The COUNTER Code of Practice for books and reference works

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The draft of the new COUNTER Code of Practice for online books and reference works was published in January 2005. Its overall format and structure are consistent with the existing COUNTER Code of Practice for journals and databases. Only the content of the usage reports has been changed and the set of definitions of terms expanded. One of the main challenges we faced in developing the new Code of Practice was the lack of consistency among publishers in the ways in which they define, structure and distribute online books. Some publishers make online books available only as a single file that can be downloaded in its entirety. Other publishers allow the downloading of individual chapters or entries, such as dictionary definitions. The COUNTER Code of Practice has to cover these and other scenarios.

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Introduction

The draft of Release 1 of the new COUNTER Code of Practice for online books and reference works was published in January 2005. This marks the first expansion of COUNTER's coverage beyond journals and databases.[1] The Code of Practice for online books and reference works has been developed with input from a task force of librarians and publishers with expert knowledge of these products and is the first attempt to introduce a comprehensive industry standard for the recording and reporting of online book usage data. Its overall format and structure are consistent with the existing COUNTER Code of Practice for journals and databases. Only the content of the usage reports has been changed and the set of definitions of terms expanded. The specifications for report delivery, data processing, auditing and compliance are identical to those already prescribed in the Code of Practice for journals and databases.

One of the main challenges we faced in developing this draft Code of Practice was the lack of consistency among publishers in the ways in which they define, structure and distribute online books. In the case of online journals there was a wide consensus that the most important content unit whose usage should be measured is the full-text article. Even before COUNTER, most journal publishers were measuring downloads of full-text journal articles. COUNTER's main role was to ensure that they all did so using the same standards and protocols. For books there is no such consensus. Some publishers make online books available only as a single file that can be downloaded in its entirety, with no further vendor monitoring of usage being possible. Other publishers allow the downloading of individual chapters or entries, such as dictionary definitions or chemical structures. We felt it was appropriate to cover both these scenarios in the draft Code of Practice and this is reflected in the usage reports described below.

The full text of Release 1 of the COUNTER Code of Practice for books and reference works is freely accessible on the COUNTER web site (www.projectCounter.org). It was available for comment for an extended period, until December 2005. Both vendors and librarians were encouraged to review the document and to submit their comments to the COUNTER Project Director. It is planned to publish the final version of this Code of Practice in early 2006. Its main features are summarized below.

Definitions of terms used

The original Code of Practice for journals and databases contains an extensive list of data elements and other terms used in the usage reports and other parts of the Code. Where possible, existing definitions from NISO, ISO, ARL and other organizations have been used. Among the terms defined are 'vendor', 'aggregator', 'search', 'item request', 'consortium' and 'consortium member'. This comprehensive list of definitions is proving to be a useful industry resource and is becoming more and more widely used for purposes not directly related to COUNTER. It has now been expanded to cover books and reference works. New definitions include:

■ **chapter:** a subdivision of a book or of some categories of reference work; usually numbered and titled
■ **entry:** a record of information in some categories of reference work (e.g. a dictionary definition)
■ **reference work:** an authoritative source of information about a subject: used to find quick answers to questions
■ **section:** a subdivision of a book or reference work (e.g. chapter, entry).

As with journals and databases, where an appropriate existing definition exists this has been used and the source, such as NISO (the National Information Standards Organization) given. The other definitions have been developed by the books task force, using a number of sources.

Also defined are the protocols to be observed when an aggregator or gateway is involved in the delivery of vendor content to the customer. These protocols are particularly important to avoid duplicate counting of usage by publisher and aggregator in situations where an intermediary aggregator or gateway is involved.

Data processing and auditing

The way usage records are generated differs from one platform to another and it is impractical to describe all the possible filters used to clean up the data. Instead, the Code of Practice specifies the requirements to be met by the data to be used for building the usage reports. A guiding principle is that only intended usage should be recorded, and all requests that are not intended by the user are removed. To this end, all double clicks on an HTML-link within 10 seconds of each other will be counted as only one request. Where a PDF-link is involved, this filter is set at 30 seconds, due to the longer time it takes to render a PDF.

