

E-book Platforms for Libraries

Comparative Overview

Abstract

Chapter 4 of Library Technology Reports (vol. 49, no. 3) “E-book Platforms for Libraries” consists of four tables. The at-a-glance table lists all fifty-one products featured in the main directory, while three comparative overview tables zoom in on the key features of thirty-five platforms (by vendors who agreed to supply information necessary for inclusion by given deadline). Librarians may use the tables to gain insight into how certain platforms measure up to others in terms of content, technical specifications, functionality, and business models.

Table 4.1 is an at-a-glance overview of the fifty-one platforms listed in chapter 3. Each is identified by platform type (e.g., aggregator, publisher, distributor) and main library market (e.g., academic/research, public, K–12), and details about the product’s website and parent company are also included. The purpose of this table (arranged alphabetically by product name) is to give librarians a bird’s-eye view of the types of e-book platforms they can purchase.

Tables 4.2.1, 4.2.2, and 4.2.3 are comparative overviews of thirty-five of the fifty-one e-book platforms listed in table 4.1. The goal here is to give librarians an understanding of each product’s size, scope, technical aspects, and purchasing plans. Librarians should note, however, that this information is time-sensitive and that these tables are not the last word

on the scope or purchasing options for the products. E-book platforms frequently go through revisions as vendors revise their offerings, in terms of both content and purchasing plans.

The information in the comparative tables was supplied by the vendors who responded to a questionnaire sent to them electronically in November and December 2012. The report was finalized in January 2013. Not all platforms listed in chapter 3 and in table 4.1 are included in the comparative tables owing to one of the following two reasons: the vendor did not respond to the initial request to provide more information, or the vendor responded but requested not to be included in the comparative tables as its product was in the midst of a significant overhaul at the time the report was compiled.

The specifics for each product are in line with the purchasing criteria discussed in chapter 2 and are broken down into four categories: Content, Technical Specifications, Functionality, and Business Model, as these are usually the most pressing issues that come up in conversations with librarians who purchase e-book platforms for their institutions. The abbreviation n/a is used in a number of fields to indicate that a particular column is not applicable to a product or that the information was not available at the time the vendor was contacted.

