

REPORT TO ALA COUNCIL (ALA CD#30) OF THE DIGITAL CONTENT WORKING GROUP (DCWG)
Sari Feldman and Robert Wolven, Co-chairs
2014 ALA Midwinter Meeting, Philadelphia

The past six months brought libraries continued improvement with the Big Five publishers (down from Big Six with the merger of Random House and Penguin in July 2013). Macmillan greatly expanded its pilot program to include all backlist titles. Penguin Books USA made its ebooks available through OverDrive, a major development. And Simon & Schuster expanded its pilot program beyond New York City.

Key activities of the Digital Content Working Group (DCWG) during this reporting period include an ALA leadership [visit](#) to New York. A delegation led by President Barbara Stripling met with executives of the American Booksellers Association, Penguin Random House, Simon & Schuster, and the Association of American Publishers. ALA representatives also met with reporter Jeremy Greenfield that led to an [article](#) in *Forbes* magazine.

The DCWG held an ALA Virtual [Town Hall](#) Meeting to provide the membership with an update of the state of library ebooks and an opportunity to ask questions. The town hall panel comprised Barbara Stripling, Immediate Past-president Maureen Sullivan, Executive Director Keith Michael Fiels, DCWG Co-chairs Bob Wolven and Sari Feldman, and OITP Director Alan S. Inouye. More than 700 participants joined the town hall. The DCWG appreciates the support of ALA Publishing in pulling this event together.

ALA has made a difference. We know this to be true in our discussions with publishers and others in the publishing ecosystem. This sense is also reflected in the larger community, as suggested in a [recent article](#) in *Publishers Weekly*:

“The ALA Digital Content Working Group remains hard at work on these and other e-book issues, and certainly some of the progress over the last two years can be traced to their engagement with commercial publishers. But as more and more book readers become e-book readers, a reckoning draws ever closer for libraries.”

From “The Top 10 Library Stories of 2013,” Andrew Albanese,
Publishers Weekly, January 2, 2014.

The DCWG agrees with this assessment. While we saw some good progress, many challenges remain with respect to the Big Five. One of the largest challenges is pricing, which we continue to believe remains too high.

On January 13, 2014, ALA held a pre-conference workshop at the 2014 *Digital Book World* conference in New York. Featured in this workshop were Nora Rawlinson of *EarlyWord*, Wendy Bartlett of the Cuyahoga County Public Library, Maja Thomas, a former Senior Vice President of Hachette Book Group, and Larra Clark of ALA.

OVER

Looking Ahead

Now in its third year, the DCWG is re-assessing its priorities, which will constitute the centerpiece of its business meeting here in Philadelphia. In response to the urgent call for action from a broad cross-section of ALA members and leaders, the DCWG has focused on the Big Six library ebook problem. While this problem will continue to require attention, it is likely time to increase focus on other aspects of the digital content portfolio. The challenge is to identify the small number of topics for which the DCWG may be able to have some influence, that properly reside at the Working Group level (i.e., some issues are best addressed by particular units of ALA, not by this Working Group), and that can be supported by the ALA with the staff and financial resources available. Also on the table for discussion is the DCWG's organizational form. As a special committee of the Association, it currently expires at the conclusion of the 2014 ALA Annual Conference.

Our third supplement on digital content for *American Libraries* is now in preparation. The issue is planned for release just before the 2014 ALA Annual Conference. Also in preparation are two articles for the 2014 Bowker Annual—one on library ebooks, co-authored by DCWG member Rob Maier and Nadine Vassallo and Len Vlahos of the Book Industry Study Group, and one on school libraries and digital content, co-authored by Barbara Stripling and DCWG member Christopher Harris. Also in preparation are papers on the possibilities of libraries as publishers and the ebook licensing models for the school library market, both expected to be publicly released prior to the 2014 Annual Conference.

Also upcoming is a major panel at the 2014 Public Library Association Conference. Sari Feldman and DCWG member Vailey Oehlke will co-host a panel that includes Steve Potash, CEO of OverDrive, and Skip Dye, Vice President of Penguin Random House. Alan S. Inouye will be a featured speaker at a workshop organized as part of the study mandated by the state of Connecticut. This workshop takes place at the end of February in Hartford.