



WHY eBOOKS? BEST PRACTICES FROM SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

EXPERT LIBRARIANS OVERCOME COMMON
CHALLENGES IN COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

OUR SURVEY FINDS

86%

of librarians want to learn best practices from those who have successfully implemented eBook acquisition programs in their school libraries

After almost two decades as a desirable and widely available format, eBooks still represent a challenge to school library collection management. An abundance of eBook publishers and providers has increased both the number of available titles and the number of decisions school librarians face when acquiring them. Complicating matters is a crowded educational marketplace in which any given eBook can include multiple price points, subscription models, and points of access.

Faced with limited budgets, finite human resources, and diverse student and educator needs, school librarians face a plethora of demands. The desire to free up space occupied by physical books and an obligation to keep students from falling behind make an eBook collection not only desirable but necessary—not to mention the format's other advantages, such as unlimited, simultaneous access (inside and outside the classroom), increased searchability, and its inherent appeal to digital natives.

No wonder school librarians are trying to conquer this challenge as cheaply and effectively as possible. Once integrated into the school setting, eBooks play a key role in keeping costs down and materials current, and an understanding of the eBook marketplace benefits students and educators alike. Due to recent developments in licensing and pricing models, publishers making their titles available to a growing number of providers, and a profusion of low-cost reading devices, eBooks are more accessible than ever before.

In 2018, we conducted a survey and gathered responses from **273 school librarians nationwide**, gaining further insight into how they, their students, and their schools view and use eBooks. **Nearly 82 percent of these respondents currently offer eBooks**, and **67 percent stated that students are using the eBooks in their collections**. Yet despite these high rates of adoption, most would find it helpful to learn best practices from those who have successfully implemented eBooks in their school libraries.

They asked, we answered: following the survey, we conducted detailed interviews with eBook experts and school librarians who've happily—and successfully—enhanced their collections with eBooks. If you and your school want to take full advantage of this format, follow these best practices.

BEST PRACTICE #1: PLAN YOUR ATTACK

It's common for eBook publishers and providers to suffer from a lack of integration with one another. Each provider has a distinct interface, a unique database, and its own range of titles. Some publishers' titles are available through several different providers, who sell them in different ways: individually, as part of a bundle, or as part of a subscription package. Once purchased, the titles may be available for a certain number of checkouts, accessible for a predetermined period, or can become a permanent part of the collection. What's more, the number of checkouts may be determined by different modes of access, depending on the platform.

It's a lot to manage for library professionals and patrons alike: where librarians need to keep track of who lends what on which terms, students must adapt to a range of different interfaces that present and track titles in diverse ways—an act that can be further complicated by the device a student uses to read an eBook. The same agility is required of the educators who use these eBooks in the classroom, who must understand how to interact with any given platform and be adept enough to demonstrate its use.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

“Consider multiple copies of an eBook format and not so many print. That way, you haven't impacted your available space, but you've been able to serve your users.”

—Karen Perry, 2017 AASL National Conference Committee Member and Library Science Instructor, Old Dominion University (Norfolk, VA)



As a member of the 2017 AASL National Conference Committee and a library science instructor at Old Dominion University, Karen Perry interacts daily with teachers and paraprofessionals working

toward certification and sees firsthand the eBook issues they're facing. In one of her classes, she requires her students to create a budget and collection management plan.

“One of the things I see them do is try to accumulate the things that will go with what is already being taught,” she explains. “If they're going to do whole-class novels, they're going to get all those eBook titles for their schools first.

They may end up buying packages of eBooks because of the way eBook providers push their titles. And in the end, it ends up being less expensive than individual titles.”

When considering a platform, Perry advises caution and attention to platform licensing. “You have to be careful that you are getting what you think you're getting,” she warns. She advises librarians, “Look closely at the licensing, especially when it comes to both the number of users the title allows and its expiration date. If you're getting a one-year subscription, and at the end of the year, you have nothing, are you okay with that?”

OUR SURVEY FINDS

45%

of school librarians use the same budget to purchase both eBooks and print titles

OUR SURVEY FINDS

40%

believe the main reason students aren't using eBooks is because they don't know they're available via their school library

OUR SURVEY FINDS

76%

of respondents would like to learn how to encourage students to use eBooks

BEST PRACTICE #1: PLAN YOUR ATTACK**EDUCATE STUDENTS & FACULTY**

“eBooks are only good if the kids know they're there.”

