COUNTER & SUSHI: Standards for subscription electronic usage data and its delivery

Louann Terveer, Hamline University
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Louann Terveer
MLIS Student • St. Catherine University • St. Paul, Minnesota

Why Usage Data Standards?

Librarians need an efficient way to collect meaningful data that can be used to analyze the usage of vendor supplied electronic resources. Reliable and comparable usage data is important in conducting cost-effectiveness studies, e-resource usage trends, and ultimately, in making subscription decisions and in justifying expenditures.

Making comparisons of e-resource usage data supplied by different vendors can become very difficult and time-consuming when vendors use various report formats and definitions of data fields. Even conducting a study of the usage of a particular e-resource over several years can be problematic as vendors make modifications to the reports over time. Downloading the reports from each vendor’s Website is also a time-consuming task.

What is COUNTER?

Counting Online Usage of NeTworked Electronic Resources is an international initiative for the creation of standards for the recording and reporting of electronic resource usage.

The COUNTER Project provides Codes of Practices (COPs) for the usage data that vendors supply for electronic journal and e-book resources. The COPs contain a definition of the terms used; describes the content, format and delivery specifications for COUNTER compliant reports; and provides for customer confidentiality and an auditing protocol.

The COUNTER COP for journals and databases has been updated since its initial release in 2002, and currently, only reports that are compliant with Release 3 are considered to be COUNTER-compliant. (see the COUNTER Website for a list of vendors providing compliant reports).

Current COUNTER-compliance includes providing the option of accessing the reports through the SUSHI protocol.

What is SUSHI?

The Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative (Z39.93) is an American National Standards Institute/National Information Standards Organization (ANSI/NISO) sponsored standard. The protocol was developed in cooperation with the COUNTER Project to provide a standardized framework for the automated requesting and delivery of electronic usage data.

Figure 1. Example of a Journal Report 1 generated in Microsoft Excel.

- Journal Report 1: Number of Successful Full-Text Article Requests by Month and Journal
- Journal Report 1a: Number of Successful Full-Text Article Requests from an Archive by Month and Journal
- Journal Report 2: Turnaways by Month and Journal
- Journal Report 3: Number of Successful Item Requests and Turnaways by Month, Journal and Page-Type
- Journal Report 4: Total Searches Run by Month and Service
- Journal Report 5: Number of Successful Full-Text Article Requests by Year-of-Publication and Journal
- Database Report 1: Total Searches and Sessions by Month and Database
- Database Report 2: Turnaways by Month and Database
- Database Report 3: Total Searches and Sessions by Month and Service
- Consortium Report 1: Number of Successful Full-Text Journal Article or Book Chapter Requests by Month
- Consortium Report 2: Total Searches by Month and Database.
- Journal/Book Report 1: Number of Successful Full-Text Item Requests by Month and Title

Figure 2.

The request is initiated by the SUSHI client (which may be incorporated into the institution’s usage consolidation application—such as an ERMS); the request is contained in a Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) “wrapper.”

The content provider’s SUSHI server verifies the identify of the institution and reads the request. The request contains Web Service Description Language (WSDL) to describe the services requested and an XML Schema to define the elements of the reports.

When the XML formatted response has been prepared, it is sent back to the institution’s SUSHI client using SOAP.

The reports are extracted by the SUSHI client and are ready for analysis using an institution’s ERMS or other statistical application.

Are Vendors Participating?

COUNTER-compliant reports for journals and databases

| Number of Vendors/Products/Services offering COUNTER-compliant reports | 102 | 89 |

*C from COUNTER Website Register of Vendors in Sept. 2009. ** from COUNTER Website Register of Vendors in March 2010.

According to the COUNTER Website, only vendor products and services listed on its Register of Vendors can be considered COUNTER-compliant. Of those that were listed as compliant to Release 2, only about one-third are on the list for compliance to the most recent copy of the COP, Release 3.

This disparity implies that there is a mixed vendor response to the COUNTER and SUSHI initiatives. Overall participation seems to have decreased slightly, and in addition, a large portion of vendor products and services that were previously compliant are not currently listed as compliant. It is possible that some vendors have not incorporated the SUSHI protocol, and therefore, their products are no longer considered compliant—even though reports that were compliant to an earlier version of the COUNTER COP continue to be supplied.

Future research could investigate whether the disappearance of names from the Release 2 to the Release 3 Vendor Register is an actual shift in participation, and if so, why those missing from the current list are no longer participating.

References


Thank you Amy Shaw for providing the COUNTER report example.