Auditing of vendor usage reports and processes by an approved third party will be a requirement for compliance when the Code of Practice for books and journals is implemented. Detailed auditing specifications are provided as an Appendix to the Code of Practice.

Usage reports

The draft COUNTER Code of Practice provides a set of five basic usage reports that cover full-text requests for a whole title, as well as for sections (chapters, encyclopaedia entries) within a title. Searches, sessions and turnaways are also covered. These reports are:

■ Book Report 1: number of successful title requests by month and title
■ Book Report 2: number of successful section requests by month and title
■ Book Report 3: number of turnaways by month and title
■ Book Report 4: total searches and sessions by month and title
■ Book Report 5: total searches and sessions by month and service.

The report formats, data processing guidelines and delivery protocols are exactly the same as those already in use for journals and databases. Likewise, searches, sessions and turnaways have been defined in the same way as for journals and databases and the usage reports relating to these (Book Reports 3, 4 and 5 above) parallel those for journals and databases. For this reason attention here will focus on Book Report 1 and Book Report 2, as these contain the key new elements on the draft Code of Practice and merit further discussion.

Book Report 1 (see Table 1) is designed to provide usage statistics for those titles that can only be downloaded in their entirety and for which online usage cannot be monitored further by the vendor.

Book Report 2 (see Table 2) is designed to allow the vendor to measure usage of individual sections within a title. A 'section' is the next level of organizational structure below the complete title, such as

Book Report 1 <Criteria> Date run: yyyy-mm-dd						
Titles	**Publisher**	**ISBN**	**Jan 2001**	**Feb 2001**	**Mar 2001**	**Total**
Total for all titles			**637**	**732**	**550**	**5,897**
Title AA		1212–3131	56	21	65	532
Title BB		9821–3361	23	51	75	465
Title CC		2464–2121	0	0	0	0
Title DD		5355–5444	13	51	75	978

Table 1. Book Report 1: number of successful title requests by month and title. (Full title and ISBN are listed.)

Notes:

1. *For 'Criteria' specify, for example, the organizational level to which the usage reports refer, e.g. 'Harvard University', 'Department of Chemistry'.*

2. *The 'Total for all titles' line is provided at the top of the table to allow it to be stripped out without disrupting the rest of the table, as the number of books included may vary from one month to another.*

3. *Books for which the number of title requests is zero in every month should be included in Book Report 1, except where an aggregator or gateway is responsible for recording and reporting the usage.*

Book Report 2 <Criteria> Date run: yyyy-mm-dd						
Titles	**Publisher**	**ISBN**	**Jan 2001**	**Feb 2001**	**Mar 2001**	**Total**
Total for all titles			**6,637**	**8,732**	**7,550**	**45,897**
Title AA		1212–3131	456	521	665	4,532
Title BB		9821–3361	203	251	275	3,465
Title CC		2464–2121	0	0	0	0
Title DD		5355–5444	203	251	275	2,978

Table 2. Book Report 2: number of successful section requests by month and title. (Full title and ISBN are listed.)

Notes:

1. *For 'Criteria' – see Note 1 under Table 1.*

2. *The 'Total for all titles' – see Note 2 under Table 1.*

3. *Books for which the number of section requests is zero in every month should be included in Book Report 2, except where an aggregator or gateway is responsible for recording and reporting the usage.*

'chapter' or 'entry'. We felt that this single report was more appropriate than having separate reports for 'chapter', 'entry', etc. as a title whose structure is based on 'chapters' is unlikely to contain 'entries' and vice versa.

Compliance with the Code of Practice

Compliance with the Code of Practice is encouraged in two ways. First, customers are urged to include a clause in all relevant licence agreements specifying that vendors provide usage statistics that are COUNTER compliant. A standard form of words for this clause is provided in the Code of Practice. Second, to obtain 'COUNTER-compliant' status for their usage reports, vendors are required to sign a formal 'Declaration of COUNTER Compliance' and to allow COUNTER to review those of their usage reports that they claim are compliant. These reports are then listed in the Register of Vendors on the COUNTER web site. Only reports listed there may be regarded as being COUNTER compliant. Since 2004, vendor usage reports have been monitored at five library test sites, which are providing useful feedback to individual vendors and to COUNTER; this is helping to improve implementation.

