

Librarians have long struggled to measure how library resources were being used: for decades, reselling and circulation lists were the main methods available to them. Publishers had no idea how much their journals were used; all they had was the subscription data (e.g. number and location of subscribers, contact details, etc). With the advent of electronic content in the late 1990s this changed: publishers could see how often articles from a certain journal were downloaded, and by which customers. Librarians could now see whether and how the resources they purchased were being used. Both groups gained a wealth of information that could help them manage their publications and collections.

It wasn't long before the need for standardization emerged. Every publisher had its own reporting format, meaning that for librarians combining data and comparing definitions from various publishers took a lot of time and effort. In March 2002, Project COUNTER (Counting Online Usage of Networked Electronic Resources) (1) was launched. In this international initiative, librarians, publishers and intermediaries collaborated by setting standards for the recording and reporting of usage statistics in a consistent, credible and compatible way. The first Code of Practice was published in 2003. This year, COUNTER celebrates its 10th anniversary and has published the fourth release of its integrated Code of Practice, which covers journals, databases, books and multimedia content. This release contains a number of new features, including a requirement to report the usage of gold open access articles separately, as well as new reports about usage on mobile devices. The COUNTER Code of Practice specifies what can be measured as a full text request, when a request needs to be ignored in the reports, and the layout and delivery method of the reports. They also require an annual audit of the reports, with an independent party confirming that the requirements are met.

1. COUNTER project (2003) "COUNTER code of practice", retrieved 27 March 2012 from the World Wide Web: http://www.projectcounter.org/documents/Draft_UF_R1.pdf . .

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