



Against the Grain

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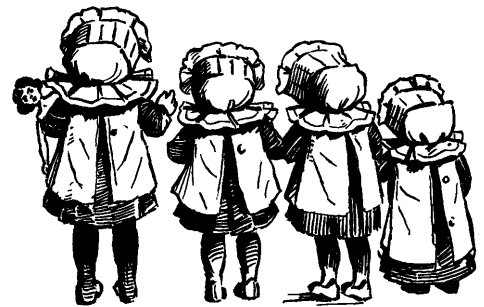
"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

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Standards — Libraries, Data Providers, and SUSHI: the Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative

by **Adam Chandler** (Information Technology Librarian, Library Technical Services, Cornell University Library, 107B Olin Library, Ithaca, NY 14853-5301; Phone: 607-255-5760) <alc28@cornell.edu>

by **Tim Jewell** (Director, Information Resources, Collections and Scholarly Communication, University of Washington Libraries, Box 352900, Seattle, WA 981195-2900; Phone: 206-543-3890) <tjewell@u.washington.edu>



The sheer amount of usage data now available to librarians who manage electronic resources represents a true "embarrassment of riches:" while the information is extensive and necessary to their operations, keeping up with it all has become a major problem. E-resource management systems now available or in development will provide tools to store and manipulate the data but may not offer much help with "intake."

The **Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative (SUSHI)** discussed below is aimed at overcoming this problem, and while librarians and ILS vendors have already demonstrated strong interest in it, there are reasons why data providers like e-journal and database publishers and vendors should also embrace it. For example, as awareness and interest in SUSHI build within the library community, data providers that become early supporters and adopters can demonstrate their vision and responsiveness to the market, while those that don't may be rightly perceived as lagging behind. And while there will be development costs associated with supporting SUSHI, those costs should be minimal and may lead over time to the need to invest less in developing custom usage data interfaces. Lastly, since the SUSHI protocol has already garnered support by COUNTER, it could conceivably become a requirement for COUNTER certification; work done now to implement it will position vendors and publishers to retain or establish certification.

COUNTER: Opportunities and Challenges

Under the skillful leadership of **Peter Shepherd** and the **COUNTER Board**, COUNTER is securely fixed among publishers and librarians as

the standard for reporting online usage.¹ However, on the demand side of the fence, there are serious impediments to making use of the COUNTER reports. The formatting of the delimited reports (either comma separated or in Excel) is widely variable across publishers, which makes processing them automatically difficult or impossible. Though steps are being taken to make the reports more consistent, COUNTER reports are not yet available in a consistent data "container." The administrative cost of individual provider-by-provider downloads is also high. To make complete use of the reports, library staff must log into each and every one of their different providers, navigate to the right page, then download the appropriate report to their hard drive. Then it is up to the library staff member to consolidate the individual report with all the others and for all the other months.

The **Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative ("SUSHI")** represents a "Web services" approach to solving the COUNTER consolidation problem.

SUSHI as COUNTER Companion

In response to the difficulty librarians are experiencing in making use of the COUNTER delimited reports, last summer a small group of librarians and vendors assembled and sketched out an automated protocol for moving COUNTER XML reports from providers to libraries.² Later the group agreed to call the effort the **Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative (SUSHI)**. After a promising start, NISO recognized the activity in November.³

The protocol is essentially a **SOAP (Simple Object Access Protocol)** request/response Web

Services "wrapper" for the XML version of COUNTER reports. In the protocol a transaction begins when a client service such as a usage data consolidation service or ILS vendor identifies itself to a data provider, identifies the customer whose statistics are being asked for, and specifies the desired report. In response, the server provides the report in XML format, along with the requestor and customer information — or an appropriate error message. We envision a system in which the client system is programmed to automatically retrieve last month's report, for all the COUNTER compliant vendors with which the library does business.

While there are a variety of possible requesters, the SUSHI model is premised on the notion that a long term solution mandates integrating usage statistics into existing library workflows, and might best be handled within the framework of an **Electronic Resource Management (ERM) System**. Given this background, it should come as no surprise that the librarians on the SUSHI working group are all steering group members of the **Digital Library Federation's Electronic Resource Management Initiative**. In fact, SUSHI is an integral part of phase 2 of the **DLF ERML**.⁴ Librarians are seeking a comprehensive solution to the management of licensed electronic resources that combines licensing, accurate holdings, orders, and statistics, among other important information from their entire life cycles. We believe models that set statistics apart from the rest of the life cycle of electronic resources are substantially less valuable, since so many factors must be considered when evaluating them.


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Status of SUSHI

There are five vendors actively engaged in developing the SUSHI protocol: two content providers (**EBSCO Information Services** and **Swets Information Services**), two ILS vendors that offer **ERM** products (**Innovative Interfaces, Inc.** and **Ex Libris**), plus **Thomson Scientific**, which is working on a **COUNTER** statistics component that would link to their journal impact index. The initial emphasis among the development partners is on transmission of the **COUNTER JR1** report.

As we write, the protocol will be offered in production within weeks at **EBSCO** and **Swets**. **III** is making it available in the beta version of their **ERM** module this month. **Ex Libris** will be following later this year with its integration of **SUSHI** in their **Verde ERM** product. Other vendors committed to implementing the protocol in 2006 include **HARRASSOWITZ**, **Endeavor Information Systems**, **SirsiDynix**, **OCLC**, and **Serials Solutions**. The **Florida Center for Library Automation** and **College Center for Library Automation (CCLA)** from the **State of Florida Community Colleges** are also interested.

The challenge at this point is lining up support among content providers. Beyond **EBSCO** and **Swets**, **Cornell's Project Euclid** is the next content provider on the list to offer the protocol

to customers. Early adopters of the protocol stand to gain a competitive edge, since Librarian colleagues we speak with are enthusiastic about the potential of the **SUSHI** protocol and are sure to compare it favorably when making decisions about products for purchase. **SUSHI** development kits are freely available for the **.NET** and **Java Web Services** environments. More information about **SUSHI** is available on the project page.⁵ 

Endnotes

1. **COUNTER** Website: <http://www.projectcounter.org/articles.html>.
2. In the summer of 2005, the project which would come to be called **SUSHI** started its investigations. Members of the team included: **Ivy Anderson** (California Digital Library), **Adam Chandler** (Cornell University Library), **Ted Fons** (Innovative Interfaces Inc.), **Bill Hoffman** (Swets Information Services), **Tim Jewell** (University of Washington Libraries), **Ted Koppel** (Ex Libris), and **Oliver Pesch** (EBSCO Information Systems).
3. "NISO Initiative to Standardize Online Usage Statistics Harvesting." Press Release. <http://www.niso.org/news/releases/pr-stats-11-05.html>
4. DLF Electronic Resource Management Initiative, Phase II. <http://www.diglib.org/standards/dlf-erm05.htm>
5. Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative (**SUSHI**). http://www.niso.org/committees/SUSHI/SUSHI_comm.html

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Katina Strauch
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