By July 2005, over 40 vendors were compliant with the Code of Practice for journals and databases. Many of the major publishers, as well as intermediaries, are now compliant, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Chemical Society, the American Institute of Physics, Blackwell Publishing, EBSCO, Elsevier, HighWire Press, ISI, Oxford University Press, Nature Publishing Group, Springer and Wiley. Already over 60% of the annual output of articles covered by the Science Citation Index is in COUNTER-compliant journals, and this proportion is growing steadily.

Vendors will have to apply separately for compliance with the Code of Practice for books and reference works.

Report delivery

Report delivery must conform to the following standards:

- Reports must be provided either as a CSV file, as a Microsoft Excel file, or as a file that can be easily imported into Microsoft Excel.
- Reports should be made available on a password-controlled web site (accompanied by an e-mail alert when data is updated).
- Reports must be provided at least monthly.
- Data must be updated within four weeks of the end of the reporting period.
- All of last calendar year's data and this calendar year's to date must be supplied.

Feedback on the draft Code of Practice

Feedback was received via the COUNTER web site, at conferences, and at a specially organized librarian focus group held at the Charleston Conference on 3 November 2005. Unlike when we developed the journals Code of Practice, both librarians and publishers appear to be less definite about what they want to see in a books Code of Practice. It is clear, however, that there is a strong wish by librarians for such a code.

In general, the feedback we have had has indicated that both communities were happy with the general approach we are taking: to try to develop a set of relatively simple reports that can be widely implemented by publishers and are generally useful to librarians. The main recommendations that we received are listed below:

Content of Code of Practice
a. *Definitions:* do not define 'book' for Release 1. We can instead provide guidelines as to the type of product that it covers and judge each application against this when it is received.
b. *Usage reports:*
   - include the new, 13-digit ISBN format
   - adopt the overall format used in Release 2 of the journals Code of Practice, including detailed display rules
   - include columns for 'publisher' and 'platform' in all reports
   - do not include specific consortium-level reports in Release 1, as consortium purchasing of books is less significant than for journals
   - Existing Book Reports 1–5: keep all five reports in the final version of the Code of Practice
   - Additional reports:
     - □ include a new report that covers 'turnaways by month and service' as most turnaways are at the service level
     - □ consider an optional additional report that allows reporting at one level below 'section', such as a soundtrack in a music encyclopaedia or an image in an art encyclopaedia.

Timetable
It is planned to publish the final version of the Code of Practice for books and reference works in February 2006.

COUNTER organization and membership

To ensure that COUNTER will be viable in the longer term, and will continue to serve the publishing, library and intermediary communities, in August 2004 it was set up as an independent, not-for-profit company in England. Known as 'Counter Online Metrics', it is governed by a six-member Board of Directors, chaired by Richard Gedye of Oxford University Press. An Executive Committee, reporting to the Board, is responsible for the management of COUNTER. The 13 members of the Executive Committee represent the international publisher, intermediary and library communities. In addition,

there is an International Advisory Board of over 30 experts from the same communities.

Counter Online Metrics is owned by its members, and since 2004 its only source of income has been its member subscriptions. Publishers, intermediaries, libraries, consortia and industry organizations are all eligible for full, voting membership at the following rates in 2006: Publisher £515 ($775); Intermediary £515 ($775); Library £258 ($387); Industry Organization £258 ($387); Consortium £345 ($515).

By the end of 2005 there were over 200 COUNTER members, in all categories. Our goal for 2006 is 250 members, as this will ensure a solid base of funding for the future. COUNTER's funding requirements are modest. We need an income of around $100k per annum to support all our activities.

The benefits of full COUNTER membership include:

- the right to vote at the Annual General Meeting on the direction and management of COUNTER, including appointments to the Board of Directors

- regular bulletins on the progress of COUNTER
- advice on implementation of COUNTER.

Further information on membership, as well as application forms, may be found on the COUNTER web site (www.projectCounter.org).

Reference

1. Shepherd, P.T., COUNTER: from conception to compliance, *Learned Publishing*, 2003, 16 (3) 201–205.

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