Table 4.1
At-a-glance overview of fifty-one e-book platforms

Platform	Website	Platform Type	Parent Company
123Library	https://www.123library.org	aggregator/distributor	123Doc Education
3M Cloud Library	http://ebook.3m.com	distributor/e-book lending service	3M
ABC-CLIO eBook Collection	http://ebooks.abc-clio.com	publisher	ABC-CLIO
Axis 360	http://btol.com/axis360	distributor	Baker & Taylor
Books24x7	www.books24x7.com	aggregator	Skillssoft
Books at JSTOR	http://books.jstor.org	university press consortium	ITHAKA
Books@Ovid	http://site.ovid.com/site/products/books_landing.jsp	aggregator/distributor	Ovid Technologies
Brain Hive	www.brainhive.com	distributor/e-book lending service	Brain Hive
Cambridge Books Online	http://ebooks.cambridge.org	publisher	Cambridge University Press
dawsonera	http://dawsonera.com	distributor	Dawson Books
De Gruyter Online	www.degruyter.com	publisher	De Gruyter
EBL (Ebook Library)	www.ebllib.com	e-book lending service	ProQuest
eBooks on EBSCOhost	http://ebscosthost.com/ebooks	aggregator	EBSCO Publishing
ebrary	www.ebrary.com	aggregator	ProQuest
epointbooks.com	www.epointbooks.com	publisher	Rosen Publishing
Follett eBooks	http://aboutfollettebooks.com	distributor/e-book lending service	Follett Corporation
Freading Ebook Service	http://freading.com	distributor/e-book lending service	Library Ideas
FreedomFlix	http://freedomflix.digital.scholastic.com/home	publisher	Scholastic
GVRL	www.gale.cengage.com/gvrl	aggregator	Gale Cengage
Infobase eBooks	http://infobasepublishing.com/ebooks	publisher	Infobase Publishing
Knovel	http://why.knovel.com	aggregator	Knovel Corporation
LexisNexis Digital Library	www.lexisnexis.com/ebooks/lending	e-book lending service	LexisNexis
Literati by Credo	http://literati.credoreference.com	aggregator	Credo Reference
MackinVIA	www.mackin.com/via	aggregator	Mackin Educational Resources
McGraw-Hill eBook Library	http://mhbooklibrary.com	publisher	McGraw-Hill
MyiLibrary	www.myilibrary.com	aggregator	Ingram Content Group
OverDrive	www.overdrive.com	distributor/e-book lending service	OverDrive
Oxford Handbooks Online	www.oxfordhandbooks.com	publisher	Oxford University Press
Oxford Reference	www.oxfordreference.com	publisher	Oxford University Press
Palgrave Connect	www.palgraveconnect.com	publisher	Palgrave MacMillan
PsycBOOKS	www.apa.org/pubs/databases/psycbooks	publisher	American Psychological Association
Questia	www.questia.com	aggregator	Cengage Learning
R2 Digital Library	http://r2library.com	aggregator/distributor	Rittenhouse Book Distributors
Routledge Reference Online	http://routledgeonline.com	publisher	Taylor & Francis
Safari Books Online	www.safaribooksonline.com	aggregator	Safari Books Online
SAGE Knowledge	http://knowledge.sagepub.com	publisher	SAGE Publications
ScienceDirect	www.sciencedirect.com	publisher	Elsevier
SOLR	http://sharpe-online.com	publisher	ME Sharpe
SpringerLink	http://link.springer.com	publisher	Springer Science+Business Media
SpringerReference	http://springerreference.com	publisher	Springer Science+Business Media
StarWalk Kids Media	http://starwalkkids.com	distributor	Seymour Science
Storia	http://scholastic.com/storia	publisher	Scholastic
SwetsWise	http://swets.com/ebooks	distributor	Swets Information Services
Taylor & Francis eBooks	www.tandfebooks.com	publisher	Taylor & Francis
TrueFlix	http://trueflix.scholastic.com	publisher	Scholastic
University Press Scholarship Online	www.universitypressscholarship.com	university press consortium	Oxford University Press
University Publishing Online	http://universitypublishingonline.org	university press consortium	Cambridge University Press
UPCC Book Collections on Project MUSE	http://muse.jhu.edu	university press consortium	Johns Hopkins University Press
Wheeler's ePlatform	www.eplatform.co	distributor/e-book lending service	Wheeler's Books
Wiley Online Library	http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com	publisher	John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
World Book Web	http://worldbook.com	publisher	World Book, Inc.

Table 4.2.1
Comparative overview of thirty-five e-book platforms—content and technical specifications

