

# Indiana Library Directors' Perceptions of e-Book Patron-Driven Acquisitions

By Robert S. Freeman, Judith M. Nixon, and Suzanne M. Ward

## Abstract

A recent survey of collection librarians at large academic libraries with patron-driven e-Book acquisition programs (e-Book PDA) has shown that a majority of these librarians support the programs and believe that patrons choose good quality e-Books that have higher circulation rates than e-Books selected by librarians. E-Book PDA is becoming an increasingly common method of building digital collections in large academic libraries. In smaller academic libraries, however, there are still relatively few e-Book PDA programs. To get some idea of how many e-Book PDA programs there are in smaller academic libraries, to learn about the directors' attitudes toward such programs, and to see whether attitudes vary according to the size of the institutions, the authors conducted a survey of directors of libraries in Academic Libraries of Indiana (ALI), an association of mostly small academic libraries. With responses from 28 out of 73 ALI directors, the survey revealed that 82 percent (n=23) of the libraries do not have e-Book PDA programs, even though 82 percent (n=23) of the directors, regardless of the size of their institution, have positive attitudes toward the propositions that patrons would choose good quality e-Books that these e-Books would likely circulate. Reasons given for the directors' reluctance to pursue e-Book PDA include the lack of time and staff, concerns with the wide variety of ways e-Books are accessed, and the resistance of some patrons to e-Books. The authors address these concerns and encourage smaller institutions to consider e-Book PDA.

*Keywords:* patron-driven acquisitions, e-Books, pda, collection development, patron-initiated collection development, small academic libraries, library directors, Indiana, Academic Libraries of Indiana, ALI

Wouldn't you be interested in significantly expanding the number of books available to your library's patrons and providing these titles 24/7 wherever your faculty or students are, for a very small investment of funds? This is a description of e-Book patron-driven acquisitions (PDA). Many libraries, especially research libraries, have implemented e-Book PDA services. Research articles assessing the results of this acquisitions model are encouraging (Breitbach & Lambert, 2011; Fischer, Wright, Clatanoff, Barton, & Shreeves, 2012; Hodges, Preston, & Hamilton, 2010a, 2010b; Levine-Clark, 2010; Price & McDonald, 2009). E-Book PDA programs are a logical outgrowth of print book PDA programs, which have been well documented as successful in the library literature.

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Unlike print book PDA programs, in which books are only purchased when a patron requests an eligible title through interlibrary loan, e-Book PDA programs only pay for the books when patrons initiate use by clicking on a link in the OPAC. For this reason, e-Book PDA programs do not require a large investment.

There are significant differences between print book and e-Book PDA plans. In a print book PDA program, patrons have already identified the book they want and have submitted the interlibrary loan request to ask the library to obtain it for them, thus making a fairly strong statement that the book is needed. Clicking on a link in an e-Book record in the OPAC may not indicate as significant an interest in a book. It could indicate a casual interest or just a desire to skim the table of contents. E-Book PDA programs are similar to approval plans in that librarians develop a profile to match the library's collection development needs and MARC records for the matching e-Books are loaded into the OPAC. When patrons access one of these e-Books they trigger a rental fee and, at a certain point (typically after 3-5 rentals), they trigger an automatic purchase. Future users do not generate any additional rental fees. Patrons almost always have no idea that their e-Book use is driving purchases; the PDA e-Book records in an OPAC look identical to those for e-Books that the library has already acquired. Indeed there are advantages for both patrons and libraries (De Fino & Lo, 2011). Patrons can easily find and use e-Books over the Internet with their personal computers or e-readers. Libraries can save money, despite offering thousands of potentially relevant e-Book titles, because they do not pay for any of them until patrons use them. However, unlike with print book PDA programs, which by now have been well received, librarians often express concerns about e-Book PDA programs.

## Background: Print Book PDA

Buying selected books requested through interlibrary loan, instead of borrowing them, is now a common practice. These programs have been called by various names, but the most accepted term is "patron-driven acquisitions (PDA)." The Purdue University Libraries was an early PDA innovator when we first set aside \$15,000 in 2000 to acquire scholarly non-fiction titles in English that were available for quick delivery from Amazon for less than \$100 each.