—Lorrie Roussin, Library Media Specialist, Judson High School (Converse, TX)



Despite library media specialist Lorrie Roussin's enthusiasm for eBooks—her collection totals 5,000 volumes, 15 percent of her library's materials—she says that encouraging awareness is more

difficult than it looks. Unfortunately, eBooks don't lend themselves to eye-catching library displays and they're not searchable across the six platforms available to her students. But Roussin has figured out some highly effective work-arounds.

First, she makes video tutorials explaining the interfaces for all eBook platforms, then uploads them to a dedicated page on her school's website. When she teaches

research to her classes, she walks students through relevant tutorials while they're sitting in the lab. She also explains the eBook interfaces to teachers as part of their professional development.

Second, because the teachers themselves are not necessarily comfortable with eBooks, she creates bookmarks listing key information teachers can use at school or at home. She also uploads usernames and passwords that are conveniently accessible via each individual's Google account.

“If I don't have time to talk to the kids in the classroom about using eBooks, they can always reference the video tutorials,” she explains. “Also, I will share these videos with my fellow librarians.”

BEST PRACTICE #2: SIMPLIFY TO SUCCEED

Options for eBook purchasing are seemingly endless. Individual publishers sell them—as do distributors of varying sizes. Traditional metrics for successful materials purchasing can be difficult to apply to products that come individually, in bundles, and via subscription. As some librarians have learned, simplifying can make for smoother sailing when navigating these challenges.

CURATE TO YOUR BUDGETARY NEEDS

When it comes to collection development, budget is always a top concern. Gale helps schools work within their budgets to acquire titles that best support their school's needs. As trends in education evolve, Gale curates collections that focus on high-interest topics, such as social issues, mental health, and STEM. We group titles based on curriculum needs, standards, and core subjects covered in the classroom. As a result, educators can create and share custom collections that align with their goals and initiatives. An education consultant works behind the scenes to select budget-friendly eBooks that meet standards, keep students engaged, and save educators time.

When a school decides to purchase *Gale eBooks*, the librarian typically receives input from teachers first, and then passes that information and the purchasing budget on to the school's Gale education consultant. That's also when Nicole Albrecht, Gale eBooks sales specialist, comes in. With almost a decade of experience as a teacher and an educational background in curriculum development, Albrecht now spends her days curating school eBook collections. To select the best range of titles, Albrecht begins by assessing the focus and price point, then asks herself a series of questions: Does the collection need to meet specific conditions, like special education and inclusion? Does the school librarian want leveled reading?

BEST PRACTICE #2: SIMPLIFY TO SUCCEED

DO MORE WITH LESS

“It’s important to ask, ‘What platform is it going to sit on . . . and how are the kids going to access it?’”

—Shannon Acedo, Chair, Library and Information Technology Department, Harvard-Westlake Upper School (Studio City, CA)



When it comes to eBook collection development, “one of the main challenges for librarians is to sort out the platforms,” says Shannon Acedo, chair of the Library and Information Technology Department

at Harvard-Westlake Upper School in Studio City, California. Acedo is also a co-author, with Cathy Leverkus, of *Ebooks and the School Library Program* (AASL, 2013).

This challenge involves several factors, including the fact that eBook platforms—each of which comes courtesy of a single digital provider—cannot be universal. Publishing rights and subscription packages vary wildly among them. Acedo cites transparency and consistency as a prime area of frustration in her purchasing decisions.

“I saw one title published by ABC-CLIO, and I also wanted to buy the print book, but

I saw five different links from five different publishers,” Acedo explains. What’s more, the books already purchased or available for purchase through one provider aren’t searchable in another. “It’s important to ask, what platform is it going to sit on? Are they on one platform? Can the kids cross search? Do they have to go from one publisher to another publisher to find a book?”

Sometimes the solution is to do more with less: while Acedo’s approach to eBook collection development involves multiple publishers and providers, she limits them to as few as possible. “I’ll check with my primary provider to see if they’ll sell me the book,” Acedo says.

While librarians might find using one provider simpler on an administrative level, students—digital natives who switch between Snapchat, Twitter, and a plethora of other digital interfaces with no issues—are certainly comfortable using many platforms.

