

## Questions about Digital Media (eBooks)

By Glenn McEowen

A pastor recently contacted me regarding his church's interest in providing eBook service to his congregation. He shared a list of questions provided by his church Library Director, Pat Bredbenner. They serve at First Baptist, O'Fallon, MO.

Pat had obviously done a great deal of research already. Her focus is on the *consortium* structure, one where several libraries share the cost of the service and share the collection itself.

This discussion will focus on a church library consortium through eBook vendor OverDrive. In most cases, the responses to the questions refer to their services. They have a tiered pricing scheme based on church 'resident' membership; larger churches pay more than smaller churches. Lately, OverDrive has preferred setting up individual (stand-alone) church libraries, but, at least early on, they were open to consortia.

A consortium includes multiple libraries from a defined geographic area, generally a county, where the individual libraries pay a lower annual cost than a stand-alone and share the eBook collection. The sum of the annual costs from all the member libraries must reach a minimum which is defined by OverDrive before the consortium can be formed. Reaching that minimum can be the most daunting task.

OverDrive is reticent to give general prices and prefer for their sales people to work with each library directly. With that in mind, OverDrive has recently quoted some good prices for smaller churches of a 1000 or less and has become competitive for larger churches of 4000 or more as well. If you have been discouraged in the past, now might be a good time to revisit OverDrive's pricing.

OverDrive's current stance on consortia is unknown at this point in time, but other vendors have been amenable to working with them and have quoted very decent pricing. We will discuss this in the following Q&A. Before completing this Q&A, Jerry and Ruthe Turner were consulted to add some of his recent research. He works with his wife, Ruthe, the Library Director at First Baptist, Dallas, one of the first churches ever to provide eBook service. They think the eBook service is great for churches with no print library. One small church in their consortium does not have a traditional library but is enthusiastically growing their eBook ministry.

### Consortiums

#### 1. How was the consortium established?

Several steps were taken:

- a. Researched eBook vendors evaluating processes and prices
- b. Gauged interest from other librarians at nearby churches; discovered their unique financing needs (some could add to their budget; others had to creatively find initial funding with the hopes of obtaining ongoing budget)
- c. Set a time line for individual libraries to commit funds. This meant working with overlapping "budget years" where approvals one year might not carry over to the next. It seemed like every library had a different budget year.

- d. Once the total of each library's cost reached OverDrive's minimum goal to create the consortium, contracts were signed, and invoices sent. OverDrive set up the catalog web site while we began training and ordering our first eBooks/audio books. A few weeks later, each library went "live."

**2. Were there policy models from other consortia that you used to draw up policies?**

The leaders of our consortium made up our own policies, but was typical. Because our libraries had a similar theological base, we decided each one could be trusted to order materials that would be accepted by all. Each church would spend their own allocation. The theological stance of a church was important in determining if they would be accepted as a member.

**3. Are all libraries equal members of the consortium regardless of the size of the congregation?**

Decisions are *one library, one vote*. Church membership size is not a factor. However, larger libraries (with larger costs) affect the content of the collection more since they can purchase more titles using their larger purchase allocations.

**4. How is cooperation maintained between the members? And how much time is devoted to this?**

- a. We meet face-to-face occasionally, not even once a year.
- b. An email is sent by the consortium leadership to everyone after each order or two. It contains the Title METADATA in Excel files that the members import into their library collections. Consortium business is sometimes sent out as a part of these emails.
- c. Ordering titles is self-managed by each library. Every library can see the "shopping carts" of other members. Checking the carts for duplicates is expected. This works reasonably well. Churches in the Dallas consortium email a request to the other libraries when titles are about to be purchased and if all are not in agreement on a particular title, it is removed, or the library can add it to their private collection which is an extra charge.
- d. OverDrive ordering can be confusing. Sometimes existing titles are issued under new names and ISBN's. Sometimes a title can be renamed or created as part of a collection ... nearly impossible to catch every time. This takes some research on the part of the person who is ordering.
- e. With the choices of titles, making sure no duplicates are ordered, and researching authors, series and such, ordering takes the most time and is proportional to how many titles are ordered (i.e. the budget).
- f. Curating various collections (Children's Non-fiction, Adult Biographies, Christmas reading, etc.) is also time-consuming but more efficient if one person has that responsibility.

