

eBook and Digital Audiobook Advocacy

Endorsement of the Canadian Urban Libraries Council's Government Relations Campaign on Accessing Digital Publications

Recommendation

That Executive Committee recommend to City Council:

That the Mayor, on behalf of City Council, write a letter, as outlined in Attachment 2 of the August 19, 2019, Edmonton Public Library report CR_7390, indicating Edmonton City Council's support and endorsement for increased access to digital content for library users across Canada, along with a request that the Federal government investigate the barriers faced by libraries in acquiring digital content, the problems it poses for vulnerable and other demographic groups in Canada and develop a solution that increases public library access to digital content across Canada.

Executive Summary

Edmonton Public Library and the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC/CBUC) are advocating for improvements in digital content accessibility and pricing for public libraries. Multinational Publishers are limiting Canadian libraries' access to digital content and, when made available, making it prohibitively expensive for libraries to acquire. This is impacting access for seniors, new Canadians, lower income families, and youth. Support is requested from City Council in seeking changes to access for digital content and pricing.

Report

Digital content is the fastest growing area of borrowing in public libraries, and usage continues to increase year over year. Over 4.3 million digital items were borrowed at Edmonton Public Library in 2018. However, multinational publishers' restrictive lending models and high prices create a significant challenge, jeopardizing the ability of public libraries to offer universal access. Further, access and pricing of digital audiobooks is an area of growing concern. Public libraries cannot purchase many titles in this format, including those written by Canadian and Indigenous writers, as they are licensed exclusively to subscription services. This restriction makes it impossible for Canadian public libraries to purchase the digital audiobook format of many titles, which is the fastest growing sector of the publishing industry. At EPL, digital audiobook usage

increased almost 35% from 2017 to 2018. This format is also an obvious choice for English language learners and Canadians with low literacy skills.

Even when publications are made available, they are often prohibitively expensive for Canadian public libraries to acquire. By way of example, Canadian author Louise Penny's book *Kingdom of the Blind* is available to libraries for \$13 as a paperback, \$22 in hard cover and \$60 in digital form. The \$60 cost would allow the e-book to be checked out 52 times or for 2 years - whichever happens first, without the library 'owning' the item. A paper edition would be expected to last 3 to 4 years at a substantially reduced cost. The book is currently not available to Canadian libraries in any e-audio format due to exclusive licensing models that are not offered to public libraries.

Additionally, recent changes to licensing terms by multinational publishers are drawing concern from CULC libraries and our Urban Library Council counterpart in the United States.

1. Tor Books, a division of Macmillan Publishers and a leading global publisher of science fiction and fantasy, announced in July 2018 that all new titles from Tor Books will become available for library eBook distribution four months after their retail on-sale date. This embargo means that public library users access to digital content will be limited, putting them at a distinct disadvantage.
2. Hachette Book Group announced in June 2019 a change in its perpetual ownership model for libraries with a two-year access model for eBooks. This means that at the end of a two-year period, libraries will have to re-purchase eBooks that they have already paid for when renewing their access agreements.
3. In June 2019, Blackstone Publishing implemented a 90-day embargo on digital audiobook titles. This embargo means that libraries will not be able to purchase new in-demand content for 90 days after release, putting library users at a distinct disadvantage accessing new titles.
4. In July 2019, Macmillan Publishers announced a new library e-Book lending model. Under this new model, libraries will only be able to purchase a single copy of any new title when it is released for sale to the general public, and will be forced to wait eight weeks before they are able to buy additional copies. This new model will mean that libraries will not be able to access enough copies to satisfy demand for new titles and will severely limit the ability to provide timely content to users.

Libraries and the programs they provide are integral to ensuring a thriving democracy. Public library digital literacy programs help ensure that citizens are able to contribute to our digital world. Additionally, for many seniors, lower income families, youth, and new

Canadians public libraries provide access to resources they may not otherwise be able to obtain. Canadians rely on libraries as an important tool for their participation in the community - from early literacy and education to searching for jobs to consuming Canadian cultural materials.

CULC is seeking assistance of its members, including EPL, in increasing government and stakeholder awareness of the negative impacts that obstacles to acquiring digital publications have on libraries and to work with governments on a solution that would benefit library customers and Canadian authors.

There are several components to the CULC campaign:

1. CULC will be reaching out to engage key policy makers in discussions as well as engaging all major party candidates during the Federal election campaign this Fall. CULC will be asking policy makers and candidates to participate in a social media campaign pledging their support for libraries to have the resources to build their collections;
2. CULC will be presenting a policy solution to the access issues to the Federal government immediately following the election in October;
3. The "One eRead Canada" Campaign launched in June 2019 enabled libraries from across Canada to access the book *Glass Beads* by Saskatchewan-born Indigenous author, actor, and comedian Dawn Dumont. Over 300 libraries participated in this campaign, exposing these issues to Canadians from communities of all sizes. This effort leverages advocacy initiatives endorsed by the Urban Library Council, the American Library Association and global initiatives by Readers First and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. With the conclusion of the campaign, CULC is gathering statistics to evaluate the impact of the program, including awareness of the e-book, usage and sales to demonstrate to publishers that library cooperation supports, not hinders book sales.

Conclusion

The Edmonton Public Library and the Canadian Urban Library Council are seeking assistance from Edmonton City Council in increasing government and stakeholder awareness of the barriers libraries face in acquiring digital content. Through the campaign, CULC intends to work with governments and other stakeholders on a solution that would benefit library users and Canadian authors.

By participating in the next phase of CULC's campaign, Council can play a leadership role in digital content advocacy in order to support cost effectiveness and access to collections in support of lifelong learning and literacy for Edmontonians.

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Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome(s): Edmontonians are connected to the city in which they live, work and play.			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
Sustainable and efficient service delivery	Library Circulation Data; User satisfaction surveys	Awareness and advocacy concerning challenges about public library digital content accessibility and pricing. Federal investigation is undertaken.	Increased content is made available to public libraries in all formats, at a fair price – restrictive licensing models will decline and/or be eliminated, Q4 2020.
Edmontonians are connected to the city in which they live, work and play	Library Circulation Data; User satisfaction surveys	Solution proposed to address challenges around digital content accessibility and unfair pricing in public libraries.	Edmontonians are able to borrow the widest variety of content through their public library system, Q4 2020.

Risk Assessment

Risk Element	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk Score (with current mitigations)	Current Mitigations	Potential Future Mitigations
Failure to resolve publishers' restrictive licensing is leading to decreased access to digital resources, higher costs for eContent, and a decreased ability to provide access to all forms of knowledge to Edmontonians.	Refusing to sell digital content, or imposing other barriers to access undermine Edmonton Public Library's ability to adequately serve Edmontonians. The results are a decrease in available content, decreased purchasing power, decreased access to information for Edmontonians, and a threat to the democratic right of every citizen to have access to all forms of knowledge.	5 - almost certain	2 - moderate	10 - medium	Canadian public libraries are currently working on raising awareness with the public via awareness campaigns; Municipalities across Canada are passing motions in support of CULC's effort to increase access to e-Content.	Canadian public libraries will manage the risks through continued negotiations and discussions with publishers and content providers, awareness raising with library users and the general public, and advocacy with various levels of government to explore solutions.

Attachments

1. Background Information
2. Draft Letter to Federal Members of Parliament