OUR SURVEY FINDS

74%

of school librarians use multipublisher eBook distributors

OUR SURVEY FINDS

75%

of school libraries that don’t carry eBooks cite budget as the reason

Is the school private, public, or charter? Once answered, she generates a list of titles based on the unique needs of the customer. The school can then choose to purchase one or more collections or handpick individual titles.

Although the requests and types of schools are remarkably diverse, Albrecht makes sure her choices fulfill two imperatives: they must satisfy different reading levels and they must be enjoyable. “I know that being able to read in every single content area is of the utmost importance,” she explains. “I pick fun titles, too. If it’s an elementary school science collection, I’ll choose titles that are standard for a science class, but I’ll also find content that will catch the students’ attention and keep

them engaged.” Albrecht sees eBooks as a cost-effective textbook supplement. While eBooks often don’t come with the extras that traditional textbooks might include, eBooks can still meet the same educational needs—and save schools a considerable amount of money. “There are eBooks that offer little things teachers need like vocabulary, comprehension questions, and primary sources. For example, UXL titles come with worksheets, standard alignments, and more. I’ve learned that eBooks can easily become textbook supplements. I encourage all teachers to keep an open mind and dare to think outside the box because this is a real opportunity to hone in on their particular needs and have creative freedom as educators.”

“The process of curating eBook collections is very personal to me. I’m genuinely excited when aligning titles for schools because I have a vivid picture in my mind of the teachers and students who will benefit from using them. Their feedback drives me and makes me better at what I do.”

OUR SURVEY FINDS

83%

of eBook purchasing decisions are affected by student interest

BEST PRACTICE #3: KNOW YOUR STUDENTS

Today's students tend to see the internet as a reliable, even omniscient, source of information and can be reluctant to open print reference sources. Fortunately, eBooks marry the fun and ease of a casual Google search with rigorously sourced research, allowing school librarians to channel students' enthusiasm for the internet into greater enthusiasm for schoolwork. It's all about meeting students where they are.

LISTEN TO THE KIDS



"I like the way the *Gale eBooks* interface works, and the students find it to be very user-friendly."

—Alicia Blowers, Middle School Librarian, St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School (Alexandria, VA)



Alicia Blowers is the middle school librarian and department chair at St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School in Alexandria, Virginia, where she makes final purchasing decisions on databases and large

contract items. When she started working there eight years ago, her library had no digital reference collection to speak of. She thought eBooks might be a way to free up physical space while taking advantage of the technology then becoming widely available.

These days, it's a different story altogether. "I don't purchase print reference anymore," she says. Not only does print reference cost about the same as eBooks, her students prefer using the latter in their research. This preference is so strong, says Blowers, that her school now requires students to use at least one physical text as a source in their schoolwork "to get them to touch a book."

"They'd really just rather use the internet and make questionable decisions," she says.

To combat this, Blowers and her colleagues grant students access to reliable digital sources in the format they prefer. This "provides the structure they need" while allowing for integration of note-taking programs accessible through the school website.

"I like the way the *Gale eBooks* interface works, and the students find it to be very user-friendly," Blowers explains. "The note-taking and citation tools are great—a boon to people with poor organizational skills, which is every middle schooler."

Blowers advises other library professionals to find their own path. "Use whatever works for you," she says. "At the end of the day, our role as librarians is to serve people, not house books . . . eBooks allow me to do this better and make it easier for students."

BEST PRACTICE #3: KNOW YOUR STUDENTS

DEVELOP A STUDENT-DIRECTED STRATEGY

“I look at our curriculum as a guide. The real purpose of the library is to support the school.”

—Roxanne Trejos, Head Librarian, Gulliver Preparatory School (Pinecrest, FL)



Roxanne Trejos stopped buying print reference books seven years ago. “What’s telling is that nobody has noticed,” she says. “No student or teacher has ever come in here asking for *new* print nonfiction books.”

The head librarian at Gulliver Preparatory School—a private high school in Pinecrest, Florida, enrolling roughly 1,000 students—came to the decision to drop print reference when circulation data for the library’s 10,000-title collection logged approximately 100 checkouts per year.

She has since developed a student-directed strategy of eBook purchasing. “I look at our curriculum as a guide,” she explains. “The real purpose of the library is to support the school.” In recognition of this, Trejos accepts nearly all student requests for eBook purchases. Many of these titles come from one-on-one reference interviews with international baccalaureate juniors and seniors completing a two-year research project.