**5. Who chooses the media for the digital collection?**

Each library is permitted to choose what they want. There is a trust between members that they are ordering appropriate material. If someone has a complaint about a title, it can be removed from the collection. We have only had to do this a few times when a problem title was mistakenly ordered.

6. **With so many patrons using the same collection, what options are used by your consortium (single-user, multiple-user, limited use, or limited time)?**  
We do not have any multiple-user titles. Way too expensive! All titles are *one user at a time*. The consortium decides how many (3 items max) and how long (3 weeks max) per user. This arrangement was decided by the group. At first, when our collection was smaller, we limited users to two weeks, two items.
7. **Who is responsible with working with Overdrive personnel?**  
Overdrive is good at supporting each library's purchasers with specific ordering questions. However, changes and technical issues (very rare) are done by one *coordinating library*.
8. **Who is responsible for purchasing?**  
Each library has one or two purchasers working together to create what has become about one order per library per month. An order may include both eBooks and Audio books ... usually five to ten at a time.
9. **Who is responsible for handling the financial record keeping, collecting from the members, and paying for the digital media?**  
Thankfully, OverDrive.
10. **Do all libraries use the same software for circulation, cataloging, and online catalogs?**  
No. Our consortium includes CONCEPT III, Atrium, *PC Card Catalog*, and Concourse.
11. **What happens when a member library of the consortium drops out of the group?**  
With OverDrive, the books purchased by that library remains in the shared collection. That library's members no longer have access. If a church library decides to leave the consortium and become a stand-alone, it is permitted to move the titles it purchased into its collection.

## Overdrive

1. **How does Overdrive determine initial and ongoing costs?**
  - a. The costs are set in the OverDrive contracts with each library. For example, one library has a three-year contract with automatic annual renewals after the initial term.
  - b. The structure of their contract is usually set at half for the service and half for title purchases. That means a \$3000 contract would include \$1500 for the Service and \$1500 for title purchases.
2. **Does Overdrive interface with each library's software?**
  - a. Though it is not required, a library may choose to add the eBook titles to their collections. For this option, OverDrive provides free (or custom for \$\$) MARC records for import. This works in virtually every library software system. The MARC records will probably require some tweaking to fit a library's cataloging standards.
  - b. First Baptist Church, Dallas uses MARCedit, a free download, to make changes to their MARC records before they are imported into the database. Once you are

- familiar with its operation, the necessary changes become routine and require very little time.
- c. The consortium also builds an Excel import file that gives better control over the imported information than MARC. Wedgwood Baptist Church uses it for CONCEPT III and *PC Card Catalog*; Atrium users stick with MARC.
  - d. The other software interface is **Patron Authentication**. That is, "Is the person checking out an eBook authorized by the library to do so?" CONCEPT III and Atrium both do this with a background, computer-to-computer 'conversation'; no librarian involvement required. *PC Card Catalog* and Concourse, however, require some interaction through OverDrive's *Library Card Manager* online patron number database. The process is efficient and easy to manage, but it does require someone to do it regularly.
  - e. Using *Library Card Manager* is also required for a church that does not have a print library collection.

**3. Must each library submit to Overdrive a database of its patrons, their user names, and their passwords?**

OverDrive never asks for Patron Names; just Patron Numbers, PINs, and statuses; and that only in the case of *Library Card Manager* users.

**4. If the answer to #3 was 'yes', how challenging is it to add new patrons to Overdrive as they join a library?**

- a. OverDrive's *Library Card Manager* is a web process that lets the library maintain its own records. A record includes three things:
  - 1) Patron Number
  - 2) PIN: the use of PINs is an optional consortium choice, but recommended.
  - 3) Status (Okay, Overdue print books, Fines, Blocked, etc.).
- b. When using *Library Card Manager*, the library team can alter any of the fields and then UPDATE, ADD, or REMOVE records. There is also the Excel import option where the file is imported, updating every record quickly.
- c. The use of *Library Card Manager* is required by *PC Card Catalog* and Concourse; it is not needed for Atrium and CONCEPT III.