When we started this program many librarians, including some of our colleagues and an associate director, had concerns

that the purchases might not fit into our collection development plan. The main concern was that we might acquire popular or non-scholarly books or books on topics outside our collection focus. Other librarians expressed similar concerns (Dahl, 2012). To address these doubts, we conducted an extensive evaluation of the books purchased through PDA two years after the program began. We concluded that the vast majority of these patron-selected books were scholarly and, in many cases, cross-disciplinary books that would have been missed through our subject librarian selector model (Anderson et al., 2002). In 2010 we conducted a 10-year study of the books purchased through the ILL PDA program. This second study confirmed the results of the 2002 evaluation and was expanded to include a circulation analysis, which found that PDA books were more likely to have repeated circulations than were books selected by librarians. Beginning in the early 2000s, many other libraries began similar PDA programs based on ILL requests, and evaluations of these programs also indicated that patrons select high quality, scholarly books that have a high likelihood of being used again by other patrons (Anderson et al., 2010; Bracke, 2010; Nixon & Saunders, 2010; Perdue & Van Fleet, 1999; Tyler, Xu, Melvin, Epp, & Kreps, 2010).

### E-Books and E-Book PDA Programs

E-Books have several advantages over print books. The advantages for patrons are that e-Books are available at any time and in any place with Internet access. Users do not need to wait for an e-Book that is checked out since, depending on the publisher's permissions for each title, multiple users are able to read it at the same time. Advantages for libraries are that staff members do not need to check the e-Books out, reshelve them, or even provide shelf space.

E-Book PDA programs also have advantages over traditional acquisitions programs. A library can add tens of thousands of titles to the catalog without purchase cost until a patron clicks on the link to open a book and then makes significant use of it, such as reading for it more than five minutes or downloading a chapter. Employing this acquisitions model avoids the situation of many librarian-purchased books just sitting on the shelves, never circulating. This usage-based purchasing model means that, even though thousands of e-Books can be made instantly available in the OPAC, those that are not used need *never* be purchased.

E-Book PDA programs represent a major shift from librarian-selected collections to ones in which patron use drives part of the collection development decisions. Some librarians see this change as a challenge to their role as subject and collection development experts. The authors wondered how widespread this challenge was felt in the library world. Except for Osorio's survey of Illinois academic librarians (Osorio, 2011), no research has examined whether librarians' perceptions are changing about this newer point-of-need and patron-focused method of collection development. To answer this research question we surveyed the collection development librarians

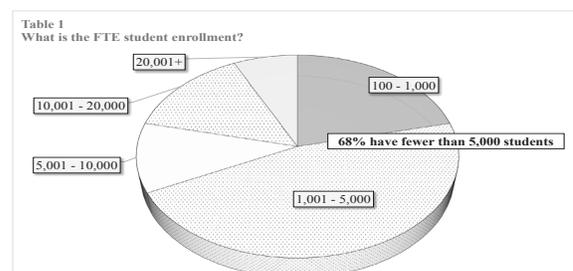
at the eight libraries in the Committee of Institutional Cooperation (CIC) that have active e-Book PDA programs. The basic research question was to determine if librarians in large academic libraries favored e-Book PDA programs and what factors influence their attitudes. Rather than ask the straightforward question of whether they were in favor of or against e-Book PDA programs, we asked two related questions. The first question was whether the librarians feel that patrons would choose high quality books. The second was whether they believe that patron-selected books would have more subsequent circulations than librarian-selected books. In addition to these two questions, we asked about personal e-Book-reading habits and the number of years in the profession. Were librarians who personally read e-Books more likely to embrace e-PDA? Would more recently trained librarians express a more positive attitude about e-PDA? The results of this research will appear in a chapter of *Customer-Based Collection Development: An Overview*, edited by Karl Bridges, published by ALA in 2014.

In summary, we found that librarians at the CIC libraries with e-Book PDA programs are highly supportive of them, feel that patrons can choose appropriate books, and think that these books are likely to recirculate. These attitudes do not appear to be influenced by factors such as personal e-Book reading habits, involvement in the planning of the e-Book PDA program, area of subject responsibility, or percent of time spent on collection management. Since only librarians at large CIC institutions were surveyed, we decided to expand the survey to Indiana academic library directors to see how attitudes of librarians at primarily smaller institutions compared.

### Methodology for Surveying Indiana Librarians

The survey of Indiana library directors was a slight variation of the one sent to CIC librarians in that we added a few questions related to size of the library and sources of funding. We used Qualtrics software to develop and distribute the survey. The survey was sent via e-mail in January 2013 to all 73 library directors who are members of the Academic Libraries of Indiana (ALI). We received 28 usable responses for a 38 percent response rate, which was a better response rate than that from the CIC survey. A major goal of the Indiana survey was to ascertain the opinions of librarians at smaller academic institutions. Responses indicate that most of the institutions (68 percent) have fewer than 5,000 students, so that goal was met (see Table 1).

