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Hartford Public Library Joins Other Library Systems In ReadersFirst Initiative To Demand Better Service For E-Book Users

Four principles required to improve current state of e-book distribution in North America

June 7 (Hartford CT) – Hartford Public Library announced today that it has joined forces with over 70 library systems from the United States and Canada to demand vastly improved e-book services for their users.

The libraries have signed a joint statement – dubbed the ReadersFirst Initiative -- calling on e-content providers to follow four basic principles that would give the public a better, less cumbersome experience accessing e-books, and lift burdensome restrictions that can limit what libraries can actually offer.

“Libraries have a responsibility to fight for the public and ensure that users have the same open, easy and free access to e-books that they have come to rely on with physical books,” said the statement. “They face two major challenges. The first is that, unlike print books, publishers are not required to sell e-books to libraries – and many do not. This is a complex and evolving issue. The second, addressed here, is that the products currently offered by e-content distributors, the middlemen from whom libraries buy e-books, create a fragmented, disjointed and cumbersome user experience.”

The principles, which can be found along with the growing list of participants at the Urban Libraries Council website (www.urbanlibraries.org), and will soon be found on a website hosted by The New York Public Library, implore providers to offer products that allow users to:

- Search and browse a single comprehensive catalog with all of a library’s offerings at once, including all e-books, physical collections, programs, blogs, and donor opportunities. Currently, content providers often only allow searches within the products they sell, depriving users of the comprehensive library experience.

- Place holds, check-out items, view availability, manage fines and receive communications within individual library catalogs or in the venue the library believes will serve them best, without having to visit separate websites (libraries, not distributors, should be enabled to manage all interactions with users).
- Seamlessly enjoy a variety of e-content. To do this, libraries must be able to choose content, devices and apps from any provider or from multiple providers, without bundling that limits a library's ability to serve content they purchase on platforms of their choice.
- Download e-books that are compatible with all readers, from the Kindle to the Nook to the iPad and so on.

“In order for libraries to continue to function as key providers of information to the public, these basic principles must be followed,” the statement said. “The libraries who signed this agreement are committed to holding content providers to this standard, and will prioritize these requirements when acquiring e-books and other e-content.”

“Hartford Public Library is proud to take its place among libraries across the continent to support this initiative,” said Matthew K. Poland, the Library's chief executive officer. “ We must ensure that customer needs are met efficiently and cost-effectively,” Poland said.

About [Hartford Public Library](#)

The Hartford Public Library traces its roots to 1774. It operates 10 locations in the City of Hartford. The Library receives more than 860,000 visits per year. Services include access to a large collection of materials for reading and research, as well as music and video. Programs provide education, information and enrichment to the people of Hartford in such areas as citizenship training, literacy, business skills and cultural awareness. The mission of Hartford Public Library is to provide free resources that inspire reading, guide learning, and encourage individual exploration. Visit hplct.org and the library's new blog at blogs.hplct.org