

Chapter 7

Findings, Discussion, and Recommendations

ABSTRACT

Examining inherent challenges with interpreting usage from different vendors' reports leads to the authors' reflections on how to deal with the challenges of comparing "apples" with "oranges" in different types of usage reports and look for possible solutions. The case study intends to help librarians make sense of usage reports provided by e-book vendors and to introduce library science students to benefits and challenges of usage reports. Chapter 7 summarizes findings of the author's research on COUNTER and non-COUNTER reports and vendor practices. The authors hope to share with vendors and the standards community librarians' perspectives and their experiences with vendor-provided usage reports. The chapter concludes with the following recommendations for best practices in dealing with vendor usage reports: 1) read and become familiar with the COUNTER Code of Practice; 2) observe terminology used to describe data categories in COUNTER reports; 3) consult vendor documentation to understand exactly how data are counted; 4) find the unique data that are offered in non-COUNTER reports; 5) gain perspective on overall usage by cross examining data between COUNTER and non-COUNTER reports; and 6) contribute to the ongoing process of improving usage reporting.

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INTRODUCTION

While usage reports are important tools for librarians, understanding and interpreting them can be a challenge, particularly because vendors offer multiple types of reports. When librarians access the administrative portals for e-book vendors, they are immediately presented with two categories of usage reports – COUNTER and non-COUNTER. Within each category, there may be several report options that present different data. For librarians or library students who are unfamiliar with the reports and their offerings, the numerous types and categories of reports may seem like a “data mess.”

COUNTER aims to minimize the mess by providing standards that determine how data should be gathered and reported. The purpose of COUNTER is to ensure that vendors and publishers can provide their library customers with consistent, credible, and comparable usage data. This is significant for librarians because usage data is critical for informing collection development and cancellation decisions. For vendors and publishers, COUNTER standards provide important guidance on generating data to the established specifications. The standards determine the data elements, definitions, content and format of usage reports, and requirements for data processing and auditing, including guidelines to avoid duplicate counting.

WHICH REPORTS TO USE FOR E-BOOKS AND DO THEY COMPARE?

COUNTER standards provide usage reports specifically for e-books, including Book Reports 1-5 and Platform Report 1. The title of each report reveals the primary category of data it intends to deliver. For example, Book Report 1 counts the number of successful title requests by month and title, while Book Report 2 offers the number of successful sections requests by month and title. Book Reports 3 and 4 serve similar purposes, as 3 reports turnaways by title while 4 provides turnaways by platform. Book Report 5 counts total searches by title, while Platform Report 1 counts searches, along with result clicks and record views, by platform.

Closer analysis of these reports reveals a potential challenge for librarians. The standards allow for flexibility in the choice of reports vendors must provide, but the alternatives also create the potential for variations that prevent a comparison of COUNTER data across vendors. The Code of Practice

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