# Chapter 1
# What Is COUNTER and Why Is It Important?

## ABSTRACT

*Electronic usage data serves an important purpose for librarians who need to assess user activities with electronic collections. Comparing usage reports by different vendors requires sorting out the various types of reports that are available and assessing how and if they can effectively be compared. This book attempts to investigate what makes vendor usage reports compatible or incompatible, and to what degree. It includes a case study where the authors analyze and interpret their institution's data in order to provide others with possible strategies for productively engaging with e-book usage reports. Chapter 1 gives a brief account on Project COUNTER (Counting Networked Electronic Resources). COUNTER supports the process of collection assessment by providing standards for vendors and publishers to follow in delivering usage data to libraries. The COUNTER Code of Practice aims for usage data to be credible, consistent, and comparable, three core principles. This chapter describes the purpose of COUNTER, its underlying principles and core standards, and more importantly, who will benefit from the COUNTER standards.*

## INTRODUCTION

The idea for this book emerged from a research project which required the authors to retrieve and analyze e-book usage reports. Using reports generated from both ebrary and EBSCO, the authors attempted to sort out the data and make comparisons between the vendors. In struggling to find commonalities, it became evident that comparing usage reports of ebrary to EBSCO was like comparing "apples" with "oranges," as the two could not be directly linked. Furthermore, each vendor provided various types of reports, which created an abundance of data for the authors to consider.

The authors found that comparing usage reports by different vendors would require sorting out the various types of reports that were available and assessing how and if they could effectively be compared. Prompted by that experience, the authors felt compelled to investigate what makes vendor usage reports compatible or incompatible, and to what degree. Additionally, they aimed to analyze and interpret their institution's data to provide others with possible strategies for productively engaging with e-book usage reports.

## MAIN FOCUS

Usage reports are important assessment tools for librarians when making collection development and cancellation decisions. Understanding and using report data effectively may be facilitated by gaining additional insight into the types of reports that are offered by various vendors. The purpose of this book is 1) for librarians, to make sense of usage reports provided by e-book vendors to determine what data are available and how the data can be interpreted, 2) for library science students, to serve as an introduction to the benefits and challenges of vendor-produced usage reports, 3) for vendors, to help them understand librarians' perspectives and provide feedback on using vendor reports, and 4) for the standards community, to offer observations and share findings resulting from this case study.

In writing this book the authors aim to introduce readers to the types of usage reports available, including COUNTER and non-COUNTER reports; recognize unique data offered by each type of reports; examine inherent challenges with interpreting usage data; and discuss potential solutions for the problem of comparing "apples" with "oranges" in usage reports. The primary focus will be given to COUNTER reports. The goal of this book

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