**Table 1:**



## Survey Questions and Basic Findings

After defining e-Book patron driven acquisition as a collection development profile with a vendor, the survey gathered some general demographic information about the institutions and the librarians. Sixty-eight percent (n=22) of the institutions have fewer than 5,000 students, although 57 percent (n=16) offer masters or PhD level degrees; 57 percent (n=16) are privately funded. The library directors are actively involved in collection development; 93 percent (n=26) have collection development responsibilities, 73 percent (n=19) collect in all or several subject areas, and 93 percent (n=26) are knowledgeable about PDA programs. Most, 64 percent (n=18), are also active e-Book readers.

The main survey questions were:

- I think patrons choose the most useful titles for their research.
- I think the titles that one patron uses will be used by other patrons.

All 28 respondents answered the first question. Do these librarians believe that patrons choose the most useful titles? Yes, a strong majority, 82 percent (n=23) agree or strongly agree (see Table 2). This was exactly the same result we found with CIC librarians; 82 percent (n=64). The importance of this question is that if one does not believe that patrons choose useful titles from a large selection, then one would almost certainly prefer an acquisition model that builds a small but highly selective collection. E-Book PDA is the opposite; it offers a large selection of books and relies on the patrons to choose the titles most relevant for their research.

**Table 2:**

I think patrons choose the most useful titles for their research.

Answer	No. of Responses	%
Strongly Agree	3	11%
Agree	20	71%
Disagree	5	18%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100%</b>

} 82% agree

Twenty-seven librarians responded to the second question. Do these librarians believe that the titles that one patron uses will be used by other patrons? Eighty-five percent (n=23) agree with this statement (see Table 3). This is a higher percentage than we found with CIC librarians, 79 percent (n=60) of whom agreed with this statement. This is an important question for e-Book PDA programs. Past research on print collections indicates that a small proportion of the collection is heavily used, while the rest of the collection is seldom or never used (Kent, 1979; Trueswell, 1969). If your collection development goal is to make available the titles patrons will want to use, then purchasing titles used by other patrons is logical. On the other hand, if your collection development goal is to build a carefully focused collection, then you would be less likely to support an e-Book PDA program.

**Table 3:**

Table 3  
I think the titles that one patron uses will be used by other patrons.

Answer	No. of Responses	%
Strongly Agree	3	11%
Agree	20	74%
Disagree	4	15%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100%</b>

} 85% agree

Indiana library directors agree with the two propositions that logically lead to offering an e-Book PDA program; however, most directors, 82 percent (n=23), responded that they do *not* have an e-Book PDA program (see Table 4). And of the five library directors who indicated that they do have PDA programs, three are at institutions with more than 10,000 students, and one is at a smaller institution which, upon further investigation, does not actually have an e-Book PDA program. This leaves only one responding Indiana library with fewer than 10,000 students that has an e-Book PDA program.

**Table 4:**

Table 4  
Do you have an e-book PDA program at your library?

Answer	No. of Responses	%
Yes	5	18%
No	23	82%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100%</b>

This result surprised the authors and prompted a deeper look into the comments section of the survey to ascertain why library directors would be overwhelmingly in favor of an e-Book PDA program yet not initiate one. Nine directors provided comments. Lack of time to develop a program was the most common reason given (n=4). Several of the comments reiterated that the directors support the e-Book PDA program concept, but have not had the time or staff to implement one, or they plan to initiate one in the coming year. We had expected that directors might want to retain control or responsibility for acquisitions; but only one director suggested interest in the condition that librarians review the selections for appropriateness to the collection prior to purchase. Another issue is how a single library participating in a shared or union catalog could have an e-Book PDA program without sharing it with the other libraries. The answer to this question may soon be solved by several large consortia that are currently experimenting with consortial e-Book PDA plans.

