

# friendly guide to **COUNTER** database reports

COUNTER

A guide for librarians

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**COUNTER stands for Counting Online Usage of NeTworked Electronic Resources. Our website is at <http://www.projectcounter.org/>**

COUNTER was one of the first, if not the first, standards organization established for the modern information environment. It has succeeded in bringing together a collaboration of publishers and librarians to develop and maintain the standard for counting the use of electronic resources. It has also ensured that most major publishers and vendors are compliant by providing their library customers around the world with COUNTER usage statistics.

COUNTER's Code of Practice is the standard for counting the use of electronic resources. It also maintains and publishes the register of COUNTER-compliant vendors and publishers. To qualify for inclusion in the register, publishers must pass an annual independent audit of their COUNTER usage report. This process ensures that vendors and publishers can provide their library customers with consistent, credible and compatible usage data.

This guide explains COUNTER usage reports for databases and how librarians can use the data to inform decision-making.

Libraries spend considerable amounts of money purchasing different types of online content to support their users' needs. User activity, in relation to this content, needs to be continually assessed to ensure that this money is spent as productively as possible. The COUNTER Code of Practice Release 4 helps librarians to demonstrate the value of electronic resources by facilitating the recording and reporting of online resources usage statistics in a standardized, credible and compatible way. This means, among other things, that if libraries receive usage stats from two or more publishers or vendors, they can compare them easily because the figures have been compiled and presented in accordance with the same standard.

COUNTER provides libraries with a set of online database usage reports that capture different aspects of user activity. This guide presents a brief overview of each type of database report, and demonstrates practical ways for librarians to employ the reports in ways that are relevant to their organization.

## Database Report 1 (DB1)

Libraries typically subscribe to two different types of online database – full-text or non-full-text. Non-full-text resources may also be known as abstracting and indexing (A&I) or citation-only databases. For full-text databases, libraries will primarily monitor COUNTER journal and book reports (JR1, BR1 and BR2) to evaluate total downloads (journals) or section requests (e-books) for a selected time period. As A&I databases do not provide full-text content, librarians require different user activity data when assessing the value of online databases, and that is what Database Report 1 provides.

COUNTER Database Report 1 (DB1) highlights the total number of searches, result clicks and record views by month and database. It details how users are navigating and engaging with a particular online database and charts the total number of searches undertaken, separating regular searches (initiated by users) from searches generated by federated or automated search engines. The report also counts result

clicks: the number of interactions that are performed when users view database search results. These include clicks on links to external resources, such as a document delivery form or a 'Find it here' link. Librarians can further filter the data within DB1 by highlighting how many of these result clicks were record views – that is, views of detailed abstract/citation metadata hosted on the database site, rather than views of the full text.

Database Report 1 (R4)		Total Searches, Result Clicks and Record Views by Month and Database													
University B															
Period covered by Report:															
2015-01-01 to 2015-12-31															
Date run:															
2016-02-04															
Database	Publisher	User Activity	Reporting Jan-2015	Feb-2015	Mar-2015	Apr-2015	May-2015	Jun-2015	Jul-2015	Aug-2015	Sep-2015	Oct-2015	Nov-2015	Dec-2015	
Publisher database A	Publisher Y	Regular Searches	155285	21976	18950	21982	18176	9352	3665	3615	11124	3780	11241	18011	13413
0	Publisher database A	Publisher Y Searches-federated and automated	304	27	38	9	46	4	32	55	64	5	29	56	19
1	Publisher database A	Publisher Y Result Clicks	181895	24583	20854	25350	21342	12362	4801	4262	11219	4328	13582	21361	17851
2	Publisher database A	Publisher Y Record Views	94147	12951	10534	12704	10138	6613	2378	2133	6259	2245	7274	11496	9422

### COUNTER DB1 data

Counting record views can be a useful measure of how up to date and relevant the content indexed in a database is, especially an A&I database. For example, a high number of record views for an A&I database may indicate that students and staff are finding relevant journal or book citation information to support their teaching and research. A low number may prompt library staff to investigate how easy it is to access that particular content, whether there is a need for extra resource promotion, or the possibility of cancellation.

Another possible reason for low user activity is the implementation of a library discovery tool. Libraries set up discovery services to link separate silos of content (e.g. the library catalogue or an alphabetical list of e-journals) into a single search box. Users generally find this easy to understand, as it reflects the way they use

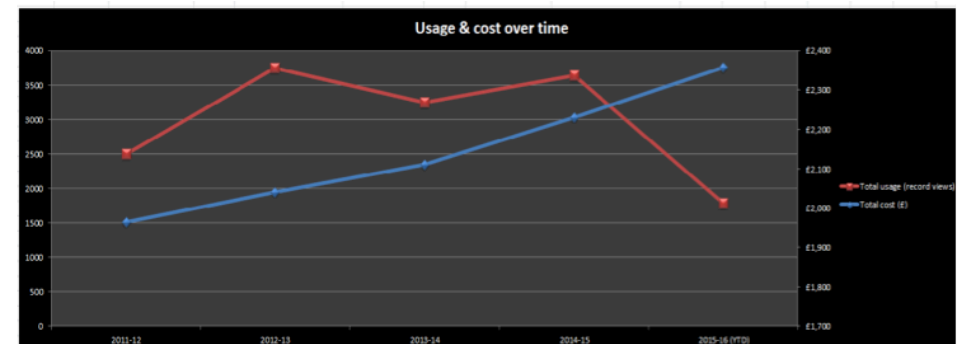
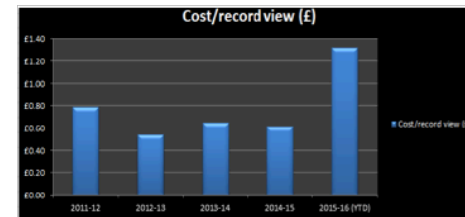
popular internet search engines in their day-to-day activities. A library discovery tool allows users to search for, and access, academic content which is available through the library. Such web-scale discovery tools, while improving search functionality, may impact on the use of the library's resources. Some libraries have reported decreases in the use of traditional abstracting and indexing databases and an equally dramatic increase in the use of full-text resources from full-text database and online journal collections following the implementation of discovery tools. \*(Way, 2010).