E-book platform	Content				Technical specifications				
	Main library market	# of e-books	# of publishers	Other content types	Multimedia	Browsers supported	Software or plugins needed	E-book file format	Compatible devices
3M Cloud Library	public	250,000+	300+	no	no	application-based	3M apps	PDF, ePub	iOS devices, Sony eReader, Nook, most ePub-compatible readers
Axis 360	public	400,000	300	no	yes (audio-books, videos)	all	Blio, Adobe Digital Editions or Bluefire Reader, Acoustik (for audiobooks)	PDF, ePub, .xps (Blio), Acoustik	iOS devices, Nook, Sony eReader, Kobo
Books24x7	academic/research	34,000+	845	no	yes (videos)	IE, Safari, Firefox, Chrome	none	HTML, PDF	any tablet or mobile device
Brain Hive	K-12	3,500	20	no	forthcoming in Fall 2013	all	none	PDF, ePub	iPad
Cambridge Books Online	academic/research, public	20,000	1	no	no	IE, Safari, Firefox, Chrome, Opera	none	PDF	most
EBL (Ebook Library)	academic/research	325,000+	500	yes (a small number of journals)	no	all	Adobe Digital Editions	PDF, ePub	any that supports Adobe Digital Editions & Bluefire Reader
eBooks on EBSCOhost	academic/research, public	350,000	1,400	no	no	all	Adobe Digital Editions, Adobe PDF plugin (for Mac)	PDF	iOS devices, Sony eReader, Nook,
ebrary	academic/research, public	450,000	500	no	no	IE, Safari, Firefox	Adobe Digital Editions, Java, enabling of cookies & popups required	PDF	Kobo, Nook, Kindle Fire, iPad, Sony eReader
Follett eBooks	K-12, public	145,000+	1,000 (publisher imprints)	yes (databases)	yes (audio-books)	IE, Safari, Firefox, Chrome	Adobe Flash Player	proprietary	iPad, Android tablets, Kindle Fire, Nook Color
Freeding Ebook Service	public	50,000	60	no	yes	all	Adobe Digital Editions	PDF, ePub	Nook, iPad, Kobo, Sony eReader, Kindle Fire, Android tablets
FreedomFlix	K-12, public	40	1	yes (related articles)	yes (videos, slideshows, images)	all	n/a	n/a	all hand-held devices
Gale Virtual Reference Library	academic/research, public	8,000+	80+	no	no	all	none	PDF, HTML	all major Android & iOS devices

Table 4.2.1 cont'd

E-book platform	Content				Technical specifications				
	Main library market	# of e-books	# of publishers	Other content types	Multimedia	Browsers supported	Software or plugins needed	E-book file format	Compatible devices
Infobase eBooks	K-12, public, academic/research	4,000	1	no	no	all	Adobe Reader	PDF, HTML, ePub (for some, not all titles)	most devices that have a web browser
Literati by Credo	academic/research, public	1,300	80+	no	yes (images, audio, videos, maps)	all	JavaScript, Adobe Flash, MP3 players	HTML (files may be saved in PDF)	n/a
MackinVIA	K-12, public	100,000	80	yes (databases)	yes (videos)	all	Adobe Digital Editions	proprietary	VIA reader, iPad, Android tablets, Kindle Fire
MyiLibrary	academic/research	400,000	1,450	no	no	all	Adobe Digital Editions (for offline download)	PDF, ePub	Nook, Apple devices, Kindle, Sony eReader
OverDrive	public, K-12, academic/research, corporate	1 million	2,000	no	yes (audio-books, music, videos)	all	Adobe Digital Editions, OverDrive Media Console app, modern web browser with JavaScript enabled	ePub, PDF, Kindle	all (including Kindle)
Oxford Handbooks Online	academic/research	325+	1	no	yes (videos)	IE, Firefox, Chrome, Opera, Safari	none	XML	forthcoming
Oxford Reference	academic/research, public	300+	300+	no	yes (videos)	all but IE 7 & older	none	XML	forthcoming
Palgrave Connect	academic/research	11,500	1	yes (journals)	no	all	Adobe Reader	PDF for all; ePub for books published in 2011 & beyond	all
PsycBOOKS	academic/research	3,500+	1	yes (articles, databases)	yes (videos)	all	none	PDF	n/a
Questia	academic/research, 9-12	76,500	500	yes (journal, magazine, & newspaper articles)	yes (videos)	all	none	HTML	iPad, iPhone, tablet
Safari Books Online	academic/research	28,000	200	yes (related articles)	yes (videos)	all	Flash (version 10 & up)	PDF	all iOS 3+ devices; all Android 1.5+, 2.1+, BlackBerry 6 PlayBook
SAGE Knowledge	academic/research, corporate, public	2,700+	1	yes (journals)	yes (images, videos)	all	Java	PDF, HTML	forthcoming in 2013

