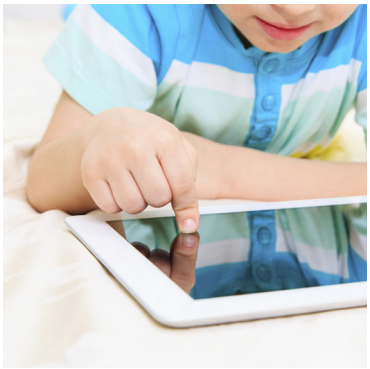
AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY ALLIANCE

Australian Library and Information Association

COMPARISON OF EBOOKS AND ELENDING IN AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES 2013 V 2014



EBOOKS AND ELENDING

This is a snapshot of the situation in Australian public libraries in January 2013 and May 2014, created by the Australian Public Library Alliance.

ABOUT APLA

ALIA's Australian Public Library Alliance (APLA) comprises representatives from the state-based public library associations, the territory libraries, LINC Tasmania and Public Libraries Australia. APLA advises the ALIA Board on policy for its sector and has a highly active role in shaping activities and campaigns.

www.alia.org.au

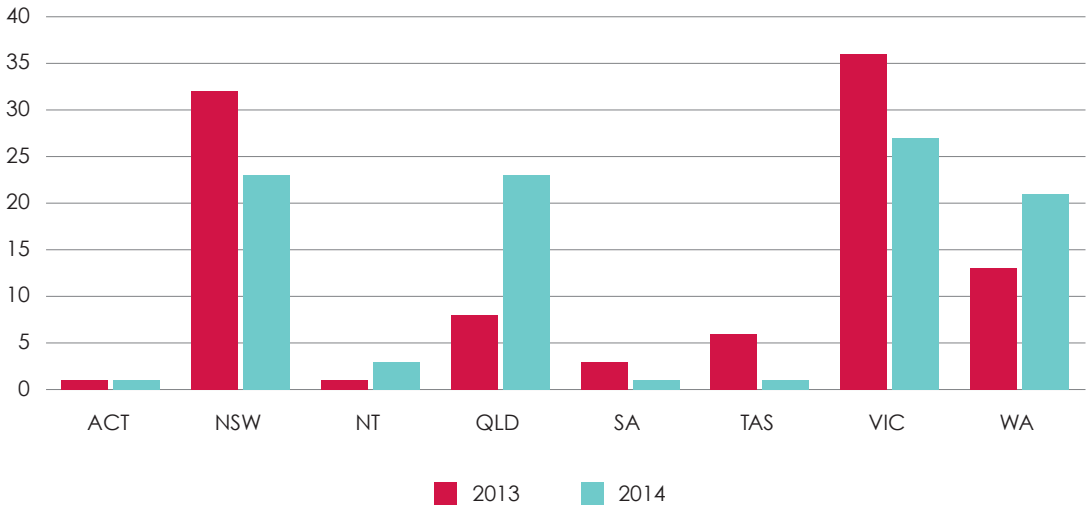
ABOUT THE SURVEYS

In January 2013, there were 190 responses representing 788 public libraries. In May 2014, there were fewer responses (72) representing 480 public libraries.

The 2013 survey was attached to the Internet Access in Public Libraries recurring study, while the 2014 survey was standalone.

With 1,500 public libraries across Australia, the 2013 response rate was approximately 50% and the 2014 response rate, approximately a third of the total.

WHERE RESPONDENTS WERE LOCATED



KEY FINDINGS

1. Nearly all Australian public libraries now lend ebooks; up from 69% a year ago to 97% in 2014.
2. On average, ebooks make up 5–6% of a public library's collection.
3. In 53% of public libraries, ebooks account for less than 1% of loans, and in almost all, they account for less than 5% of loans.
4. 60% of libraries use two or more ebook providers, up from 33% in 2013. The three most popular providers are Bolinda, Overdrive and Wheelers.
5. Between half and two thirds of libraries are less than satisfied or not satisfied with the choice of bestsellers, books by Australians, popular authors and overall content.
6. 71% of libraries have ebooks in their catalogue but less than a quarter of libraries (23%) are able to offer ebooks direct from their catalogue.
7. More libraries appear to be loaning ereading devices — 23% in 2014, up from 19% in 2013.
8. Skills in public libraries have remained at a similar level, with two in every five libraries saying most or all of their staff were conversant with ebooks and ereaders.

EBOOKS HAVE ARRIVED

In January 2013, 69% of public libraries loaned ebooks. Of the other 31%, almost all (95%) planned to do so within the next two years, and the 2014 survey results suggest almost all had achieved this within 18 months.

97% of respondents in May 2014 said their libraries loaned ebooks.

AVERAGE SIZE OF PUBLIC LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

WHY WERE THEY DELAYED?

