

eBook and audiobook downloads move into library arena

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Internet usage in South Africa is accelerating rapidly. For the first time ever, more than 10% of the South African population is online, and that number is expected to skyrocket in the years to come. Combine that with the 83% of South Africans using cell phones and a vibrant picture of a connected population begins to take shape.

What does this mean for libraries?

Today, libraries must offer customers myriad options for accessing information anytime, anywhere. One of the most popular ways libraries are responding to digital demand is to provide eBooks, digital audiobooks and more for download. From New York City to Toronto to London to Taipei, more than 10 000 libraries worldwide allow their customers to browse, check out, and download digital books and more with just a library card and an Internet connection. Titles can be read or listened to on a computer; transferred to mobile devices like the iPod or Sony Reader; and downloaded directly onto popular Windows Mobile, Android, or BlackBerry smartphones.

As the number of South African Internet users and mobile device owners grows, demand for online services from libraries will only increase. OverDrive (www.overdrive.com), the leading global distributor of eBooks, audiobooks and other digital formats to libraries, provides download services to meet the demands of a 21st century library user. Since 2004, OverDrive has delivered more than 21 million checkouts to millions of library users around the globe. In January 2010 alone more than one million digital books were checked out from OverDrive-powered libraries, and usage is increasing

every day.

How does it work? For each library system OverDrive develops a custom download web site - or 'Virtual branch' since it looks and feels like a library branch. The web site is hosted on OverDrive's global server network and integrates with the library's integrated library system (ILS) for seamless checkout. Libraries build collections that reflect their communities. Using OverDrive's collection development portal, Content Reserve, libraries can choose from more than 175,000 audiobook, eBook, music, and video titles to add to their digital catalogues. MARC records are available so that the digital titles on a downloaded web site can be added to libraries' Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC).

For the library user downloading is easy. Library users simply browse for digital titles on their library's downloaded web site, check them out for free with a library card, and download them to a personal computer at home or anywhere they have an Internet connection. The library downloads are compatible with Windows and Mac computers and can be transferred to some of the most popular devices, including Sony Reader, Barnes & Noble's nook, iPod, iPhone, Zune, BlackBerry, Android devices, and many more. The digital titles also lend just like a print book. Each digital title has a lending period, and when the title expires, it checks itself back into the library's digital catalogue, so there's never a late fee.

Also, like the printed books and physical media on a library's shelves, the digital catalogue on a library's downloaded web site is made up of best-selling and new release digital titles. Dan Brown's international bestseller **The lost symbol** is available to libraries, as is Barack Obama's **The audacity of hope**. Oftentimes a library can add a title to its digital catalogue prior to the release date, and patrons can join

a waiting list until it becomes available for download. With download standing order plans and holds manager, libraries are able to automate collection development so that the latest releases become available to library patrons faster.

Even though a library can automate some collection development, staying on top of statistics and trends is also a key to success. OverDrive's download services include real-time reports with data on circulation, web traffic, new user registration, and holds. The data available helps a library develop a collection that meets its community's needs.

Because of easy access to popular and best-selling titles and a growing list of compatible devices, libraries around the world have seen enormous success after introducing digital book downloads to their library users. In 2009 library users viewed more than 401 million download web site pages, a 69% increase over 2008. Audiobook checkouts increased 70% in 2009 compared to 2008, and eBook checkouts grew 53%. OverDrive's network of libraries recently crossed the 20 million all-time checkouts mark, but it was just last year that library partners hit 10 million all-time checkouts. It means that, in a little more than one year, libraries accomplished what took five years since the service became available in 2004.

South African libraries now have an opportunity to take part in the global library download phenomenon. With Internet penetration beginning its rapid growth in South Africa, libraries should start to plan now to add services that will be in demand for years to come.

For more information on eBook, audiobook, music, and video download services for South African libraries, contact Kirston Hoets at <booktalk@global.co.za>.

2009 by the numbers

- 401 million web site pages viewed by library users (69% growth over 2008) and 8.7 million digital titles checked out (63% increase over 2008)
- 4 billion minutes of spoken word audio downloaded from library web sites
- 70% increase in audiobook checkouts over 2008, while eBook checkouts increased by 53%
- 40% increase in new library users over 2008.

Featured library web sites

- The New York Public Library - <http://ebooks.nypl.org>
 - Toronto Public Library - <http://overdrive.torontopubliclibrary.ca>
 - London libraries - <http://llc.lib.overdrive.com>
 - Taipei Public Library - <http://taipei.lib.overdrive.com>
- ... and more at <http://search.overdrive.com>