**5. Can each library use its own software to do statistics on circulation based on its own patrons?**

OverDrive provides extensive reports which can export to Excel. They provide reports of combined consortium stats, individual library stats, individual user stats, and stats for individual titles.

## **Evaluating Success**

**1. How do you evaluate the success of the usage of your digital collection?**

- a. OverDrive has a very thorough reports feature. The consortium leaders can compare the usage by member church and look at an individual's usage.
- b. Consider, however, that numbers do not show everything. A single count in the chart may indicate depth of ministry that is only understood with intimate knowledge of the library's members. In fact, one may never know.

2. **How successful has digital usage been for your church?**
  - a. Each library knows their usage numbers. They know they have a fairly constant number of users each month. Do I wish we had more users? Yes. Can we affect the number? Yes, by promoting our eBook service.
  - b. Our members will occasionally tell us how they are using eBooks. These unexpected affirmations are always an encouragement. Great reference of success.
  
3. **How successful has digital usage been for other churches in the consortium?**

Each of our member churches is pleased with its usage. There are good stories of ministry; each library puts in its fair share of effort to make the group a success; and, so far none has hinted that it wants to leave the group.

## **Training Patrons**

Many patrons have not begun to use digital media even though many public libraries have extensive collections. Consequently, patrons need to be trained in how to get the Overdrive App and how to use it.

1. **How did the members of your consortium train the patrons?**

Most members are familiar with loading apps on their devices. OverDrive provides instruction sheets for just about every device. The Dallas group has created its own, very thorough and step-by-step instruction sheet. In a few cases, one-on-one assistance was provided to those that had difficulties.
  
2. **How do they keep up with the patrons who need to be trained one-by-one as they begin to see value in reading online?**

Training starts with the app installation and goes all the way to checking out their first eBook. Then they are shown how to read a book as well as assist them with settings such as font sizes and brightness. Follow up visits are also available.

## **Did you look at other models other than Overdrive?**

1. **3-M Cloud Library Service**
  - a. The advantage to 3M is that its cost may be lower, especially for larger churches.
  - b. Their payment scheme is simply an annual amount for service and purchase as few or as many books as desired.
  - c. 3M has been open to church consortia. (Contact 3M for the latest pricing and structure)
  - d. Ask about religious publishers, do they serve Kindles, are audio books easily available, and do they have an authorization feature for console programs like *PC Card Catalog* and *Concourse*.
  
2. **Titlewave, a product of Follett**
  - a. Since they service mainly educational institutions, they do not charge an enrollment fee or yearly subscription fees.
  - b. The individual costs of their digital media are similar to Overdrive, since costs are determined by publishers.
  - c. Titlewave offers an extensive collection of media from Christian publishers.

### 3. Wheelers Eplatform

- a. New Zealand company
- b. Price is good
- c. They are willing to consider a consortium

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**Pat Bredbenner** is the Library Director at First Baptist Church, O'Fallon, MO.  
**Glenn McEowen** serves in the library at Wedgwood Baptist in Fort Worth, TX,  
and is Vice President of Development and Sales for Library Concepts.  
**Jerry Turner** serves in the library at First Baptist, Dallas, TX.

### Products and Services referenced in this article

**Cloud Library** - Bibliotheca (formerly 3M)  
<https://www.bibliotheca.com/cloudLibrary>

**Concourse, Atrium** - Book Systems  
<https://www.booksys.com>

**CONCEPT III, PC Card Catalog** - Library Concepts:  
<https://libraryconcepts.com>

**Destiny, TitleWave** – Follett  
<https://follett.com>

**MARCEdit** <https://marcedit.reeset.net>

**OverDrive** <https://company.overdrive.com>

**Wheelers Eplatform**  
<https://eplatform.co/us>