



SCHOLARLYSTATS - THE PERFECT ACCOMPANIMENT TO SUSHI

** Journal usage data is valuable for librarians, but gathering the data and presenting it in a useable format has until now been problematic. Two recent efforts, one from Macmillan's MPS Technologies and the other an initiative by the National Information Standards Organisation (NISO), promise to increase the process's efficiency.*

by Majjed Robinson, Associate

The fact that physical copies of journals are for the most part available only in a library's reference section has meant that beyond checking spines for wear, librarians have been largely unable to assess how much they are used. The availability and popularity of journals in digital format has changed this, but librarians are still faced with difficulties. A typical library will have journals delivered electronically from between thirty to fifty different suppliers, all of whom will make their journal usage data available, but in different formats. The COUNTER initiative has gone some way towards remedying this, but not all suppliers comply with it and often when they do, the formats still differ. Even if a library can devote the resources towards manually gathering data from each supplier and then compiling it, the end result may be too complicated for untrained library staff to easily understand.

In a bid to standardise usage data, NISO has launched an initiative called SUSHI (Scholarly Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative) which defines an XML standard for the transfer of usage data from suppliers. SUSHI had its first successful test in November 2005, and has partnered with many journal suppliers including EBSCO, Thomson Scientific and Swets. The private sector has also weighed in, with an offering from MPS Technologies (a Macmillan company which also provides web analytics for COUNTER) called ScholarlyStats. ScholarlyStats gathers usage statistics using both manual and automatic methods, before merging the reports into consolidated statistics that are then presented to libraries on a hosted platform. The data is available in Excel compatible formats to enable easy analysis, and is collected and delivered on a monthly basis. MPS Technologies claims that ScholarlyStats should not be seen as a competitor to SUSHI, but rather a complimentary service. SUSHI is currently in draft form and is soon to undergo NISO ratification – a process that may take some time. When a critical mass of providers offer SUSHI, ScholarlyStats and other service providers will use SUSHI to automate more of the collection process, and the associated cost-savings will ultimately be passed on to their library customers.

The result is all good news for librarians because while journal usage data clearly has an impact during budget decisions, its potential goes far beyond this. For example, when a journal is indicated as "zero usage", this does not necessarily mean that it should be culled from the subscription list. Often it is the case that links are broken or there are problems with users accessing them, or the journal was not catalogued correctly. Widespread availability of usage data in a standard format also increases the opportunity for collaboration. While the statistics

generated by MPS are strictly confidential for the libraries concerned, librarians have expressed the desire to share this information with other librarians, which is leading to benchmarking initiatives that are beginning to appear amongst library consortia. In addition to this, Thomson Scientific has partnered with MPS to combine ScholarlyStats with impact factors to create what Thomson describes as a 360-degree assessment of a journal's usage. Initiatives like SUSHI and services like ScholarlyStats should not be seen as ways for librarians to abandon under-used journals, but rather ways to help librarians develop strategies through investigation and benchmarking that can increase the value of a subscription.

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RELATED LINKS

COUNTER: <http://www.projectcounter.org/>

Information World Review article: <http://www.iwr.co.uk/information-world-review/news/2149678/scholarlystats-won-push-sushi>

ScholarlyStats: <http://www.scholarlystats.com/>

SUSHI: <http://www.library.cornell.edu/cts/elicenestudy/ermi2/sushi/>

FROM THE EPS ARCHIVE

Counter: credible, global, compatible, consistent and soon, EPS Insights, 12 October 2004

<http://www.epsltd.com/clients/viewUpdateNotes.asp?updateNoteID=1459>

Scopus launches citation tracker into traditional Thomson territory, EPS Insights, 26 January 2006

<http://www.epsltd.com/clients/viewUpdateNotes.asp?updateNoteID=1841>

Spotlight on CoiNS, imi, October 2005

<http://www.epsltd.com/clients/viewIMIArticle.asp?imiID=73&articleID=351>