Beyond the Leaky Bucket:

Navigating the 2026 Digital Publishing Crunch

Ongoing changes in the digital publishing landscape make Hoopla the only sustainable option for public libraries.

A Landscape in Flux

Digital demand is no longer just rising. It's one of the primary ways patrons engage with the library.

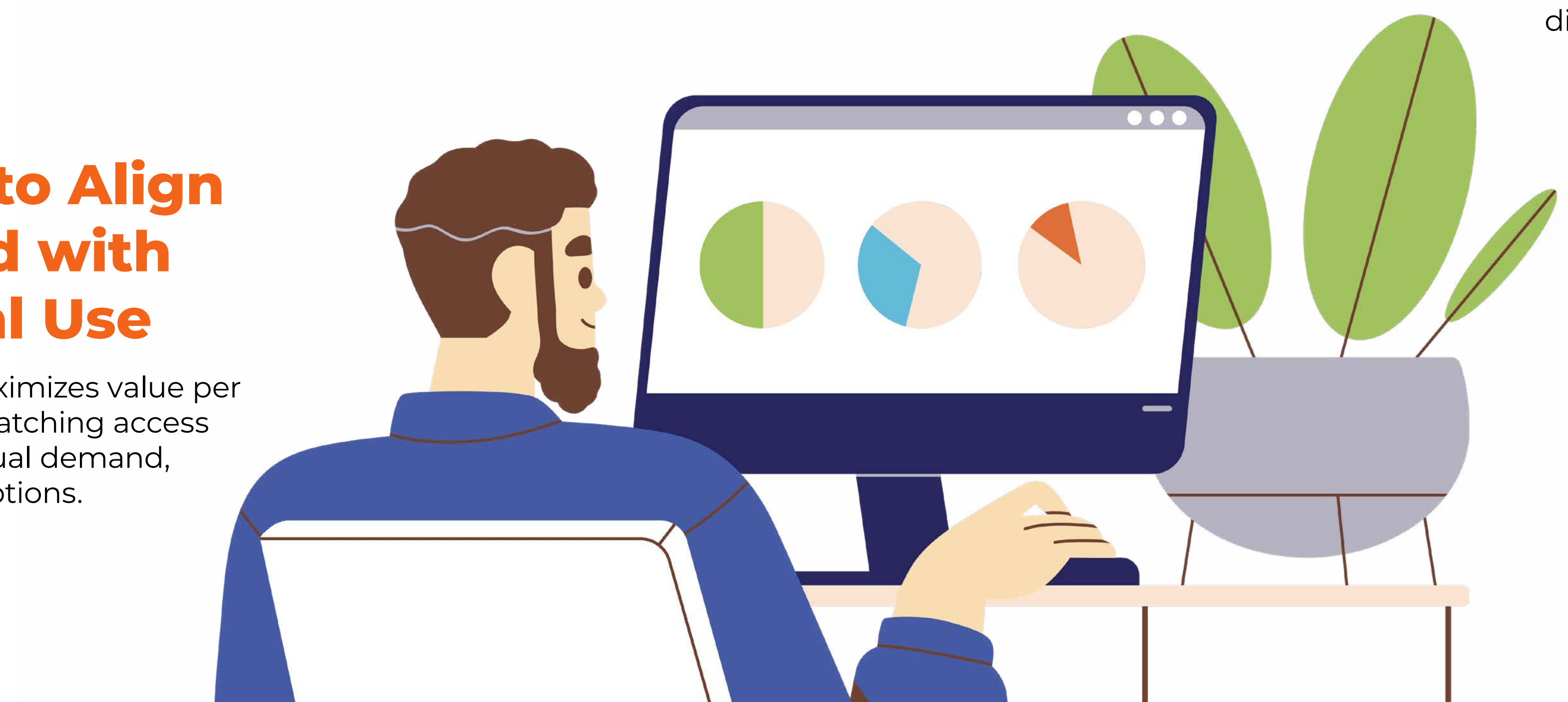
Yet, the industry is shifting toward models that prioritize platform profit over library sustainability. Most platforms force an impossible choice: a massive bill or an unmanageable waitlist.

Hoopla is sustainable because it was intentionally built as a system where three different license types work together to align patron demand, license efficiency, and long term library budgets.

Rather than forcing libraries into a single access model, Hoopla combines the on-demand access of Hoopla Instant, the one copy/one user licensing of Hoopla Flex, and the pre-paid simultaneous use of Instant Bundles. This integrated approach allows libraries to meet high demand in the moment while making intentional ownership decisions that protect collections and budgets over time.

Built to Align Spend with Actual Use

Hoopla maximizes value per dollar by matching access type to actual demand, not assumptions.



Model	Best for...	Budget Impact
Instant (On demand)	Viral spikes, deep backlists, and midlist discovery	Zero waste: Pay only for what is actually used
Flex (One copy/one user)	High-demand new releases	Intentional ownership: Targeted spending on evergreen frontlist content
Instant Bundles (Simultaneous use)	Bestsellers and trending series	Best of both worlds: Instant access plus budget predictability

The Reality of Metered Licensing

The Big Five publishers have moved almost exclusively to metered licensing for trending titles, while most platforms lock libraries into a buy-expire-rebuy loop. This has created a "leaky bucket" effect where your digital collection quietly shrinks by **10% every year.**

- **Financial Strain:** Audiobook and eBook license **costs have surged by more than 200%** over the past 3-5 years.
- **Hidden Waste:** As many as **73.5% of usage-metered licenses expire** before even reaching 50% utilization; 10% never circulate **at all.**
- **The Result:** Libraries sacrifice their diverse collections just to keep up with temporary best seller demand.
- **The Good News:** Hoopla breaks that cycle by helping your collection grow larger and more diverse with lasting depth across midlists, backlists, and complete series.