“Student research can point out the holes in our collection,” she says.

Students too, are eager to adapt to the many different platforms through which their eBook requests are delivered. “These are digital natives,” Trejos says. “I want to meet them where they are.”

SUMMING UP

Educate yourself and your fellow faculty. Simplify. Reach out to your eBook provider(s). Let your students lead the way. Acquiring a robust, budget-friendly eBook solution is easier than you think. Now that you’ve learned how our experts have faced some of the biggest challenges of eBook collection development, you can adopt these solutions to enhance your own library. You’ll make discoveries of your own—or perhaps you already have!

OUR SURVEY FINDS

70%

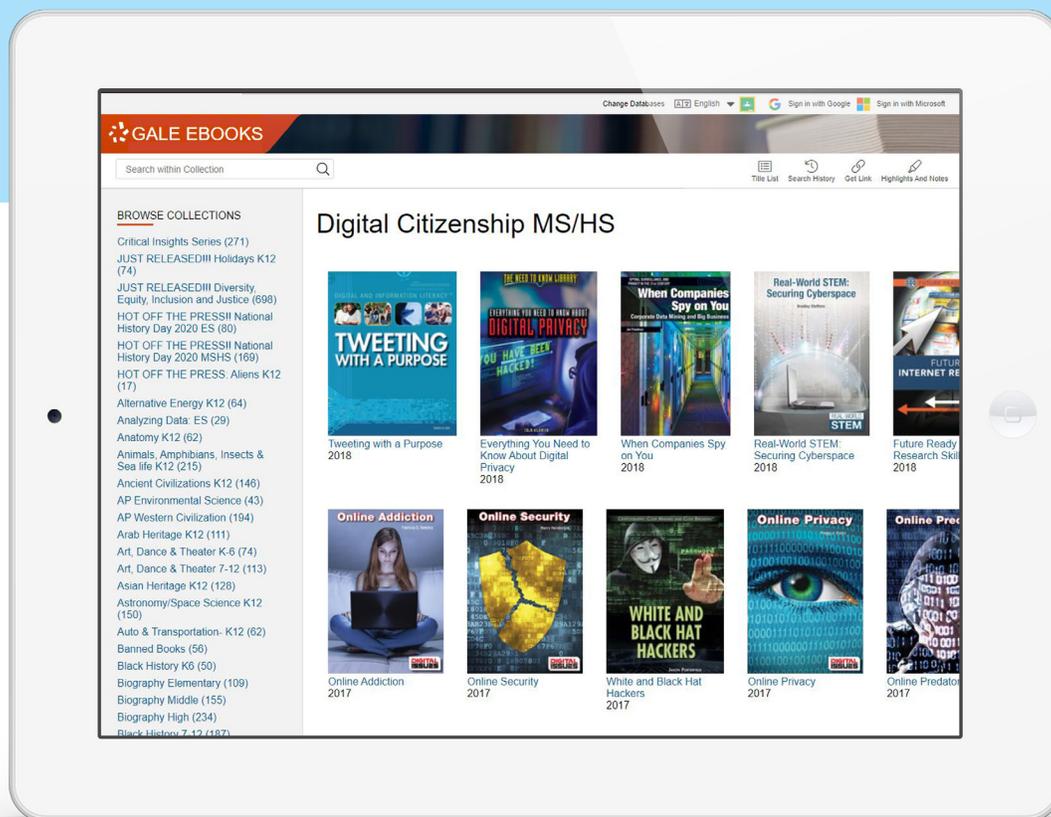
of school libraries offer eBooks because of curriculum support and classroom use

Start your eBook success story at:

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ABOUT GALE eBooks

How your users research is just as important as what they research. Gale's award-winning, hassle-free platform is designed to cross search all of your school's eBooks to pinpoint relevant material so that students and educators spend less time searching for authoritative content and more time meeting their research goals. From cross-searchable eBooks to sharable links to ReadSpeaker text-to-speech technology to citation tools, *Gale eBooks* offers users the modern research tools that simplify and enrich the learning process. Integration with G Suite for Education and Microsoft Office 365 makes collaboration a breeze for students and educators alike. Plus, users have unlimited, simultaneous access with the purchase of just one copy.



SOURCES

The following people shared their expertise for this brief:

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