



YOUR BOOK IS IN THE MAIL

We know ebooks present a challenge in the management of agreements with publishers and resellers. One library service for the print-disabled has already faced – and found a way past – that challenge for their clients. Vision Australia's Deborah Mould describes how.

Imagine a library where books were created as you wanted them. Welcome to Vision Australia's library and, if you can read this, you probably aren't one of our clients.

Almost one in six people you know will have a disability. It could be Parkinson's disease, chronic arthritis of the hands, dyslexia or MS. Being unable to read standard print can happen at almost any age, but with thousands of free audio and Braille books to choose from, it doesn't have to mean that you also have to stop reading.



Vision Australia's Burn On Demand disc-burning machine

Audio libraries then and now

Before the digital revolution, audio was largely cassette-based. Hundreds of thousands of cassettes were required due to the large number required to make a single book. These cassettes were prone to damage and loss and required a lengthy manual process to maintain the title in the collection.

Regardless of expected demand, sufficient copies were always difficult to keep in stock. Reader interest in *The Da Vinci Code* or *The Secret* would ebb as *The Girl With A Dragon Tattoo* made its way up the reservation list. In print-based libraries this can be a problem, but for alternative format producers it was a nightmare.

With the move to a digital environment, a new way of circulating materials became available. The *Burn on Demand* (BoD) system allows the library to generate structured MP3 (DAISY) audio books on demand. Titles are stored on a Storage Area Network (SAN), and can be burnt to a single disc, labelled and out in the mail within 24 hours. Every day, we send out over 2,000 books to clients all around Australia.

Once returned in the two-way envelope, the discs are removed from the client record. This creates a space so that the next book can be burned and sent out. 'Both the returned disc and cardboard envelope are recycled, with the disc sent away to be pulped and turned into building materials or car dashboards'. The enjoyment of reading is enhanced because each book is loaned on a brand new CD, avoiding the frustration that can occur with old CDs.

The transition from an analogue-based service to a digital one has been the result of a strategy to reduce the time taken for clients to receive books. It also reduces wastage caused by damaged parts, or books that have lost their appeal, as well as manual handling by staff.

New approach to publishers' agreements

To reach this goal, the library had to work with audio publishers to resolve the number of copies allowed. When *Overdrive* announced that all of its Harper Collins books were limited to 26 downloads, unless additional copies were purchased, the reaction raised the issue of what rights libraries should hold, as well as what libraries can do to create favourable conditions.

This issue of limited copies is familiar to print disabled libraries. Many of us have had to negotiate directly with



Posting your book back couldn't be easier

audio publishers to supply demand according to agreed copyright numbers. Rather than use a method which restricts to a single level of copies, (such as 26 copies to be created and read by clients and not copied again), we have instead agreed to a number of copies that can exist at any one time. For us, this means that when the agreed number of copies (say 26) are out on loan, no further copies can be produced. When a client returns one of those 26 copies, the disc deleted, and we can create another copy for another client.

By moving from a model which restricts by usage to one restricted by time (i.e. a limited copies on a particular day), we have enabled our clients to read more widely than before. The use of a centralised electronic storage method also allows us to prepare for the next opportunities in our electronic library.

It is this challenge, of finding a way to do business with existing partners in a new environment, that will enable us to handle the different formats our clients want for their content and our ability to supply them.

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