Two concerns expressed may change as patrons become more familiar with e-Books. The first concern was over the wide variation in how e-Books are handled by publishers. This is certainly an issue with e-Books in general and therefore with

e-Book PDA programs. The variety of ways e-Books are accessed, how many pages can be printed or downloaded, how long a user has access and whether multiple users can simultaneously use the same book are all serious concerns. All of these limitations can lead to frustrations for users and the need for more help from staff. There is no immediate solution to this problem and, therefore, some libraries may want to delay purchasing e-Books. However, as time goes on, this issue will be resolved partly because users will become more familiar with electronic files and publishers will reach some common standards. The second concern was patron resistance to e-Books. We assume that reading devices will improve and this will become less of an issue. However, surveys indicate that librarians perceive that patrons prefer print books. The *Library Journal* report on e-Book usage found that almost half of librarians' belief that "users prefer print" is one of the primary barriers to student and faculty use of e-Books; and this barrier has increased from 47 percent to 50 percent of librarians in two years ("2012 e-Book usage in U.S. Academic libraries: Third annual survey," 2012). However, actual usage studies do not confirm this concern. Comparative studies in libraries that have both print and electronic versions of the same titles show much higher use of the electronic versions. In the largest study to date of PDA of e-Books, Fischer and others at the University of Iowa compared 166 print and e-Book duplicates. "Despite the availability of the titles in print, users were demonstrating their preference for electronic versions." The circulation of the print titles was 100 while the electronic versions had 1,030 user sessions (Fischer et al., 2012). Smyth and Carlin, in their study at the University of Ulster (UK), found that e-Books in the study were used 154 times compared to five uses of the print versions. Yet when users were asked which they would choose "respondents expressed a distinct bias towards print" (Smyth & Carlin, 2012). Paula Kaufman's unpublished research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found that PhD students are evenly split with 45 of 114 students preferring print and 45 preferring electronic; 23 had no preference. Of the 15 faculty members in this study, seven preferred electronic while six preferred print; two faculty members had no preference (Kaufman, 2012). These studies in part indicate high use of e-Books while many users express their preference for print. The authors see the question of patron preference for print as an area for future research. Do patrons use e-Books for their convenience, but would rather have a print book? Or do patrons use e-Books as a finding aid, but when they want to read they would prefer the book in print format? Or do they often use e-Books like journals, only reading or printing certain chapters, and so, in fact, they often are satisfied with e-Books?

## Conclusions

An important finding in this research was that library directors at Indiana academic libraries are highly supportive of e-Book PDA programs; they feel that patrons can choose appropriate books for their own research, and that these books are likely to circulate. This attitude parallels the attitudes the authors found in a survey of CIC collection development librarians.

So the size of the institution does not appear to influence librarians' attitudes towards e-Book PDA programs, neither does the percent of time librarians spent on collection management activities nor librarians' personal e-Book reading habits. Smaller academic libraries have not started e-Book PDA programs, and the reasons gleaned from the comments at the end of the survey seem to be a lack of staff time, concerns over the wide variety of options offered by publishers, and the librarians' perceptions that patrons prefer print books.

Based on the survey's findings, the authors encourage libraries at smaller institutions to consider an e-Book PDA program. The major time commitment for initiating an e-Book PDA program lies in selecting a vendor, developing a profile, and working through the initial load of e-Book records into the catalog. Guidance on how to set one up is available in Ward's *Guide to Implementing and Managing Patron-Driven Acquisitions*, published by the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services (Ward, 2012).

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- Bios:**  
**Robert S. Freeman** has worked at Purdue University since 1997, where he is a reference librarian and liaison to the School of Languages and Cultures and the Department of English. He has an M.A. in German from UNC-Chapel Hill and an MLS from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Interested in the history of libraries and publishing, he co-edited and contributed to *Libraries to the People: Histories of Outreach* (McFarland, 2003). He recently co-edited a special issue of *Collection Management* (July-December 2010) on PDA with Judith M. Nixon and Suzanne M. Ward.
- Judith M. Nixon** received her B.S. degree in education from Valparaiso University (Ind.) in 1967 and her MLS from the University of Iowa in 1974. She has held appointments as head of three libraries at Purdue University: Consumer & Family Sciences, Management & Economics, and Humanities, Social Science & Education Library. Currently she is the bibliographer and liaison to the College of Education. She has published over 23 articles and seven books. Most recently her research has focused on evaluation of library science journals and patron-driven acquisitions (PDA).
- Suzanne Ward** holds degrees from UCLA, the University of Michigan, and Memphis State University. She has worked at the Purdue University Libraries since 1987 and is currently Head, Collection Management. Professional interests include patron-driven acquisitions (PDA) and print retention issues. She has published two books and over 25 articles on various aspects of librarianship. Her book *Guide to Implementing and Managing Patron-Driven Acquisitions* was published by the American Library Association in 2012.