



## Why You Should Know about COUNTER

As we head to Portland in July for the AALL Annual Meeting, this issue of *Spectrum* is filled with vendor relations-focused content, just in time for our Exhibit Hall forays. Please read the *Members' Briefing* insert, which includes an update on AALL activities concerning vendor relations written by the Committee on Relations with Information Vendor's (CRIV) Board Liaison Steve Anderson; a thought-provoking piece on pricing models for legal information in law schools; a look at whether law schools need both Westlaw and Lexis; and an insightful article on the importance of communication to vendor relationships.

In Anderson's article he notes that the AALL Executive Board encourages the CRIV to promote Project COUNTER. To that end, this month's "CRIV Notes" features Shyama Agrawal's report on Project COUNTER and the activities of the Technical Services Special Interest Section Project COUNTER Task Group.

## COUNTER Usage Statistics

by Shyama Agrawal, *acquisitions and serials librarian at Duke University School of Law Library in Durham, North Carolina*

Electronic resources have proliferated in the last decade in all disciplines. Librarians are spending an increasing percentage of their budgets on electronic resources every year. As the cost of resources is going up and budgets are shrinking, it becomes very important for librarians to justify why they buy what they buy. One of the measures that can be used is usage statistics. It is an effective tool, especially in the online environment where it is much more feasible to get systematic usage data.

Usage data will enable librarians to know how much a resource is being used. They can compare use of vendor products, see the usage patterns, and know user access routes. All of these will help in making informed purchasing and weeding decisions. It will benefit vendors to justify the importance of their products, adjusting their pricing models, and how they group

different resources together. One will get these benefits only if the usage data is consistent among all vendors. Counting Online Usage of

Networked Electronic Resources (COUNTER), launched in 2002, is an international initiative to improve the reliability of online usage statistics, according to the COUNTER Web site. "COUNTER's objective is to ensure that vendor online usage reports are credible, compatible, and consistent," the Web site states. "This is achieved by the publication of Codes of Practice that specify the content, format, delivery mechanisms, and data processing rules for a set of core usage reports that are easily implemented by vendors and easily understood by librarians." To be COUNTER compliant, a vendor must provide usage statistics that conform to COUNTER Codes of Practice.

## Code of Practice for Journals and Databases

The COUNTER Code of Practice for Journals and Databases was first released in 2002. It is revised and updated with changing technologies and the needs of its users. Release 2 was published in 2005, and the draft of Release 3 was published in March 2008. Release 3 (draft) has "incorporated measures to minimize the inflationary effects of federated searches, Internet robots, and search-engine prefetching on the reported usage statistics," according to the code. The initiative also published the Code of Practice for Books and Reference Works in 2006.

Code of Practice for Journals and Databases, Release 3 (draft), includes reports to measure successful full-text article requests for journals and journal archives and total searches and sessions, including separate reporting on federated searches by database and month. There are reports for turnaways for journals and databases. "A turnaway (rejected session) is defined as an unsuccessful login to an electronic service due to exceeding the simultaneous user limit allowed by the license," according to the code.

This report is useful for libraries that have limited simultaneous user licenses. In addition, there are separate usage reports for library consortia and its individual members. There are similar reports for electronic books described in the

COUNTER Code of Practice for Books and Reference Works.

Usage reports are audited by independent auditors based on COUNTER defined audit test-scripts. To be considered COUNTER compliant and to maintain the compliant status, vendors have to be audited annually. A list of compliant vendors is available at the Project COUNTER Web site, <http://projectcounter.org>.

As of April 2008, although there are 96 vendors who are compliant, very few are legal information vendors.

## TS-SIS COUNTER Task Group

The Project COUNTER Task Group of the AALL Technical Services Special Interest Section Serials Committee ([www.aallnet.org/sis/tssis/committees/serials/projectcounter](http://www.aallnet.org/sis/tssis/committees/serials/projectcounter)) was formed in 2007 in an effort to promote the use of COUNTER-compliant statistics among law librarians and legal database publishers. As part of the Serials Committee, the task group's main focus will be on standards that apply to serials and databases, rather than to monographs.

The task group contacted all major legal publishers and vendors and discovered that none of them were COUNTER compliant. Only a few vendors provide limited usage data. The task group also sent a short survey through different AALL special interest section and chapter online discussion lists about their use of usage statistics in June 2007. Unfortunately the response was minimal. Law librarians should insist on COUNTER-compliant statistics when signing licenses.

It is very time consuming to gather all usage reports and consolidate and present them in a meaningful way. A librarian has to go to each vendor's Web site (potentially a variety of user interfaces) periodically to retrieve, consolidate, and report on it. Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative (SUSHI) automates the process of request and delivery of usage reports. So far very few vendors have adopted the SUSHI protocol.

SUSHI is proposed as a requirement for COUNTER compliance in the draft of COUNTER's Code of Practice for Journals and Databases, Release 3. Consequently it is expected that the number of vendors supporting SUSHI will increase significantly in the coming years. ■