

## **National Library: Electronic Purchasing in Collaboration**

A shared initiative of New Zealand libraries

EPIC is the national e-licensing consortium in New Zealand that makes available a package of high quality e-resources, including over 16,000 journals not otherwise freely available, to all New Zealanders through their libraries.

Through a National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa funded Proof of Concept project, using a competitive procurement process, it was possible to negotiate subscription rates that have allowed even very small libraries to subscribe. Previous to EPIC, e-resources were unaffordable for many of New Zealand's medium and smaller sized libraries.

Over 170 libraries of all types have committed to EPIC to date, and the Ministry of Education has funded access for all New Zealand schools for the first two years. As a result EPIC has provided unparalleled access to high quality electronic resources for New Zealanders.

EPIC is a world first. The consortium is self-funded by the member libraries along with the contribution from the Ministry of Education for all New Zealand Schools. All other countries with national level library consortia have received significant centralised funding of some type.

EPIC is an unprecedented level of collaboration across all types of New Zealand libraries and their organisations. Many libraries took a broader view of collaborative benefits to New Zealanders and the wider library and information sector rather than basing their decision purely on a financial basis. EPIC would not have happened without the almost universal desire to collaborate by New Zealand's library community.

In 2002, the National Library surveyed libraries to determine interest in forming a self-funded consortium for the purchase of e-content and to identify the type of content required. A positive response led to the establishment of two multi-sector working groups that made recommendations about possible consortium structure, funding arrangements and content.

To take these recommendations forward the National Library agreed to fund a six-month proof of concept project to develop a cross-sector consortium to deliver at least two electronic publications for NZ libraries and their users. This was the PER:NA (Purchasing Electronic Resources: a National Approach) Proof of Concept Project which began in May 2003.

A project manager was seconded from another library and over 60 librarians from across the country were involved in the project working groups. The initial focus was on the development and running of a Request for Proposal (RFP) process that sought to identify and select possible vendors and products.

The following key principles were also emphasised in the project:

- Collaboration - it was an opportunity to demonstrate that the New Zealand library sector can collaborate, in the national interest, through a licensing consortium;
- The model must have the potential to include any New Zealand library
- There should be expanded access to e-Resources for all users
- The consortium should be financially self-sustaining after the set-up phase
- A partnering approach with e-Resource providers

The outcome of the RFP was the selection of a range of EBSCO and Thomson Gale resources. The PER:NA project team negotiated an 'all of country' deal, meaning every person in New Zealand could access the resources through a consortium member library - be it local library, education library, work library or the National Library of New Zealand.

The proposed deal was put to New Zealand libraries in early November 2003 and on 19 December 2003 enough commitment was gained to announce that the consortium could be formed.

As at April 2005 EPIC comprises:

Library Type	% Total in that Sector
Universities, Polytechnics, Wananga, Colleges of Education and other Tertiary	95%
Public Libraries	88%
Special Libraries (includes Company, Charity, Government, Health and other types of libraries)	Approx 30%
Schools - <i>Schools must register, and sign licences, before they can access through <a href="http://www.tki.org.nz/epic">www.tki.org.nz/epic</a></i>	51% of all schools registered. 91% of all secondary schools have registered.

A key success factor for EPIC was our partnering approach with EBSCO and Thomson Gale. Because EPIC is a new concept in NZ there was a need to work with the vendors to ensure flexibility in tackling any challenges or unexpected outcomes. The contracts with EBSCO and Thomson Gale include a schedule on an agreed way of working together that promotes prompt constructive communication and a problem solving approach. It requires the delivery of agreed content and service levels and enables the setting of future goals and targets.

The e-resources include over 16000 full-text journals, plus biographies, photographs and graphics that are not available freely elsewhere. There are articles from a wide range of New Zealand and Australian publications, an Opposing Viewpoints database (perfect for seeing both sides of an argument!), resources designed specifically for school students, as well as history, biography and literature collections.

The e-resources are browser based and EBSCO and Thomson Gale host the content. Each member library manages its own access to the resources. This can be as simple as saving a link as a bookmark, to putting a URL on an intranet or webpage, to uploading URLs into library catalogue record to enable open URL linking through a federated search system. Libraries can also customise interfaces, access usage reports and select their preferred authentication method (for both in-library and remote access) to suit their own users.

New Zealand schools access EPIC through TKI - The Online Learning Centre and EPIC is also a key resource used by AnyQuestions.co.nz - the online reference service for New Zealand school students.

Some of the benefits of EPIC are:

- Nationwide on-site access to electronic resources at all types of libraries
- Library users now have remote access to resources otherwise necessitating a trip to a local library
- Small and rural libraries now have access to full-text electronic resources previously unavailable because both the subscription and the cost of negotiation was considered unaffordable
- Affordable subscription costs for most types of libraries
- Libraries that had already subscribed to the EPIC products could now do so for a lower price
- Existing consortia were not negatively affected
- Provision of technical support for libraries
- Increased awareness of the benefits of e-resources by smaller or less well funded libraries.

The benefits of EPIC are most obvious among the smaller libraries and schools around New Zealand, evidenced by the positive feedback sent to National Library.