Table 4.2.1 cont'd

E-book platform	Content					Technical specifications			
	Main library market	# of e-books	# of publishers	Other content types	Multimedia	Browsers supported	Software or plugins needed	E-book file format	Compatible devices
Sharpe Online Reference	academic/research, public	29 (multivolume)	1	no	yes (audio & video)	all	Java & Flash	HTML	iPad forthcoming
SpringerLink	academic/research	88,000	40+	yes (journals, protocols)	yes (videos)	all	none	PDF, HTML	all
SpringerReference	academic/research	195+	1	no	no	all	none	PDF, HTML	does not support mobile screen size
StarWalk Kids Media	K-12, public	400 (by June 2013)	1	no	yes	IE, Safari, Firefox, Chrome	Flash plugin	PDF, streaming delivery	Nook, iPad, Kindle Fire, iPhone, Android phones
Storia	Pre K-8	3,500	21	no	yes	application-based	Storia app	n/a	iPad, Android tablets
Taylor & Francis eBooks	academic/research, corporate, government, public	35,000+	1	no	no	all	FileOpen plugin	PDF	not yet supported
TrueFlix	K-12, public	84	1	yes (related articles)	yes (videos, slideshows, images)	all	Flash	n/a	all Flash-based devices (by Aug. 2013, non-Flash-based devices will be supported)
University Press Scholarship Online	academic/research	11,200+	11	no	yes (videos)	all	none	XML (printable & downloadable in PDF at chapter level)	all smartphones & tablet devices
University Publishing Online	academic/research	22,000	9	yes (journals)	no	IE, Safari, Firefox, Chrome, Opera	none	PDF	most
UPCC Book Collections on Project MUSE	academic/research; public	20,000+	80+	yes (journals)	no	IE, Firefox, Chrome, Opera	none	PDF	all PDF-compatible
Wheeler's ePlatform	public, K-12	100,000	700+	no	no	all	Adobe Digital Editions; Bluefire reading app	PDF, ePub	Nook, iPad, Sony eReader, Samsung Galaxy, Kobo, Android tablets

Table 4.2.2
Comparative overview of thirty-five e-book platforms—functionality

E-book Platform	Full-text searching	Copy/paste	Printing	Offline reading	ADA compliance	Annotation tools	Usage reports	MARC records	Persistent URLs
3M Cloud Library	yes	no	no	yes	no (forthcoming)	yes	no	yes (free)	no
Axis 360	yes	yes (if publisher allows)	yes (if publisher allows)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes (free)	yes (book level)
Books24x7	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes (free)	yes
Brain Hive	yes	no	no	no	no	no	yes	yes (free)	yes (book level)
Cambridge Books Online	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes (free)	yes (book & chapter level)
EBL (Ebook Library)	yes	yes (up to 5% of any book's content)	yes (up to 20% of any book's content)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes (book & chapter level)
eBooks on EBSCOhost	yes (for 90% of titles)	yes (for 90% of titles)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes (free)	yes (book, chapter, & page level)	yes
ebrary	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes (on demand)	yes (collection, book & chapter level)
Follett eBooks	yes	yes (if publisher allows)	yes (if publisher allows)	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes (book level)
Freeding Ebook Service	no	n/a	n/a	yes	yes	n/a	yes	no	n/a
FreedomFlix	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Gale Virtual Reference Library	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes (free)	yes
Infobase eBooks	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes (free)	yes (book & chapter level)
Literati by Credo	yes	yes	yes	yes (by saving in PDF)	yes	no	yes	yes (free)	yes (book level, entry, image, topic)
MackinVIA	yes (within VIA reader)	yes (if publisher allows)	yes (if publisher allows)	yes (via MackinVIA app)	n/a	yes	yes	yes (free)	yes (book level)
MyiLibrary	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes (book level)
OverDrive	yes (for OverDrive Read only)	yes (if publisher allows)	yes (if publisher allows)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes (paid & free options)	yes (to OverDrive Read titles)
Oxford Handbooks Online	yes	yes	yes (in PDF)	no	yes	forthcoming	yes	yes (free)	yes (book & article level)
Oxford Reference	yes	yes	yes (in PDF)	no	yes	forthcoming	yes	yes (free)	yes (all levels)

