

Measuring Streams

A recent conversation on the Videolib listserv (<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/vrllists.html>) about annual data for video circulation in academic libraries caught my eye. Jane B. Hutchison, Associate Director, Instruction & Research Technology, at William Paterson University in NJ posted a chart comparing hard copy (DVD/Blu-ray) vs. streaming circulation. In 2010, the number of hard copy circulations appeared to be around 5,600, while streaming circulations numbered about 4,000. In 2014, hard copy circs had dropped to 4,000 and streaming circulations jumped to a jaw-dropping 18,000-plus.

While I was trying to wrap my brain around this incredible statistical disparity, Jo Ann Reynolds, Reserve Services Coordinator at the University of Connecticut's Homer Babbidge Library, responded with some pertinent comments/questions regarding how streaming statistics are measured (which can be done on either the library or vendor's side).

Jo Ann noted that "different vendors count views or engagement differently." She added: "I was recently looking closely at views/engagement for some streams from different vendors...comparing vendor data with data from Ares [an e-reserve system], which shows

user ID by date/time. When you look at this level of granularity you see multiple hits by the same user within very short periods of time, sometimes 10 hits or more in a minute. Clearly they are not watching a full film...nor are they gaining a meaningful browse or 'engagement'... Someone should be able to devise an algorithm based on data (patron behavior, hit length, and computer issues) that could be applied to the hit data to provide a more realistic picture of what patrons are actually watching."

Jo Ann continues: "Engagement, depending on how it is defined by the vendor, is probably a better measure but still requires some framing. For me, engagement would have to be at least 15% or more of the total run time. Certainly not a hit of 30 seconds or less; even a couple of minutes for a two-hour film is questionable."

Jo Ann appended several questions to ask vendors about circulation data, including:

What data are you counting? Hits to a URL or some percentage of the total film length that a user spent with a film (engagement)?

If it is number of minutes watched, what percentage of the total film did those minutes comprise?

Were the hits/engagement all for the same portion of the film (clips vs. watching a film)?

These questions are, of course, unique to

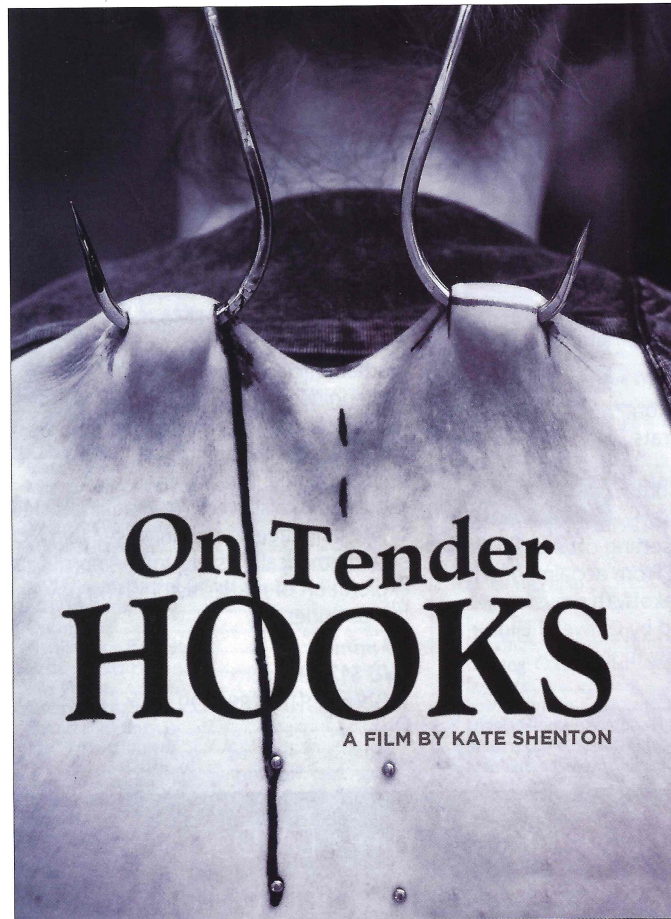
current technology. In ages past, no one could accurately measure what percentage of a book checked out by a patron was actually read (or even if the spine was cracked at all). And what are we to make of the qualifier "meaningful" in regards to a browse or circulation? What does "meaningful" mean? (Sorry, I just finished Rebecca Newberger Goldstein's *Plato at the Googleplex*, which has left me in a philosophic frame of mind.) A particular clip that a patron is specifically looking for could be found in the first 2% of a film, just as a quick index browse could lead someone to the exact page of a book containing a relevant piece of information. 15%? No. Meaningful? Yes.

But these are devil's advocate questions.

Jo Ann is clearly trying to frame a necessary conversation about accountability and pricing.

We are at the relative dawn of the digital age, faced with new issues that are bringing new questions. If libraries are going to pay to license the same content every one, three, or five years (as opposed to yesteryear's outright purchases of physical copies), then accurate and meaningful usage measurements make sense and new pricing models may be in order.

Randy Pitman

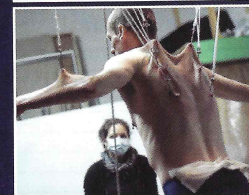


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