Adding resource costs to COUNTER metrics can help librarians to attribute value to their online database purchases. Cost per use can be determined by taking the total resource cost and dividing it by the total resource usage. As DB1 data measures usage in three different ways (searches, result clicks and record views), librarians will have to decide which of these is the best method of defining cost per use at their organization, or they may choose to calculate separate cost-per-use values for all three categories.

Subscription year	Total cost (£)	Total cost change (£)	% change	Total usage (record views)	Total usage change	% change	Cost/record view (£)	Cost/record view difference (£)
2011-12	£1,965			2500			£0.79	
2012-13	£2,040	£75	3.82%	3750	1250	33%	£0.54	-£0.24
2013-14	£2,111	£71	3.48%	3248	-502	-15%	£0.65	£0.11
2014-15	£2,230	£119	5.64%	3641	393	11%	£0.61	-£0.04
2015-16 (YTD)	£2,358	£128	5.74%	1785	-1856	-104%	£1.32	£0.71

Combining cost and usage data for resource analysis

Representing COUNTER data outputs visually, in the form of a graph or a chart, can help librarians to spot and interpret resource usage and cost trends more easily. Ultimately, this will mean that they are better informed when it comes to making database purchase or renewal decisions.



Representing cost and usage data visually using charts and graphs

\* Way, Doug, 'The Impact of Web-scale Discovery on the Use of a Library Collection' (2010). Articles. Paper 9. [http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/library\\_sp/9](http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/library_sp/9)

## Database Report 1 (DB1)

COUNTER Database Report 1 (DB1) provides usage data for online databases that libraries either purchase in perpetuity or lease from a service provider for a given subscription period. **Database Report 2 (DB2)** concentrates on a different context – **access denied** (to database content) **by month, database and category**.

The DB2 report may be helpful for librarians who are considering cancelling low-use databases, or making a budget case for new online resources. JR2 provides proof of user activity across alternative, and potentially relevant, database content, which may be a more appropriate financial investment for the organization.

Database Report 2 (R4)		Access Denied by Month, Database and Category													
University B															
Period covered by Report:															
2015-01-01 to 2015-12-31															
Date run:															
2016-02-04															
Database	Publisher	Access denied category	Reporting Period Total	Jan-2015	Feb-2015	Mar-2015	Apr-2015	May-2015	Jun-2015	Jul-2015	Aug-2015	Sep-2015	Oct-2015	Nov-2015	Dec-2015
Total for all databases		Access denied: content item not licensed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total for all databases		Access denied: concurrent/simultaneous user licence limit exceeded	123	0	31	0	27	0	18	0	0	0	12	18	17
Database A	Publisher Y	Access denied: content item not licensed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Database A	Publisher Y	Access denied: concurrent/simultaneous user licence limit exceeded	32	0	17	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	9
Database B	Publisher Y	Access denied: content item not licensed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Database B	Publisher Y	Access denied: concurrent/simultaneous user licence limit exceeded	65	0	14	0	18	0	15	0	0	0	11	9	2
Database C	Publisher Y	Access denied: content item not licensed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Database C	Publisher Y	Access denied: concurrent/simultaneous user licence limit exceeded	22	0	0	0	6	0	3	0	0	0	1	6	6

### Viewing database turnaway data using COUNTER DB2

DB2 stats reveal an unmet demand for libraries to consider, as they show that users are clicking on database content that they cannot retrieve. This lack of access may be due to the library not having access rights, or to the number of simultaneous users exceeding limits outlined in the database agreement. DB2 metrics are useful for both full-text and A&I resources, although librarians may also want to view COUNTER Journal Report 2 (JR2) and Book Report 3 (BR3) data for full-text journal and e-books respectively. These reports give more details of content 'turnaway' with reference to individual journal and book titles.

**Access denied: content item not licensed** User is denied access to a content item because the user or his/her institution does not have access rights under an agreement with the vendor.

**Access denied: concurrent/simultaneous user licence limit exceeded** User is denied access to an electronic service because the simultaneous/concurrent user limit allowed by the licence has been exceeded.

**Record views** These report the number of times the detailed metadata (not the full text) of records within the database is viewed, irrespective of whether these records are reached from a set of search/browse results from the platform or via a link from an external source. Typical examples of record views counted in COUNTER Database Reports are views of abstracts and other descriptive data.

**Result clicks** These report the number of times that users click on results from a given database from the result list displayed by a search or browse action on that platform. The result click is counted irrespective of whether it takes the user to an internal record within the database searched (e.g. full text or an abstract/detailed display) or to an external resource (e.g. an OpenURL link such as 'findit@mylibrary' or a document delivery form).

**Search (regular)** A user-driven intellectual query, typically equated to submitting the search form of the online service to the server.

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About the author



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