons are learned, to make the adjusted model available to all libraries by approximately January, 2014. It will take this long for us to build the necessary technical infrastructure, to work out license agreements and to test the models through the pilot. Any agreements that CULC/CBUC manages to secure will be available to all public library systems in the country and will be completely voluntary. No library system will be compelled to participate but all will have the opportunity.

The pilot project will involve most ACP publishers who are part of the eBound Canada Consortium (the organization was created to address the digital issues ACP members have) and – potentially – one or two of multinational publishers. The pilot will also involve approximately 6 public library systems, serving a population of between two and four million people..

Preliminary negotiations point toward a pilot system that may allow:

- Records of ebooks to be loaded directly into each participating library's catalogue;
- Loan transactions and downloads to take place within the catalogue, with no visible third-party vendor;
- Licensed, simultaneous use by library customers of backlist titles and of many new books, although not bestsellers (This means that thousands of books could become available with no holds needing to be placed);
- Pricing models for bestsellers and front-list titles;
- The ability for libraries to purchase ebooks from vendors of their choice;
- The opportunity for links that allow publishers to sell ebook and print material (with local fulfillment through a local bookstore or agency as an option for print);
- The opportunity for in-catalogue marketing and merchandizing (as determined by the library system) to occur.

Public libraries and Canadian publishers need a more sophisticated technology platform for this model to succeed. We will not use vendors such as Overdrive to supply the technology. Instead, much of the infrastructure has to be created, purchased or acquired through a third-party relationship. We are working hard to secure the necessary technical platform.

We are, then, pursuing two initiatives at the same time.

1. We are working with publishers to determine a pilot model for ebook licensing/purchasing and use, and
2. We are working with publishers to ensure the existence of a technical platform that can deliver ebook services. This platform would allow for libraries to acquire ebooks from multiple sources and would allow all patron transactions to take place within a library's catalogue.

It is always hard to know when an update should be sent out. After all, there is no guarantee that we will be successful or that the pilot, once we solve the technical issues, will be successful.

At this time, however, the Task Force charged with working with publishers feels secure in stating that talks are going well, progress is being made and we are optimistic that we will be able to introduce some positive news into the churning world of ebook rights for public libraries.

We will continue to post all documents, papers, updates on the www.culc.ca/ebooks website. Following the November meeting in Surrey, this was significantly changed to become a single source for the topic. There is also a companion blog that can be connected from here.

Please see below for what is planned for the CULC/CBUC member meeting in late May in Ottawa. CULC/CBUC will also be hosting three sessions, at CLA's request, on the eBook topic including:

- Panel of library people with a Publisher asking the questions about needs and requirements
- Panel of publishers with a Librarian asking the questions
- Two views of how the eBook future might look featuring ALA President Molly Raphael and BiblioCommon's Beth Jefferson. Both have a view and it will be a view into what is different in the US, than here in Canada.

For public libraries, the eBook Task Force active contributors have been:

Ken Roberts, Hamilton Public Library
Michael Ciccone, Hamilton Public Library
Susan Caron, Toronto Public Library
Vickery Bowles, Toronto Public Library
Jane Pyper, Toronto Public Library
Jennifer Stirling, Ottawa Public Library
Christina de Castell, Vancouver Public Library
Don Mills, Mississauga Library System
Jefferson Gilbert, CULC/CBUC Executive Director

For more information:

Please visit www.culc.ca/ebooks

Or contact CULC/CBUC Executive Director Jefferson Gilbert – jgilbert@culc.ca