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Navigating the Digital Publishing Landscape

How the publishing industry and rising digital demand are impacting libraries

One Copy/One User and Pay Per Use Work Best When Working Together

The use of metered one copy/one user licensing has risen in the digital publishing industry. The Big Five book publishers have moved eBook and digital audiobook availability almost exclusively to metered licensing. Perpetual licensing remains available but is often cost-ineffective and is slowly phasing out for high-demand titles.

With the Big Five only offering most new and trending titles via metered licenses, libraries rely on the one copy/one user model to deliver highly sought-after content.

Transactional licensing, however, offers a 100% return on investment and delivers more catalog permanency. Whereas 99% of the Hoopla Instant pay per use (PPU) catalog is maintained over time, metered content is temporary—with many licenses expiring long before the library has been able to realize the full value of the purchase.

Below is a comparison of true costs per circ for an audiobook available from a large trade publisher and authored by a *New York Times* bestselling author. Emerging authors, backlist, and special interest titles offer better value as PPU titles.

License list price	Pay per use price
$80	**$2.54**

True cost per circ (full utilization)	True cost per circ (50% utilization)	True cost per circ (25% utilization)
$2.35	**$4.71**	**$9.41**

True cost per circ
$2.54

Assumes 21-day checkout period or 17 circs/yeap.

Digital Publishing Landscape
An Apples-to-Apples Comparison

When considering the purchase of a one copy/one user license, fully evaluate its true cost and consider that not all licenses will achieve full utilization. The numbers below are averages and will help define a better purchasing strategy for your library.

Did you know?
73.5%
of usage-metered licenses **expire** before 50% utilization.

Perpetual License Types
(Assumes 100% License Utilization Across Three Years)

Publisher	Format	Perpetual	Average License Cost 2024-2025	Cost Per Circ Year 1	Cost Per Circ Year 2	Cost Per Circ Year 3	PPU Average Cost Per Cir	On Hoopla
Penguin Random House	📖	No	-	-	-	-	-	-
	🎧	Yes	$92.15	$5.42	$2.71	$1.81	-	PPU Pricing Not Suitable
HarperCollins	📖	No	-	-	-	-	-	-
	🎧	Yes	$84.17	$4.95	$2.48	$1.65	$2.99	✓
Macmillan	📖	No	-	-	-	-	-	-
	🎧	Yes	$81.79	$4.81	$2.41	$1.60	$3.68*	✓
Recorded Books	🎧	Yes	$89.30	$5.25	$2.63	$1.75	$2.84	✓
Blackstone Publishing	📖	Yes	$42.99	$2.53	$1.26	$0.84	$2.70	✓
	🎧	Yes	$57.75	$3.40	$1.70	$1.13	$1.93	✓
Dreamscape	📖	Yes	$15.75	$0.93	$0.46	$0.31	$1.05	✓
	🎧	Yes	$85.90	$5.05	$2.53	$1.68	$2.59	✓
Podium	🎧	Yes	$62.49	$3.68	$1.84	$1.23	$2.43	✓

Metered License Types
(Variable Utilization Rates - 100%, 50%, 25%)

Publisher	Format	Meter Type	Average License Cost 2024-2025	Cost Per Circ (100%)	Cost Per Circ (50%)	Cost Per Circ (25%)	PPU Average Cost Per Cir	On Hoopla
Penguin Random House	📖	Time (12 mos.)	$27.50	$1.62	$3.24	$6.47	-	PPU Pricing Not Suitable
	📖	Time (24 mos.)	$55.00	$1.62	$3.24	$6.47	-	PPU Pricing Not Suitable
	🎧	Time (12 mos.)	$46.08	$2.71	$5.42	$10.84	-	PPU Pricing Not Suitable
Hachette	📖	Time (24 mos.)	$72.00	$2.12	$4.24	$8.47	$2.94	✓
	🎧	Time (24 mos.)	$67.60	$1.99	$3.98	$7.95	$2.99	✓
Harper Collins	📖	Circs (26)	$41.85	$1.61	$3.22	$6.44	$2.61	✓
Macmillan	📖	Time (24 mos.)	$60.00	$1.76	$3.53	$7.06	$1.26*	✓
Simon & Schuster	📖	Time (24 mos.)	$59.99	$1.76	$3.53	$7.06	$0.96	✓
	🎧	Time (24 mos.)	$78.49	$2.31	$4.62	$9.23	$3.20	✓

