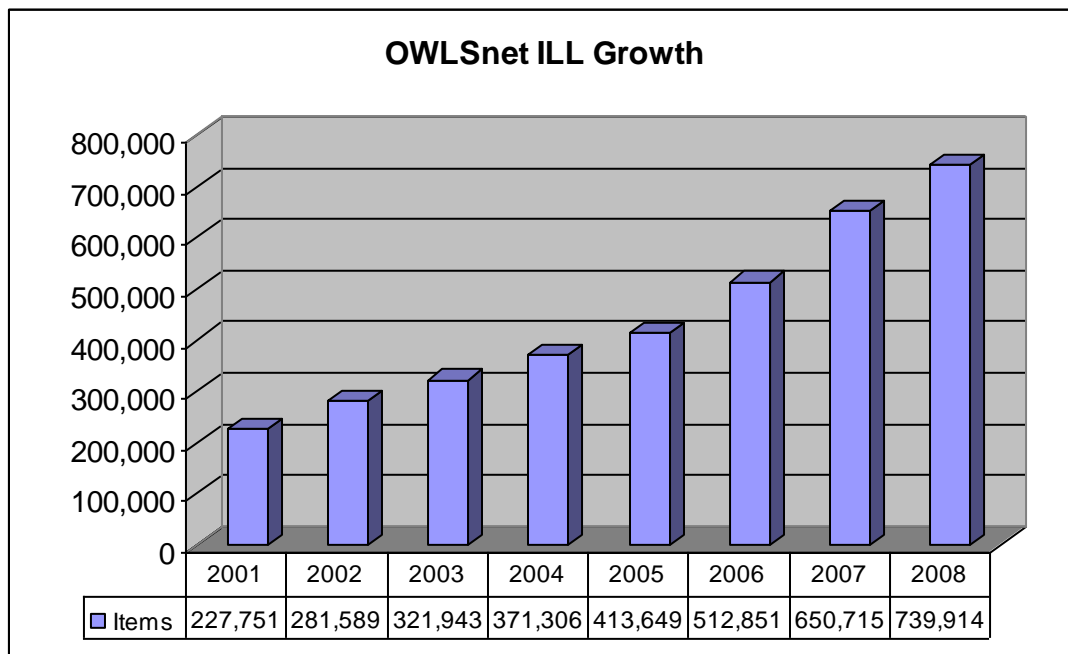


Resource Sharing Growth in OWLSnet

Background

For many years, interlibrary loan among OWLSnet libraries has grown at a rapid rate. Since 2001 the number of items shared among member libraries annually has increased by more than a half a million items (i.e., 265%). If this trend continues, we can expect our lending/borrowing numbers to exceed 900,000 by the year 2011 and approach 1,000,000 by 2012. Interlibrary loan will grow even faster if Brown County Library should join OWLSnet.



It's not likely that OWLSnet member libraries and the two systems can sustain this rate of growth for much longer.

What are the consequences of all of this increased activity?

Circ is going up less than ILL

While our first response is to be happy that our patrons are using our libraries, there are some downsides to all of this activity. The rate of increase in circulation is much smaller than the rate of increase of ILL. So – while we're doing a lot more work to get items to our patrons, we're not seeing comparable increases in circulation. Essentially, items borrowed from other libraries are an increasing portion of the total circulation.

Libraries are struggling with increased demand

The most frequent comment we hear from library staff is, "we don't have time!" Library staff have struggled with updating patron records, doing inventories, weeding, purchasing new

items, processing new items, and working their hold lists. Library staff find it difficult to attend training and workshops because they are overwhelmed by the day-to-day demands of their jobs, and resource sharing activities represent a significant part of these demands. We hear these comments frequently in telephone calls, surveys, and email, and they come from libraries of all sizes.

Systems are struggling with increased demand

When OWLS switched to Waltco, we anticipated that we would spend less time handling delivery materials. After all, we were no longer sorting materials for all of the libraries. However, even though now we're just handling materials for Appleton, OWLS staff is spending more time sorting than we used to – entirely due to the increased volume. Mondays are increasingly busy (and items that should get out in delivery are sometimes delayed in the OWLS office due to lack of space on the delivery vans). The NFLS staff also finds it very challenging to keep up with their delivery volume.

Waltco is struggling with the increased demand

One reason that the Waltco delivery has been affordable to NFLS and OWLS is because we share the delivery trucks and routes with other customers. That produces cost savings for Waltco that they are able to pass on to the library systems. As our volume increases, the ability to share routes becomes increasingly threatened. Even now, some days Waltco is unable to deliver all of the items at the sorting center because their trucks are full.

Who is placing all of these holds? What are they placing holds on?

