

Digital Distribution to Depository Libraries: Exploring the Issues



U.S. GOVERNMENT
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Overview

In the digital information age, distribution of FDLP publications in intangible, digital form to Federal depository libraries is an evolutionary step in transforming the 20th century model of distributing tangible publications. Over time, as information delivery technologies have advanced, GPO has offered depository libraries additional choices of format. From a strictly ink-on-paper program through the 1960's, the FDLP has evolved to encompass microforms in the 1970's, tangible electronic products in the early 1990's, and to provide access to online resources such as *GPO Access*, beginning in 1994.

Not only have these additional choices improved the comprehensiveness of the program, the transformative characteristics of the Internet have brought an unprecedented expansion in public access to U.S. government information. Today, publishing to the Web is rapidly becoming the preferred means of disseminating information, and with nearly all government information born digital, there has been a related decrease in the number of tangible products available for distribution through the FDLP.

At present, some depository libraries download digital files from *GPO Access* or use GPO assigned PURLS to identify and obtain files for local storage and public access. GPO expects to continue to offer this capability for libraries (and others) to download digital files for local use, but we are also seeking information that will help us develop more specific FDsys requirements for affirmative distribution of published digital content.

General Assumptions

1. Consistent with other formats, GPO will distribute authentic digital publications in formats intended for public access.
2. The characteristics of digital publications vary so significantly from tangible products that new, more flexible, guidelines for managing them in depository libraries will need to be developed.
3. Preservation of the source files, called Archival Information Packages in FDsys, will be the responsibility of GPO and its preservation partners.
4. For a majority of content, digital distribution represents another format choice that can be selected, in addition to print, microfiche, and tangible electronic products.
5. Libraries receiving FDLP digital publications would be responsible for providing sufficient infrastructure, including bandwidth and storage, to provide timely and effective public access.
6. Libraries would need to ensure that they are providing access to the same version(s) of a digital publication that is/are available from GPO.

Questions for Discussion

1. Access
 - a. Is the major goal of digital distribution to improve public access to FDLP publications, and if so, how is that goal facilitated by libraries providing local access to a digital copy?
 - b. Should libraries receiving digital distribution be expected to offer no-fee, anonymous public access to local copies of FDLP digital publications, and to minimize any restrictions such as user registration, location, etc?
 - c. Should depository libraries take active steps, such as including metadata in their catalog or developing appropriate web pages, to enable users to identify and link to FDLP digital publications in their collections?
2. Infrastructure
 - a. Who determines sufficiency for local infrastructure to provide timely and effective public access?
 - i. What are the criteria?
 - ii. Should GPO develop guidelines as it did for workstations?
3. Regional responsibilities
 - a. What are the responsibilities of regional depositories for the digital publications GPO distributes?
 - i. Should they be required to accept and maintain all digital publications that GPO distributes?
 - ii. Should regional depositories be allowed to accept digital content as an alternative to the print or microform version?
4. Metadata
 - a. Should GPO distribute bibliographic and other metadata as well as the digital publication?
 - b. What other metadata should be routinely distributed?
5. Selectivity
 - a. When can a selective library / regional select only the digital version of a publication?
 - b. Are there exceptions?
6. Version issues/synchronization
 - a. If a library no longer selects similar publications, will it need to manage its collection to ensure that it is not providing access to a superseded version?
 - i. If yes, how could this be accomplished?
7. Ownership
 - a. Do digital publications distributed under the aegis of the FDLP remain the property of the U.S. Government, including back up and other copies maintained on library systems?
 - b. What are the implications of an agency requesting the recall of an FDLP electronic title?
 - c. If an agency does not want older issues to remain available on-line, how should this be handled?