📖 eBooks   🎧 Audiobooks

*Price applies only to titles carried on Hoopla

A New Strategy
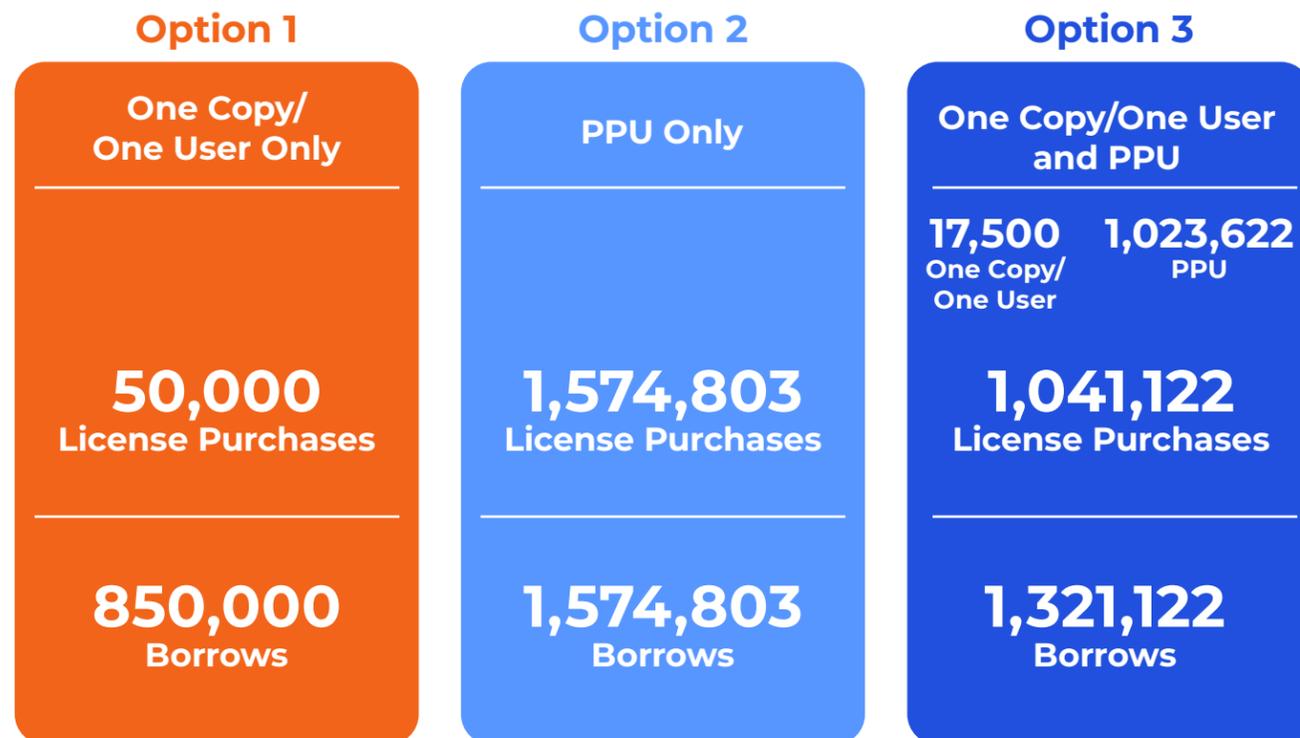### The answer isn't one model or the other—it's both.

Libraries are developing stronger collection development policies that **strategically blend metered, perpetual, and transactional licenses**, optimizing budgets and allowing for a better patron experience.

Metered licenses can bridge the gap to pay per use availability, while features such as Hoopla's holds relief functionality reduce the need for additional one copy/one user licenses.

Breaking Down the Math

Libraries have options when it comes to one copy/one user and PPU content. With a **$4 million digital audiobook budget**, libraries can choose:

Option 1
One Copy/ One User Only

50,000
License Purchases

850,000
Borrows

Option 2
PPU Only

1,574,803
License Purchases

1,574,803
Borrows

Option 3
One Copy/One User and PPU

17,500
One Copy/ One User

1,023,622
PPU

1,041,122
License Purchases

1,321,122
Borrows

Here are some best practices to help navigate the increasing shift to metered licenses:

Use only one platform for your digital collection.

Offering titles through different platforms is confusing for the patron and creates a headache for the library. Resulting abandoned holds create a false sense of need for the library, causing money to be spent on unnecessary one copy/one user licenses.

### Use a platform that advocates for better pricing.

While some platforms offer a standard price, Hoopla negotiates on behalf of libraries for fair pricing. This is important, as some publishers price their pay per use titles in a way that is unsustainable to the library market.

Use data to understand true cost per circ.

Because many metered licenses expire before full utilization, the cost per circ of some materials may be higher than libraries realize. Before renewing an expiring license, use available tools and resources (such as Hoopla's side-by-side comparison tools) to evaluate past—and expected future—utilization and all licensing models available for the title.

Determine budgets based on patron usage patterns.

