

## **WAIT BUT WHY: Explaining Wait Times in the WI Digital Library to Patrons**

Wait times for audio and eBooks are a source of frustration for library staff and patrons alike. A solution often proposed to the problem of long wait times is to add additional money to the WI Digital Library collection. Although money is one part of the solution, there are other factors that must be addressed in order to make a significant, visible impact on wait times and high holds that affect the WI Digital Library.

### **1) Price of Digital Books**

There is a perception that digital books are far less expensive than print books. After all, there are no paper or printing costs to incur. In reality, eBooks, particularly bestsellers, are often double the price of the same title in print.

Ex. Camino Island by John Grisham has a list price of \$28.95 in print. It sells for \$19.97 via Amazon. The same title as an eBook via OverDrive is \$65.00. The Kindle format via Amazon retails for \$14.99.

Libraries are paying significantly more for copies of eBooks than copies in print of the same titles. In addition, libraries are paying significantly more for digital copies of books than consumers are via Amazon.

### **2) Lending Models**

Digital aggregators have two basic lending models: one copy/one user and metered access. Both models allow only one patron at a time to use a copy of a title. There are some advantages to metered access by checkout or by the length of time as opposed to the one copy/one user model. This includes not having to repurchase every copy of a title when the time or checkouts expire. This is particularly useful for high demand titles after their popularity has waned. In addition, metered access titles are often priced much less than titles under the one copy/one user model.

Both models require libraries to purchase a large number of copies to accommodate patron holds. When a bestseller is no longer in demand, the consortium is left with several hundred copies of a title.

Ex. Gone Girl by Gillian Flynn, at its peak, had thousands of holds on it. There are 375 copies in the WI Digital Library and the eBook is modestly priced at \$45.00. As a result, \$16,875 was spent on one eBook title and the consortium was still unable to meet a 20:1 holds to copy ratio.

Publishers, particularly the 'Big Five' that publish 95% of adult bestsellers, must be willing to change their lending models before we can make a lasting impact on wait times. Advocating for digital book rentals, simultaneous usage within the metered access model, and listening and responding to the needs of libraries, are all part of the conversations library advocates are having around the country.

### **3) Understanding Holds vs. Wait Times**

It is important to understand that although holds contribute to wait times, holds and particularly hold ratios do not always equate to wait times. This can be illustrated in the example below.

Ex. The Whistler by John Grisham is a popular title with 1244 holds in the shared collection and 1198 holds via Advantage. There is a total of 295 copies available for patrons. The holds ratios are as follows:

Shared collection: 6.22 holds per copy

Advantage collection: 4.061 holds per copy

The holds ratios for this title are both below the 10:1 holds to copies ratio the WPLC strives for, yet the wait times are an average of 34 days for a copy of the title.

In addition to the disparity between the number of copies available and wait times, the messaging currently used by Overdrive to communicate a patron's position in line can be misleading. The WPLC Project Managers are working with OverDrive to review and revise messaging to give a more accurate depiction of actual wait times.

We hope that through education about the factors affecting wait times for materials, we will be able to help patrons better understand the WI Digital Library.