

Public Library eBook Lending Initiative – RFP Ends Without a Pilot

In mid-November, the Working Group of eBOUND Canada and CULC/CBUC members reached the conclusion that a made in Canada eBook lending technology solution could not be developed at a cost that was sustainable for all parties while still achieving the goals of the pilot project. A proponent vendor, whom eBOUND and CULC/CBUC were negotiating with, was informed and the RFP process terminated.

BACKGROUND

The Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC/CBUC) has been meeting with publishers to find mutually beneficial solutions for improved public library access to eBooks since 2010. As part of this effort, CULC/CBUC established an eContent Working Group to investigate ways to improve access to eBooks. In recent months, the Working Group focused its efforts on working with eBOUND Canada, the digital publishing agency born from the Association of Canadian Publishers (ACP), to jointly develop options to improve access and discoverability of Canadian content.

The RFP process took place from May through July 2013 and negotiation with the selected vendor over the terms of the contract continued through November 2013. Several complex issues arose during the negotiation. The most problematic were the terms of sale for content from specific publishers that would be included in the pilot and the cost of the solution. In the current market, Canadian libraries expect to subscribe to multiple products concurrently to purchase and lend eBooks, resulting in concerns about the sustainability of paying multiple platform fees. Through the process of contract negotiation at the conclusion of the RFP, it was determined that the conditions were not favorable to proceed with platform implementation.

PROGRESS

Since the inception of the Working Group significant progress has been made. This project helped to accelerate changes in the marketplace in terms of both content and discoverability. Most large multinational publishers now make their content available to public libraries, joining a long list of Canadian independent publishers such as Dundurn Press, House of Anansi, Orca, ECW Press and Coach House. The basic framework from the CULC/CBUC RFP was used as a baseline for the technical requirements shared with vendors through the Readers First initiative, providing detailed information on library and customer expectations surrounding user experience with eBooks. As a result, vendors have begun to release technology solutions that enhance access and discoverability and advance the goals established by the CULC/CBUC Working Group.

The Working Group will be meeting in the near future to determine how to advance the goals of content integration and publisher collaboration through alternative means. In recognition of the importance of the publishing industry in Canada to the preservation and ongoing evolution of the Canadian identity and literary culture, and the integral role of public libraries to the ecosystem of reading, CULC/CBUC and the ACP will continue their collaborative efforts to improve access, promotion and discoverability of Canadian content in all its forms.

For more information:

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