Catalog titles such as children's titles, indie books, and timeless favorites are best served via pay per use, while one copy/one user dollars are better spent on new and trending titles that circulate frequently or are only available through metered licensing.
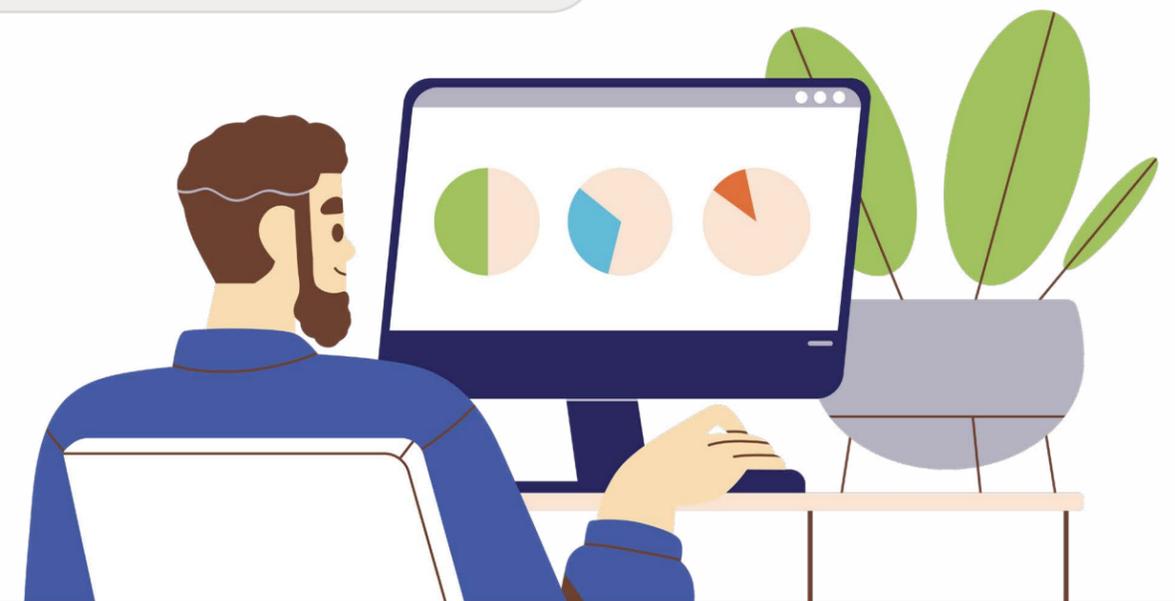
Maintaining a catalog gets harder every year.

9-10% of your catalog disappears annually due to expiring licenses.
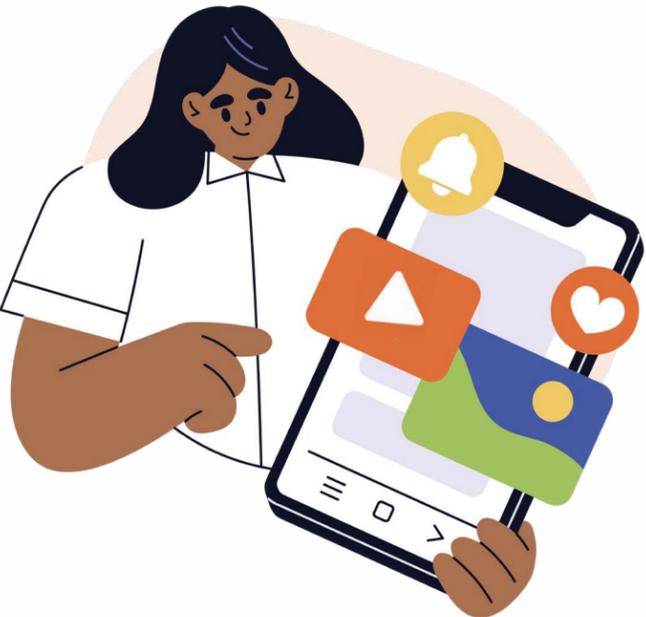
Meeting the Challenge of AI-Generated Content

As AI-generated eBooks and audiobooks have become more common across the industry, Hoopla has strengthened its approach to transparency, detection, and library control.

We proactively ask our content partners for clear identification of AI-generated materials and make that information available to libraries so they can block content based on their own policies.

Additionally, our detection workflows flag content with unusual sentence structures, questionable author authenticity, abnormal page counts, odd publication patterns, cover art inconsistencies, or other indications that a title may not meet quality standards.

Every flagged title is then reviewed by real people—analysts trained specifically to evaluate potential AI content. This hybrid approach gives libraries a deeper layer of protection.

Digital Audiobook Sales Increase—Along with Piracy

Audiobook sales revenue for 2025 is forecasted to reach and/or exceed $8 billion globally. In the U.S., audiobook revenue is projected to hit 6-7% growth year over year. This growth is almost entirely driven by digital audiobooks. Digital accounted for 99% of all audiobook revenue in 2024, growing year over year by 14%.

However, 35% of surveyed audiobook listeners said they have listened to an audiobook on YouTube.* While this content is free, much of it is also pirated. This creates an opportunity for libraries to step in and become a free—yet ethical—option for digital audiobooks.

The Emergence of Independent Creators

With new promotional avenues like TikTok and Goodreads, independent authors are enjoying increased exposure to new audiences. While the Big Five still hold the majority of market share when it comes to dollars, independent authors are moving more units.

Digital platforms like Hoopla make it easier for libraries to offer patrons a wide variety of content—not just from major publishers, but also from indie authors who may be experiencing sudden increased visibility.

Libraries Are a Trusted Source

A recent survey revealed that 63% of audiobook listeners value access through their library app.* This number indicates that libraries—despite recent political and funding challenges—are still considered trusted entities within their communities.

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