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 Circ	On Hoopla
Penguin Random House	eBook	No	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Audiobook	Yes	$92.15	$5.42	$2.71	$1.81	-	PPU Pricing Not Suitable
HarperCollins	eBook	No	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Audiobook	Yes	$84.17	$4.95	$2.48	$1.65	$2.99	✓
Macmillan	eBook	No	-	-	-	-	-	
	Audiobook	Yes	$81.79	$4.81	$2.41	$1.60	$3.68*	✓
Recorded Books	Audiobook	Yes	$89.30	$5.25	$2.63	$1.75	$2.84	✓
Blackstone Publishing	eBook	Yes	$42.99	$2.53	$1.26	$0.84	$2.70	✓
	Audiobook	Yes	$57.75	$3.40	$1.70	$1.13	$1.93	✓
Dreamscape	eBook	Yes	$15.75	$0.93	$0.46	$0.31	$1.05	✓
	Audiobook	Yes	$85.90	$5.05	$2.53	$1.68	$2.59	✓
Podium	eBook	Yes	$19.50	$1.15	$0.57	$0.38	$1.00	✓
	Audiobook	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 Circ	On Hoopla
Penguin Random House	eBook	Time (12 mos.)	$27.50	$1.62	$3.24	$6.47	-	PPU Pricing Not Suitable
	eBook	Time (24 mos.)	$55.00	$1.62	$3.24	$6.47	-	PPU Pricing Not Suitable
	Audiobook	Time (12 mos.)	$46.08	$2.71	$5.42	$10.84	-	PPU Pricing Not Suitable
Hachette	eBook	Time (24 mos.)	$72.00	$2.12	$4.24	$8.47	$2.94	✓
	Audiobook	Time (24 mos.)	$67.60	$1.99	$3.98	$7.95	$2.99	✓
Harper Collins	eBook	Circs (26)	$41.85	$1.61	$3.22	$6.44	$2.61	✓
Macmillan	eBook	Time (24 mos.)	$60.00	$1.76	$3.53	$7.06	$1.26*	✓
Simon & Schuster	eBook	Time (24 mos.)	$59.99	$1.76	$3.53	$7.06	$0.96	✓
	Audiobook	Time (24 mos.)	$78.49	$2.31	$4.62	$9.23	$3.20	✓

eBooks Audiobooks *Price applies only to titles carried on Hoopla

New Standards for Fair Library Licensing

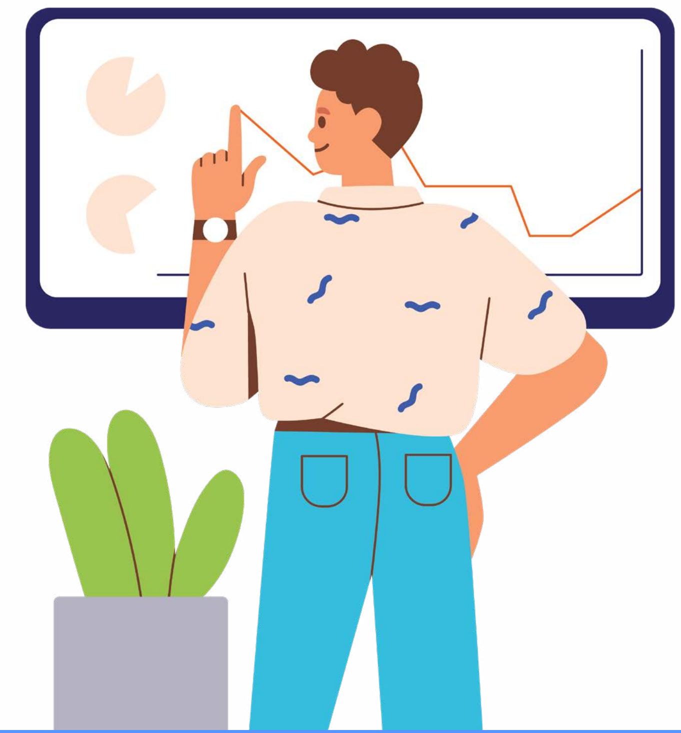
States across the country are taking a closer look at how digital content is licensed to libraries. Using clear standards to best determine fair licensing practices, the goal is simple: give libraries more flexibility, transparency, and choice. As these conversations continue, platforms that offer transparent, predictable pricing and flexible licensing models can help libraries stay focused on what matters most: serving patrons without disruption.

2026 Market Intelligence & Best Practices

To best navigate the current landscape, libraries are moving from reactive buying to a proactive strategy.

- Avoid platform fee surprises: While competitors double platform fees for many libraries in 2026, Hoopla remains committed to no platform fees and transparent, usage-based pricing.
- Consolidate for clarity: Using multiple platforms creates abandoned holds and a false sense of demand. A single-platform approach reduces digital waste.
- The AI ethics opportunity: With 35% of patrons admitting to using pirated content on YouTube, libraries have a unique opportunity to provide a free, ethical, and high-quality alternative.

Sustainability is about spending smarter. Hoopla allows you to say “yes” to your patrons today without compromising your collection’s depth tomorrow.



“Demand for digital content continues to grow, but budgets do not always grow with it. So, the balance comes from being strategic, supporting the services that offer strong value to the community while also making sure we can sustain a healthy overall collection.”

- Ashley Fedele, Materials Management & Technical Services Director, Harford County Public Library, Maryland

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