Table 4.2.2 cont'd

E-book Platform	Full-text searching	Copy/paste	Printing	Offline reading	ADA compliance	Annotation tools	Usage reports	MARC records	Persistent URLs
Palgrave Connect	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes (free)	yes (book level; chapter level forthcoming)
PsycBOOKS	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes
Questia	yes	yes (portions of the content)	yes (one page at a time)	no	yes	yes	no	no	yes (book level)
Safari Books Online	yes	yes	yes	no for libraries; yes for corporate & consumer accounts	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes (book level)
SAGE Knowledge	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Sharpe Online Reference	yes	yes (content & images)	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes (free if requested)	yes (book & chapter level, image)
SpringerLink	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes (book & chapter level)
SpringerReference	yes	yes	yes (in PDF)	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes (book & chapter level)
StarWalk Kids Media	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no
Storia	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no	no	n/a
Taylor & Francis eBooks	yes	yes	yes	yes	forthcoming in 2013	yes	yes	yes (free)	yes (book level)
TrueFlix	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	yes	yes	yes
University Press Scholarship Online	yes	yes	yes (in PDF)	no	yes	forthcoming	yes	yes (free)	yes (book & chapter level)
University Publishing Online	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes (free)	yes (book & chapter level)
UPCC Book Collections on Project MUSE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes (free)	yes (book & chapter level)
Wheeler's ePlatform	no	no	no	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	n/a

Table 4.2.3
Comparative overview of thirty-five e-book platforms—business model details

E-book platform	One user/one book	Purchase one book to own	Subscription	Short-term loans	PDA	Annual fee	Minimum commitment	Inter-library loan	Invoicing intervals	Consortial purchasing	Embargo	DRM	Free trials
3M Cloud Library	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no	monthly	yes	no	full DRM protection	no
Axis 360	yes	yes (single user or multiuser)	no (in development)	no (in development)	no (in development)	yes (for perpetual access)	\$1,000 minimum opening order (scaled by size of library)	no	yearly	yes (limitations apply)	mostly no	limited copy/paste & printing	n/a
Books24x7	no	no (but available as an option within the subscription package)	yes	no	no	no	no	no	yearly	yes	no	none	yes
Brain Hive	yes (on demand, rental)	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	monthly	yes	no	full DRM protection	no
Cambridge Books Online	no	no (but available upon request)	yes	forthcoming	no	yes (for perpetual access only)	25 titles	no	vary	yes	yes (4–6 weeks)	minimal	yes (30 days)
EBL (Ebook Library)	no	yes (unlimited, multiuser)	no	yes	yes	yes (nominal)	no	no	weekly & monthly	yes	no	some restrictions apply	yes (30 days)
eBooks on EBSCOhost	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	depends on type of purchase	yes (limitations apply)	set by publisher	Adobe DRM applies	yes
ebrary	yes (for perpetual purchases)	yes (unlimited, multiuser)	yes	yes	yes	yes (for perpetual access only)	no (pledges may be required for PDA accounts)	no	yearly (for subscription) & weekly (for PDA)	yes	no	some restrictions apply	yes (30 days)
Follett eBooks	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	vary	n/a	no	restrictions set by publishers	yes
Freeding Ebook Service	yes	no	yes (via tokens)	no	no	no	no	no	vary	n/a	varies; set by publishers	standard DRM	n/a
FreedomFlix	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	yearly	yes	no	n/a	yes (60 days)

