

Guest Editorial

Mountain View: the Agreement among Google, Publishers, and Authors



The Google Book Search settlement has now been visible to the world since the end of October 2008, and significant commentary and criticism are beginning to appear. Some of that commentary is exceptionally well informed, as exemplified by Jonathan Band's recent piece (<http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/google-settlement-13nov08.pdf>), which exposes clearly the mechanics and financial details of the agreement. The time is therefore ripe for us to consider the implications of the settlement for the higher education and public library communities and to ensure that our voices figure in to the public discourse as this landmark settlement makes its way through the courts. Let me initiate that discourse by citing what I see as the most significant aspects of the settlement not just from a research library perspective, but as well bearing the attitude that all libraries are research libraries to some considerable extent.

The overarching advantage of this settlement is that it allows us to dramatically improve the accessibility of a large portion of the intellectual content that a few research libraries have carefully selected, acquired, cataloged, interpreted, and preserved in our physical facilities for so many years. Already the number of volumes that will be made accessible once the Settlement Agreement is approved amounts to over seven million. This is a larger collection than all but a very few of the largest libraries in the

U.S. and for that matter the world. Some portion of that seven million volume collection consists of public domain works, and the remainder are in-copyright, but out-of-print books, ones published in the U.S. and in many other countries. Many languages and many countries of origin are represented in this new digital collection.

The expansion of effective access to these digital books is unprecedented for those making use of the free licenses Google will provide to public libraries and to higher education institutions as well as for those subscribing to the institutional licenses and to individual readers paying for reading individual books. This expanded access will have incalculable beneficial effects on teaching, learning, and research in a great many settings. This new and improved access will be empowering for individuals, self-paced learners, for school kids and their teachers, and for retirees. And this access should attract many more patrons to public libraries, maybe turning the new readers into constant patrons.

The full-text search that Google will provide for these works, as well as other advanced search tools that Stanford and other libraries are developing for use with full text, represent a dramatic improvement over the traditional library catalog, and are well suited to the searching styles of current researchers. Key word indexing and searching effectively unlocks the

contents of books, increasing the chances of discovery and certainly increasing the intellectual returns on the investments we in libraries have made in the names of our communities in collecting and preserving these books over many decades.

Granted, there are restrictions. We cannot use the materials in every way we might imagine, or even every way we might have planned. It is not yet clear whether and how printing and downloading will work in practical and financial terms. Nevertheless, the settlement provides a huge step forward for access to out-of-print and public domain works, which before the effective date of the Settlement Agreement were confined to our shelves.

A particular example of improving access is the ability to link to e-books at Google from our catalogs to allow users to view title pages, tables of contents and indexes of books that appear in search results. Often, this is all readers need to determine if a book is of interest. The ability to review that material online, even when the readers want to read books in hard copy, saves a significant amount of time and effort. Stanford and others are already engaged in linking bibliographic

records in catalogs to Google e-books.

The settlement also adds another layer to the preservation schemes of participating libraries, as they will have digital scans of the books to use for preservation, among other things. Are these scans everything we would like them to be? Most certainly not. However, the scans will exist for a very large number of books, thus allowing us to take up digital preservation in a significant and thoughtful way. The Hathi Trust has already come forward as one model, Stanford is developing its own Stanford Digital Repository, and we anticipate other methodologies as we move forward.

Lord Byron in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* writes:

He who ascends to mountain-tops
shall find
The loftiest peaks most wrapt in
clouds and snow

Extensive library collections formerly accessible in a few, well-supported institutions were effectively “wrapt in clouds and snow”. Soon they will become accessible to multitudes of readers in many locations.

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