In November 2008, 10,364 patrons, who represent less than 5% of all cardholders, had approximately 66,000 holds filled. The vast majority of these patrons (64%) had between one and five holds filled, but a small percentage had many more holds filled. Only 561 patrons, or about 5% of patrons with holds filled, had over 21 holds filled in November. These 561 patrons accounted for a total of 18,243 holds or 28% of the total number.

Most of the filled holds in November were for books, DVDs and Music CDs, but books still fill far more holds than media. (Note: statistics for *placed* holds by item type or material type are unavailable.)

November 2008 Filled Holds

<u>Type</u>	<u>No. Filled</u>	<u>Percent of Total Filled</u>
Book - adult	22,239	35.30%
DVD	17,695	28.09%
Book - child	8,315	13.20%
Music CD	6,007	9.54%
Book - YA	3,343	5.31%

Combining all of the books yields the following:

November 2008 Filled Holds

<u>Type</u>	<u>No. Filled</u>	<u>Percent of Total Filled</u>
Book	33,897	53.81%
DVD	17,695	28.09%
Music CD	6,007	9.54%
Audiobook CD	2,283	3.62%

On any given day, we have about 50,000 holds in the system, placed by about 11,000 patrons. Typically, four to five percent of these patrons have 15 or more holds, accounting for about 25% of the total holds.

What can we do to reduce the volume of materials libraries are handling?

We've spent quite a bit of time trying to determine everything we could do, short of discontinuing interlibrary loan, to reduce the growth of resource sharing and the volume of materials that libraries are handling. There are only three realistic possibilities for changing how we manage resource sharing:

Give precedence to local holds

If we enabled this option, Millennium would fill holds with locally-owned materials before those materials are used to fill non-local holds, regardless of when the holds were placed. Holds would no longer be filled on a first-come, first-serve basis. The speed at which holds are filled would become more a function of local library collections. Patrons of libraries with larger or stronger collections might have their holds filled faster, while patrons of libraries with smaller or weaker collections would be likely to wait longer for their items.

PROs: Holds would be more likely to be filled by items owned by the pickup location, which has been popular with staff and patrons of libraries that have enabled this option.

CONs: Libraries and consortia using this option have not noticed a decrease in transit volume – even libraries who really like this feature. If an item is set in transit to a non-owning library, and a hold is placed during transit at the owning library, the item turns around and goes back home instead of filling the item for the patron at the non-owning library. This increases transit time. Because the hold queue is no longer representative, the hold queue is suppressed from display in Millennium circ. Patrons and staff can no longer estimate when an item will arrive to fill a hold because holds aren't filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

Make some items not "holdable," i.e., not eligible to have holds placed on them

It is possible to make some itypes ineligible to have holds placed on them. These items would only be available to patrons who retrieve them from the shelves.

PROs: This would reduce the number of holds processed and the amount of materials traveling in delivery. More items would stay at their owning library, increasing the number of items available for browsing by patrons.

CONs: This option could be very complicated to administer effectively. It depends upon itypes being assigned correctly and consistently. Failure to handle itypes correctly would result in inconsistent availability for holds and confusion to patrons. This option also represents a reduction in current service to all library patrons, and some patrons would be very unhappy.

Reduce the number of holds allowed per person

PROs: There is a relatively strong correlation between the average number of holds filled per patron per month, and the number of holds allowed by that library. A similar correlation showed up both in the November and December numbers. Therefore, this measure is likely to reduce the volume of holds and delivery volume. Because most patrons don't place lots of holds, this would affect a small number of people, while still having an impact on workflow in most OWLSnet libraries.

CONs: Patrons who were used to high hold limits may be unhappy with the reduced service. OWLSnet would need to determine the situations under which exceptions could be made. Some libraries might experience a small decrease in circulation.

Conclusion: Reducing hold limit to 15 would be reasonable and effective

We believe that reducing the number of holds allowed per person would be the most reasonable and effective way to curtail the growth in interlibrary loan. Reducing the holds limit to 15 is likely to have a significant impact on volume while affecting a small number of patrons.

- Looking at both the daily hold numbers and filled hold statistics, it seems likely that reducing the maximum number of holds to 15 would result in a 10 to 15 percent drop in the number of holds filled.
- This would be likely to affect about five percent of the patrons who place holds (i.e., 500 to 600 patrons) and about one-quarter percent of all patrons.
- Setting the hold limit to lower than 15 would likely affect a much larger number of patrons, but with diminishing returns. Setting the number higher than 15 would not have a big impact on resource sharing volume.
- Because libraries that have small hold limits still need to make all of their materials available to libraries that have large hold limits, this change is likely to make sharing more equitable – all OWLSnet patrons will have equal access to all OWLSnet materials.
- This might increase demands on staff time at libraries that currently have high hold limits – they might need to find ways to fill patron's needs from locally available materials.
- If Brown County joins OWLSnet, having a lower hold limit would help all OWLSnet libraries handle the increased traffic that their membership is expected to bring.