

Digital Distribution

April 10, 2007

Introduction

During FY 2006, 93% of all new titles made available through the FDLP were available in electronic form. Although not required by the FDLP, some depository libraries choose to download digital files from *GPO Access* or from agency websites. Libraries which exercise local initiative to acquire digital files by pulling them from GPO or from other sources are under no FDLP obligations for access or retention. With the development of GPO's digital content system (FDsys), GPO will continue to offer depository libraries and other users the option of downloading digital files for local use. GPO is also considering an affirmative distribution of authenticated and official published digital content to Federal depository libraries. Digital distribution would involve GPO "pushing" electronic publications to depositories based on their selection criteria. Title 44 of the U.S. Code requires selective depository libraries to retain Federal publications disseminated through the FDLP for at least five years, and with few exceptions depository materials must be maintained permanently by regional depository libraries.

The 2005 Biennial Survey included questions directly related to the dissemination of electronic publication files to depository libraries. Eighteen percent of depositories responded that they currently download, store, and make online publications available via local servers. Thirty-three percent of the respondents indicated that they are willing to receive digital files from GPO to store on local systems, but most libraries expressed interest in receiving only between 1 and 25 files.

During the October 2006 Depository Library Council Meeting, participants discussed what digital distribution meant to Council members and others. While many of the discussion participants were interested in having active digital distribution available as an option, it became apparent that the issues of who owns the electronic files and what requirements will be placed on libraries receiving the files were of great concern to the depository library community.

General Assumptions

1. Electronic files of Federal publications will continue to be available for downloading by Federal depository libraries under FDsys.
2. Under an FDLP distribution option, distributed digital publications would be sent to depository libraries via a "push" mechanism.
3. Based on the most recent Biennial Survey, a high percentage of libraries do not want to receive electronic files at all. Those libraries that do wish to receive them want only a very low volume.
4. Redundancy is needed to ensure future public access, and FDsys will provide this capability, either by storage at multiple sites, by relying on preservation partners, or both mechanisms.
5. GPO will distribute digital files optimized for public access. These files will typically be smaller than the archival copies preserved by GPO.
6. If GPO distributes digital files to libraries under the aegis of the FDLP, then the various requirements and obligations of Title 44 apply.

Issues Related to Digital Distribution

1. Authenticated files accessed from a GPO server may display differently than the same files located on individual library servers.
2. Costs associated with management and storage of digital files are significant and can be a constraint on some libraries.
3. Depository libraries may have different system requirements and configurations for the servers where digital distributed files will be located.
4. As a practical matter, selective and regional libraries will only be required to retain access derivative files so long as they work in their electronic delivery environment. This is analogous to current requirements for maintenance and care of tangible documents, where due care is to be exercised, but preservation and conservation techniques are not an FDLR requirement for selectives.

Questions for Discussion

1. Partners are concerned that files contained in FDsys may become different from files stored at depository libraries. How can data synchronization best be addressed?
2. Should regionals have to accept and retain all digital files pushed to depository libraries? Are subsets or subject specialties going to be allowed for regional libraries?
3. When GPO makes a new or changed version of a digital file available, what responsibility do the libraries have to inform their users about other versions?
4. Is there a role for libraries wishing to receive the preservation level files to ensure redundancy for permanent public access? Will the distribution of files via FDsys provide the opportunity for permanent public access partnerships through the provision of access derivative files and long-term partnerships for preservation level files?

Definitions

Pull: Downloading of content on an as-needed basis. Content is made available for users to select and retrieve (“pull”) to local servers or computers. For example, currently users may be said to pull documents from GPO Access. There are no retention or access requirements associated with files pulled from GPO.

Push: Intentionally and specifically serving out information to target recipients. Content is automatically sent (“pushed”) from GPO to a list of interested users. The push mechanism is analogous to shipping a box of depository documents, only with electronic content instead of tangible copy. Push technology on the internet refers to a communications protocol where the request for a given transaction originates with the publisher, or central server.