	2013
Budget constraints	76%
Technology issues	54%
Licensing restrictions	39%
Content inadequacies	32%

In 2014, budget constraints and content inadequacies were still issues for the 3% of libraries not offering ebooks for loan.

LOANS ARE INCREASING

In 2013, in 99% of libraries with ebooks, they represented less than 5% of loans, and in 72% of these libraries they accounted for less than 1%. In 2014, the corresponding figures were 96% and 53%.

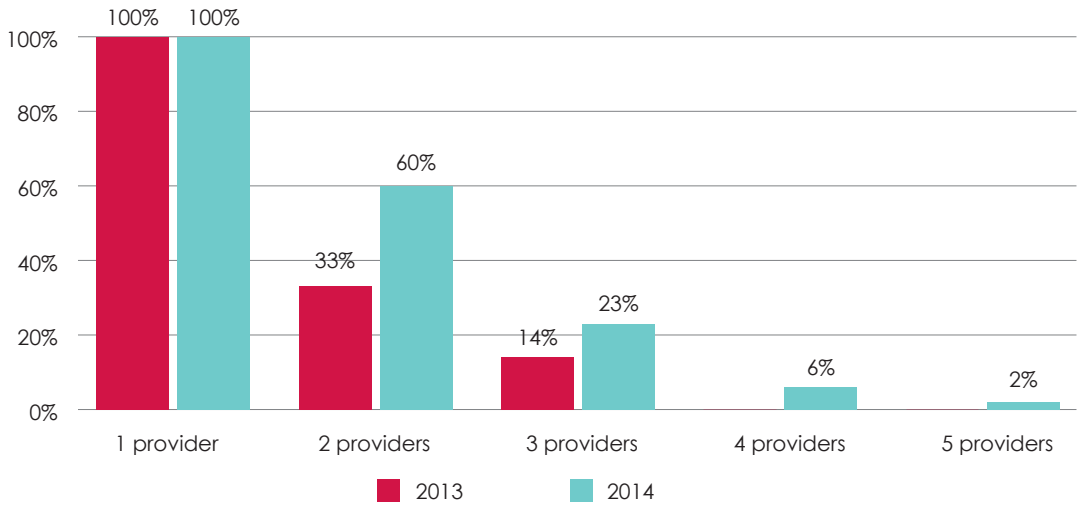
Ebook loans have risen, but they are still a small percentage of the total.

HOW MANY PROVIDERS?

In 2013, 67% of libraries said they couldn't get what they needed from one supplier and in 2014, 59% said the same thing.

In 2013, 33% of libraries responding used two or more providers. In 2014, it was 60%.

NUMBER OF PROVIDERS USED BY RESPONDENTS



WHAT WE ARE MISSING

Libraries are less than satisfied or not satisfied with the choice of:

	2013	2014
Bestsellers	79%	66%
Books by Australians	65%	52%
Overall content	59%	52%
Popular authors	57%	58%

FITTING OUR SYSTEMS

In 2013, while 55% of libraries could incorporate ebook titles in their catalogues, only 30% of libraries offered ebook downloads direct from the catalogue. The figures in 2014 were 71% and 23%.

LOANING HARDWARE

In 2013, only 19% of libraries offering ebooks had ereaders for people to borrow; in 2014, the figure was 23%.

DO WE HAVE THE SKILLS?

In 2013, 39% of libraries said most or all of the library team were conversant with ebooks and ereaders and 58% said some or a couple of members of the team were ebook/ereader conversant.

In 2014, 41% of libraries said most or all of the library team were conversant with ebooks and ereaders and 59% said some or a couple of members of the team were ebook/ereader conversant.

OTHER COMMENTS

Our ebook collection is still growing, and we are basing purchases on the physical collection, as well as customer requests. We are running in-house training for staff members on using BorrowBox soon, and hoping this will instill increased confidence for staff, and in supporting library customers.

We just started circulating ebooks this past year, but we know it will be a growing area of the collection. It's growing and improving but there are still a lot of issues. These include:

- We need to have all the major publishers on board to give our customers the best access to content.
- We need all staff to be familiar with elending to provide better support to customers.
- We need the download process to be far simpler for our customers.

There has been an improvement in quality and quantity of content available in the last year. However there is still a high level of unmet demand experienced by public library customers particularly for recently published bestsellers.

The content is terrible, more and more people are turning to Amazon because of the lack of content available to Australian libraries.

