

A 21st Century Digital Library – An OverDrive Experience

By Joy Board

I kept asking myself this question as I learned about the benefits or disadvantages of one e-reader over another and the interest (or not) of students in using different mobile technologies for their recreational reading and educational research.

It seemed that all technology was immediately out of date, so purchasing mobile technology stocked with a range of resources and lending that to patrons was proving to be an expensive option fraught with technical challenges. I came to the conclusion that given Australians are early adopters of technology my challenge was not to provide the actual mobile technology but rather provide resources in a format that can be accessed by all my users regardless of which version of mobile technology was their preferred format. What I wanted was a Digital Library.

I first heard of such a digital library through friends with like interests. **Yarra Plenty Regional Library Service** had recently established a Digital Library (Overdrive) in conjunction with Brisbane City Library. **OverDrive** is a powerful platform for lending and managing a range of digital content including eBooks, audio books, music, and video. Yarra Plenty Regional Library Service kindly agreed to demonstrate it to all my campus library staff at a time when their library is closed to the public. This was invaluable as we learned of the impact and take up of the service by their patrons and the issues they had experienced. My campus staff agreed it suited our needs provided we could secure education pricing and I could garner the support of relevant stakeholders. Contact was made with an Australian representative of the company but progress was slow and generally unsatisfactory. Consequently OverDrive reverted to not having an Australian agent although this has since changed with **Softlink** announcing on June 28 that they have partnered with Overdrive.

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The initial emails set up times for phone conversations with Ms Claudia Weissman, OverDrive's Vice President of Sales to discuss the costs and timeframe for the setup of our hosted website and the start of the subscription. Subsequently most negotiations were via email. After initial problems with time-zones, eg: someone thinking Melbourne is in Queensland, I was able to work out a routine for a successful timeframe/response time to queries. I found that holidays in both countries did complicate communication and I had to be prepared to check email during term breaks if I wanted progress. The company is well established in the US with over 15,000 libraries worldwide and has a structured process for the establishment of a successful service. An annual fee is paid, half of the fee represents the license, and the other half is available as credit for the purchase of resources for your library. Once our order was placed, I was introduced via email to my support person who consequently emailed documents for me to complete that would be the basis for the development of our proposed Digital Library.

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We needed to look at existing sites and decide how we wanted ours to look. What colours would we use? Did we have logos we needed incorporated? What were we going to call it? What digital formats were we going to purchase for our users? What did we want as the loan length per resource type? What was to be our method of patron authentication, ie, would they need a library

card? We didn't have a library card (and still don't) but we had to determine what patrons would use as their login. How would we allocate each user a password? What email address was to be on the site for users to request support? Support in various formats was provided to assist with decision-making and we were assured that everything could be changed if we felt it necessary at a later stage.

Some of these questions I initially handed to our Web developer and our marketing department but obviously all library policy questions were my domain. The assistance of our Head IT technician was invaluable for the few technical questions around login and authentication protocols. Seeing the initial mock-up of our site was exciting. After multiple changes including a different banner image, a different name and inclusion of a link back to our intranet it seemed like we were well on the way. Little did I realise what still had to be done! My OverDrive support person in turn 'introduced me' to other support staff who were assigned to my account as needed; for example, I have a 'collection development' contact person, a 'marketing' contact person and different trainers.



With the format of our site decided (see image) we then had to populate the site with resources and to do that staff required training. Library staff saw the test site when the initial one hour real time collection development training session was undertaken. Library staff saw how it was going to work, were able to ask questions, share concerns and provide feedback. To do this training we needed to find a suitable day where a 9am start (to match late evening in the US) was possible for all library staff. This was challenging given we are a large multi campus college. Technologically we needed to be able to log in remotely to a webinar training site, project the computer images and have a quality speaker phone set up so all staff could participate. Following the Collection development training staff were encouraged to shop online in the 'OverDrive Marketplace' to develop a wish list of resources to form the basis of our initial digital collection. After the initial foray on training day the realities of workloads relegated this to a low priority for most but the early adopters came through and provided input. Surely we were ready to launch now!

The next steps were: uploading patron details, testing the site, training staff to assist users with checkout and downloading, marketing, updating patron details and testing again.

The final major challenge was how do we advise all students and staff personally and privately across all campuses of their username and pin numbers? I shared this concern with staff and a staff member came forward with a solution. I learned I could use an Excel spreadsheet linked to a word document with merge fields and that the final 'finish & merge' option included one to email! What a time saver that was.

After launch there was one more stage – more training for staff. By now OverDrive had launched an online training centre where users can log in and work their way through all training packages. We found this to be hugely beneficial to library staff on a recent PD day. While I requested all staff complete the reporting and statistics training there was also time for staff to revisit previous training sessions and they can continue to do so at their own pace.

The use of the digital library will be promoted through English classes and in future years will be incorporated into the library orientation.

From an administration viewpoint digital books are cost-effective as there will be no more lost or damaged items, nor a need to do a stocktake or to make room on shelves for new material.

At all stages I refused to be locked into a projected launch date, as setting it up was an addition to my usual busy workload with many unknowns. I reasoned the construction of the site, including approval by our College marketing department, the training of staff, selection of resources to stock the library, uploading of patron details and the testing of the site could uncover unexpected obstacles so felt it best to not lock us in to a set time frame for launch. In the end the Library Captains announced the launch of the Digital Library at the

various section academic assemblies which some parents attend. It was also featured in the College News and in the Headmaster's blog.

Budget cuts have meant the initial collection isn't as large as I had hoped but it is up and running and will grow each year. Usage statistics and reservations will be our guide to its popularity and our basis for budget submissions and purchases in the future.

The next challenge will be integrating the digital library into our overall library management system.

Joy Board is Head of Information Services at the Valley Campus (Pakenham) of Beaconhills College which is on the outer SE edge of Melbourne, has 3 campuses and approximately 3000 students. Joy also coordinates the extensive Library Intranet college wide and is a Co-Convenor and Treasurer of the Pakenham SLAV Branch. Joy has previously been published in FYI and in Rethink: Ideas for inspiring library design, where she discussed the challenges of revamping and revitalizing library spaces at Beaconhills College.