Best Practices for Increasing E-Journal Usage

The library web page should be linked on the institutional homepage
The library should advocate for a link on the homepage of its parent institution. If this is not possible, links to the library web page should be relatively easy to locate and integrated into portals for different user types.

E-Journals should be easy to locate on the library homepage
Users who specifically want online access to academic journals should easily be able to find this content on the library home page. They should be able to easily search for journals by title and for articles by keyword.

Mobile optimized web site
Users should be able to search for and access e-journals via the library Web site on mobile devices. While ease of access is somewhat dependent on the publisher and platform of the journal, users should at least be able to get to the content on smartphones and tablets.

Easy to use remote access
Instructions and modules for remote authentication should be simple and clear.

Journals A to Z list
The library should populate and maintain an accurate, comprehensive A to Z list of all available e-journals. This practice will enable users to accurately search by title and will also facilitate access via link resolvers and discovery tools.

Databases A to Z List
The library’s databases A to Z list should include links to all e-journal packages.

Discovery Services
A unified discovery service (e.g., Summon, EBSCO Discovery Service, Primo) can significantly enhance access to e-journal collections by allowing for seamless article-level access across a wide range of platforms. Budget permitting, the library should implement such a service and prominently display a search box for the service on the library homepage. Further, the library should take the time to carefully customize settings, display options, and searching options to ensure that the service will effectively meet the needs of the library’s user communities.

Enable link resolver on all database platforms and utilize SmartLinks in EBSCO (and equivalent on other platforms)
Many library databases allow linking to other platforms. This process allows the user to access the full text of an article found in an A&I database if the library has
a subscription. The library should enter link resolver information into all database platforms that allow OpenURL linking. Some platforms, such as EBSCOhost, have protocols for linking to content within multiple databases on that platform. In EBSCOhost’s case, SmartLinks allow persistent linking to articles within all EBSCO databases as well as to CrossRef member publishers. Whenever possible, durable linking features should be enabled, as these services are more reliable than an OpenURL resolver.

Customization of Google Scholar
A significant portion of e-journal usage occurs as a result of articles discovered through Google Scholar searches. Many link resolver vendors have arrangements with Google so that users within an institution’s IP range receive search results in Google Scholar that are configured with the library’s link resolver. This ensures that users can use the link resolver to effectively access journal content and reduces the chance of users being blocked by a paywall. The library should work to ensure that its link resolver is correctly configured with Google Scholar.

Linking in learning management systems
Libraries should strive to collaborate with instructors and system administrators to ensure that learning management systems (e.g., Blackboard and Moodle) reflect the availability of library resources and services. For example, a course’s online presence within a learning management system should include links to relevant materials within the library’s e-resources collection, and instructors should be advised by library personnel that, in instances in which a journal article is a required or recommended reading in a course, instructors should direct students to access this content via the subscribed platform, not a locally produced PDF scan of the article (which would not be reflected in usage data).

Links to journal collections and to individual journals on online research guides (such as LibGuides)
Subject librarians can direct users in specific disciplines to relevant journal collections and titles via online research guides. This practice raises awareness of journals available for a particular discipline and provides additional access points.

MARC records for e-journals in the library catalog
E-journals should be accurately represented in the library’s catalog. MARC records services (such as EBSCO’s MARC Updates and Serials Solutions’ 360 MARC Updates) can help ensure that metadata for e-journal content is current and accurate.

Use of apps
The increasing prevalence of mobile devices creates new opportunity for delivery of e-journal content. Since this area is relatively new, librarians should be on the lookout for emerging products in addition to those mentioned here.

Many publishers have developed apps for iOS and Android devices. The library should be familiar with these apps, so that they can assist patrons with their use, and should consider installing these apps on mobile devices that are available for checkout.

In addition to publisher apps, many libraries are licensing a third-party app called BrowZine, that allows users to create a digital bookshelf of e-journals from multiple publishers. This new mode of access may help increase usage.

Pubget, a search engine for science articles, is another option. Pubget can be scoped for institutions, so that users can find articles accessible through their institutions. This service is available via browser or via an iPad app.

**Marketing and promoting e-journal access**

The library should promote its e-journal collection to key constituents as appropriate for the institution. One avenue for promotion is faculty outreach. Faculty are key drivers of e-journal use, so it is imperative that they know what e-journals are available to them. Faculty may use journals in ways that aren’t detectable by the publisher’s COUNTER reports (personal subscriptions, sharing PDFs with colleagues and students, etc.), so faculty outreach can help steer them toward access via the library. Other areas to target for outreach efforts may include distance education and study abroad programs.

Electronic access to journals can also be emphasized in the library’s regular marketing and outreach efforts. Marketing materials can highlight the library’s e-journal collection, and e-journal access can be emphasized in the library’s instruction program.

**Analyze use data to identify specific usage patterns and study how users access e-journal content to better meet their needs**

To maximize e-journal usage, it is important to understand how the library’s e-journal collection is being used. One important way to develop this understanding is through the analysis of e-journal use data. Analysis of this data will help the library to identify usage patterns such as the specific titles and disciplines that are receiving the highest and lowest use and the specific times of the year in which this use is occurring. This information in turn will help enable the library to develop an e-journal collection that receives high use and to market and promote por-
tions of the e-journal collection that are being underutilized. In addition to analyzing full text retrievals and other metrics covered by COUNTER reports, web analytics and link resolver data can be used to determine how users access e-journals via the library website.

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