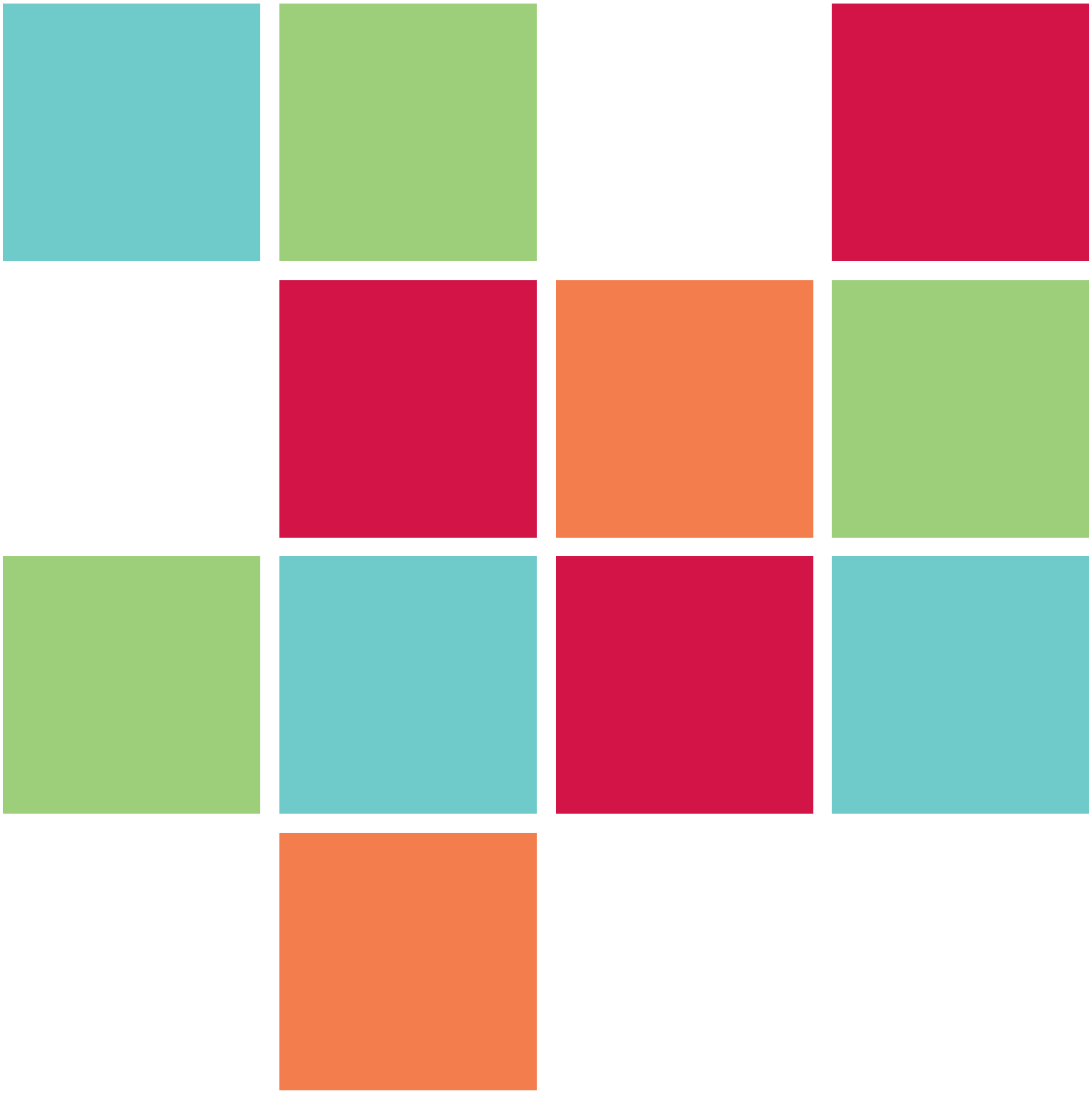
Collection development across multiple platforms will be a concern in the future to avoid duplication. We would like more popular authors, but are restricted due to geographic copyright. More Australian publishers are making popular ebooks available which is great.

Very concerned about the funding required to grow ebook collections and also maintain physical collections.

I think that it is important that public libraries collectively work with publishers to improve the range of titles on offer and the cost of titles. We need to show the publishers that selling eBooks to libraries is not going to negatively impact on their business.

The various contractual arrangements we have to agree to for the various publishers is mind-bogglingly complex and ridiculous. Obtaining backlist titles of an author can also be difficult.

Appreciate the ALIA-driven high level of discussions happening with all parties participating and progress towards workable solutions for libraries around ebooks.

We started lending ebooks in March 2013. I have averaged our ebook borrowing over 12 months based on our lending figures to date. If these early figures maintain their initial growth rate then demand for ebooks will far exceed our expectations. Our ebooks have proved popular from the outset as opposed to our eaudio borrowing which has grown steadily over 12 months but not as quickly as the ebooks in the first month. This may partly be due to technical issues experienced in the first year of setting up elending.

In my dream world there will be one seamless portal that handles all the different lending platforms and customers and staff will only need to know how to interact with one process.