

Case Study

Expanding options for reading ebooks at New York University

SERVICE AREA: NEW YORK, NY

POPULATION SERVED: 66,000+

» BACKGROUND

Founded in 1831, New York University is one of the largest private universities in the United States. The University has degree-granting campuses in New York, Abu Dhabi, and Shanghai and operates 13 global academic centers and research programs in more than 25 countries.

» INTRODUCTION

NYU Libraries is a multi-library system providing resources and services to NYU's population of over 61,000 students and 5,000 faculty members. Its flagship is the Elmer Holmes Bobst Library on Washington Square in New York City. NYU Libraries collection includes over 3.5 million physical volumes and 5 million electronic resources.

» TESTIMONIAL

"The more libraries focus on core functions, the more central interoperability and innovation become. It is unsustainable for user access to ebooks to remain so disjointed with little development in tools and integration. NYU and Lyrasis' successful implementation of the Palace App proves that we can innovate and improve user experience by pulling in over 400,000 ebooks into one unified mobile app. We believe that interoperable infrastructure and open standards (such as OPDS) will spawn more innovation from all parties including publishers, libraries, and technology developers."

Bill Maltarich

Interim Associate Dean for Collections & Content Strategy;
Head, Collection Development, NYU

» CHALLENGE

Too many platforms to access ebook content.

NYU Libraries provides users with over 4 million ebooks from 100+ different platforms, each with different interfaces and functionality. With so many variations, the user experience for reading ebooks is not streamlined, as they jump from one siloed site to another siloed site.

Where you buy the ebook should not limit innovation.

As it stands now, if NYU Libraries or vendors want to develop creative new services such as mobile apps, accessibility tools, ebook ILL (per contract), better web or desktop ereaders, or aggregate sets of titles, libraries cannot access the ebooks they purchased for this type of development. Currently, our users are beholden to reading ebooks we purchased in only the ways developed by each proprietary platform.

Mobile app ereaders siloed & stagnant.

Most platforms do not allow mobile apps to access their ebooks, and the few that do use Adobe Digital Editions or proprietary ereaders that are not being actively developed. Downloading and using separate e-readers is burdensome and creating additional accounts could raise privacy concerns.

Hosting the same ebook across multiple sites is inefficient.

Having to duplicate ebook hosting in order to add new services is not what NYU Libraries wants to support.

» STRATEGY

NYU Libraries contracted Lyrasis to set up Palace ereader for NYU. Goal was to show that integration of a new service (such as this mobile ereader) could be efficient, cost-effective, and scalable, and also abide by all authentication and DRM needed. NYU's key considerations for going forward:

- Palace mobile ereader app (originally SimplyE) already works well for public libraries.
- Ebook vendors only need to add metadata text feeds. EPUB and PDF file hosting, authentication, DRM, and usage tracking would remain on the ebook vendor's site.
- Users authenticate with NYU SSO login. Palace pulls in ebook files into protected app.
- Use of non-proprietary, open standards Open Publication Distribution System (ODPS) protocol to integrate ebooks from multiple ebook vendors.

» IMPLEMENTATION

1. Lyrasis set up Palace app, circulation manager, SSO authentication for NYU.
2. Worked with ProQuest Ebook Central to create OPDS feeds for 400,000 leased and owned ebooks with unlimited user and downloadable licenses.
3. Worked with OAPEN and University of Michigan to develop OPDS feeds for 20,000 Open Access ebooks.
4. Added Palace URL links to NYU's library catalog.
5. Added browse lanes with semester course books and NYU Press and new titles.

» RESULTS AND OUTCOME

Expanded easy mobile access to 400,000 ebooks. Implemented the Palace app for mobile access to ebooks on or off campus, authenticating via NYU SSO login (no VPN needed). Once downloaded, ebooks can be read online or offline without internet connection.

Aggregated ebooks from multiple platforms in one interface. The Palace app easily integrated content from multiple vendors so users can read books from one interface. The Netflix-style carousel browse lanes offers an enticing array of titles and all 400,000 titles are there to be downloaded as opposed to the typical ereader model showing only the few books you checked out and downloaded.

Open standards, OPDS, stable, robust, no maintenance. Vendors successfully created open standards protocol (OPDS) to integrate ebooks into the Palace app.

Student feedback. NYU received positive student and librarian feedback on access and reading experience.

» ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Key Insights:

Interoperable infrastructure: NYU's implementation of Palace successfully proved that building an interoperable infrastructure for ebook access is possible and cost-effective. Ebooks purchased from vendors can be made available to libraries and developers for innovative development of new services. Files and authentication and digital rights management can remain with the ebook vendor so rights protection is as robust as what is on the current sites.

Innovation: NYU firmly believes that an interoperable infrastructure is mutually beneficial, and pushes innovation. NYU users find frustration in multiple proprietary ebook systems and siloed user experiences, so we need to innovate and build more options for access. Where we buy the ebook should not limit our capacity to innovate. Large collections of ebooks brought together through interoperable standards attract users and bring additional usage from readers who don't see vendor platforms as destinations. The ability to innovate across these collections brings new opportunities to meet the needs of those users.

Open standards: For this project, OPDS has proven to be a stable protocol allowing vendors to send daily updates on holdings and links to Palace. These feeds have required no continued maintenance after initial creation by our vendors in 2021. OPDS gave us a way to get critical data from 3 vendors without having to invent a whole new proprietary data feed format.

Palace app: The Palace app and backend manager have required little maintenance and most issues reported were fixed by Lyrisis. However, more development has been discussed in the community for improved functionality such as title and in-book searching and citation and annotation tool integration.

» CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Conclusion:

- Ebook vendors not familiar with creating OPDS feeds along with vendor questions about impact on usage, revenue, and contracts.
- Libraries lacked easy activation of Palace titles in ILS (Alma, Worldshare, Folio).
- Adobe DRM software stagnant, need to explore LCP or other interoperable DRM.
- Need deletion workflow, now deleting after twice annual removals.

- Duplicates of Open Access titles from different platforms.
- Lack of consistent universal ID, so cannot easily match
- Palace, OCLC record, Alma, stats, bookstore data. This is a broader library ecosystem issue.

Next Steps:

1. Increase number of NYU ebooks in Palace: Work with vendors to provide data in OPDS or familiar formats (Kbart, ONIX, or MARC) and contract Lyrisis to convert.
2. Develop workflow to add Palace titles to Alma, OCLC Worldshare, and Folio for easy activation, ideally with custom library holdings.
3. Increase the number of libraries implementing Palace.

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