

# Straight Download Episode 15 Summary

## Episode Summary

Episode 15 of *The Straight Download* dives into one of the most urgent and fast-evolving challenges facing libraries today: the rise of AI-generated content and its impact on digital collections, discovery, and trust.

Building on conversations from the ULC CEO Roundtable, Ann Ford and Jeff Jankowski explore how AI is rapidly reshaping the eBook landscape, introducing both unprecedented opportunities and serious quality concerns. Joined by Hoopla's Director of Digital Operations, Matt Schimler, the episode goes deep into what libraries are actually up against and how they can respond.

At its core, the conversation frames AI not as a future disruption, but as a present-day reality that libraries must actively navigate, curate, and help their communities understand.

## Key Themes & Insights

### AI Is Flooding the Content Ecosystem

AI-generated content has rapidly scaled from a fringe issue to a systemic challenge:

- Over 3,400 books per day are being ingested into Hoopla's ecosystem
- Approximately 300 titles per day are blocked due to quality concerns
- More than 220,000 titles have been removed from the catalog

**Takeaway:** AI content is not emerging. It is already reshaping collections at scale.

### Curation Is the New Front Line

As content creation becomes easier, curation becomes more critical:

- AI-driven detection tools flag potential low-quality or AI-generated "slop" using pattern recognition
- Human review ensures accuracy and avoids over-filtering
- Systems are evolving to identify repeat offenders and scrutinize unverified publishers

**Takeaway:** Maintaining trust now depends on how effectively libraries filter, not just provide, content.

## **Transparency Is Still a Major Gap**

The ecosystem lacks consistent standards for identifying AI-generated content:

- Publishers rely heavily on self-disclosure from authors
- Metadata around AI involvement is inconsistent or often missing
- Even experts struggle to reliably distinguish between human and AI-written works

**Takeaway:** Without clear labeling, libraries must shoulder the burden of verification and quality control.

## **AI Is Changing How People Seek Information**

AI is reshaping user behavior toward speed and convenience:

- Search is evolving toward summarized answers rather than source exploration
- Independent and long-tail content risks becoming less discoverable
- Users may engage less critically when information is delivered instantly

**Takeaway:** Libraries remain essential as spaces for depth, discovery, and critical engagement.

## **Libraries as Guides in the AI Era**

Libraries have a growing role beyond access. They are becoming guides for navigating AI-driven information:

- Teaching patrons how to question and validate AI-generated outputs
- Supporting digital literacy in a world of synthetic content
- Providing unbiased, diverse collections outside of algorithmic influence

**Takeaway:** Libraries are uniquely positioned to help communities understand, not just consume, information.

## Balancing Access and Quality

A central tension throughout the episode:

- Libraries must avoid censorship while maintaining collection integrity
- Open access must be balanced with thoughtful moderation
- Large, diverse collections remain critical to discovery and relevance

**Takeaway:** The goal is not to limit access, but to ensure that access remains meaningful and trustworthy.

## Final Thought

AI is accelerating change across the content landscape, but it also reinforces the enduring value of libraries. As discovery becomes more automated, trusted curation, equitable access, and critical thinking become even more important.

This is not a one-time disruption. It is an ongoing evolution, and libraries are at the center of how it unfolds.

## What We're Reading, Watching & Listening To

A staple of *The Straight Download*, this episode closes with a look at what is currently capturing the team's attention:

- **Matt Schimler (Reading):**  
*The Fiery Cross* by Diana Gabaldon (Book 5 of the *Outlander* series)  
A long-form, immersive historical fantasy, ideal for deep, extended engagement.
- **Jeff Jankowski (Reading / Watching):**  
*Twice* by Mitch Albom  
A creative and reflective novel about second chances and the emotional weight of reliving life's moments.  
Jeff also recommends the film *Project Hail Mary* (based on Andy Weir's work), praising its creativity and its uplifting portrayal of the human spirit while highlighting ongoing challenges around exclusive content access for libraries.
- **Ann Ford (Reading):**  
*Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals* by Oliver Burkeman  
A thought-provoking nonfiction read that challenges the modern obsession with productivity and reframes time around intentionality rather than busyness.