Table 4.2.3 cont'd

E-book platform	One user/ one book to own	Purchase to own	Subscription	Short-term loans	PDA	Annual fee	Minimum commitment	Inter-library loan	Invoicing intervals	Consortial purchasing	Embargo	DRM	Free trials
Gale Virtual Reference Library	no	yes (unlimited, perpetual)	no	no	no	yes	no	no	upon availability of content	yes	no	none	yes (1-4 weeks)
Infobase eBooks	no	yes (unlimited)	yes	no	no	no	no	no	yearly	yes	no	none	yes (30 days)
Literati by Credo	no	yes (for collections)	yes	no	no	no	no	yes	yearly	yes	no	none	no (3-month paid trials only)
MackinVIA	no	yes (unlimited, multi-user)	no	yes (if enabled by administrator)	no	no	n/a	n/a	vary	yes	n/a	none	yes (15-30 days)
MyLibrary	yes	yes (multi-user, perpetual)	yes	yes	yes	yes (for perpetual access only)		yes	n/a	yes	n/a	evaluated on a per-title basis	yes (30 days)
OverDrive	yes (simultaneous & metered access)	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	monthly	yes	varies; set by publishers	standard DRM for ePub & WMA	yes
Oxford Handbooks Online	no	yes (unlimited)	yes	no	no	yes (for perpetual access)	no	no	yearly	yes	no	none	yes (30 days)
Oxford Reference	no	yes	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	yearly	yes	no	none	yes (30 days)
Palgrave Connect	no	yes (perpetual)	no	no	no	yes (waived when a current collection is purchased)	20-title minimum for Build-Your-Own model	yes	yearly	yes	no	none	yes (30 & 60 days)
PsycBOOKS	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	n/a	yes (in accordance with license terms)	yearly	yes	yes (12 months)	n/a	yes (30 days)
Questia	no	no	yes	no	no	n/a	\$750 for schools; no minimum for higher ed when bundled with a Centage print product	no	yearly for school; vary for higher ed (monthly, quarterly, bi-yearly, bi-annual)	yes (case-by-case)	no	some restrictions apply	yes (1 day for individual; 30 days for schools)

Table 4.2.3 cont'd

E-book platform	One user/one book	Purchase one book to own	Subscription	Short-term loans	PDA	Annual fee	Minimum commitment	Inter-library loan	Invoicing intervals	Consortial purchasing	Embargo	DRM	Free trials
Safari Books Online	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no	yearly (negotiable)	yes	no	n/a	yes (30 days)
SAGE Knowledge	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no	yearly	yes	no	none	yes (30 days)
Sharpe Online Reference	no	yes (unlimited)	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	yes	no	none	yes (30 days)
SpringerLink	no	yes (perpetual)	no	no	no	yes	no	yes	vary	yes	no	none	yes (up to 90 days)
SpringerReference	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	yes	yearly	yes	no	none	yes (60 days)
StarWalk Kids Media	no	no	yes	no	no	no	\$595 for schools	no	yearly	yes	no	none	yes (30 days)
Storia	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	vary	negotiable on a case-by-case basis	n/a	yes	n/a
Taylor & Francis eBooks	yes	yes (multiuser & unlimited)	yes	no	no	yes (nominal)	50-title minimum purchase or subscription	no	yearly	yes	no	75% of the catalog is DRM-free	yes
TrueFlix	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	yearly	yes	no	n/a	yes (60 days)
University Press Scholarship Online	no	yes (unlimited)	yes	no	no	yes (for perpetual access)	no	no	yearly	yes	no	download limited to 5 chapters per session	yes (30 days)
University Publishing Online	no	not standard but available upon request (via perpetual access)	yes	forthcoming	no	yes (for perpetual access only)	25	no	vary	yes	no	minimal	yes (30 days)
UPCC Book Collections on Project MUSE	no	yes (unlimited)	yes	no	no	no	no	yes for owned; no for subscriptions	yearly	yes	no	none	no
Wheeler's ePlatform	yes	yes	no	yes	some	no	no	no	monthly	yes	n/a	Adobe DRM applies	yes (30 days)