

# **indyreads™, a local approach to eContent licensing, aggregation and access**

## **Abstract**

Whilst the rapid growth in eBook sales over the early part of this decade has plateaued it is important that libraries do not become complacent despite some of the earlier issues which created angst for libraries being resolved. The current lull in sales of eBooks provides libraries with the time to redefine their role in the digital publishing sphere.

In late 2015, the State Library of New South Wales (SLNSW) in collaboration with Leichhardt Library and Parramatta City Library embarked on a year-long pilot, called indyreads, to investigate a new eLending model.

Issues around the availability of eBook titles for eLending in Australia and concerns over the prevailing licensing, distribution and pricing models for digital content were prime considerations which informed the development of the pilot.

A further impetus for the pilot was the opportunity to work directly with community authors and independent, mid-list and open access publishers to explore ways of making locally important digital content more readily available to readers.

Indyreads™ also explored the suitability of the platform for hosting digitised local studies publications including eBooks, oral history recordings and video content from

the pilot site collections. A starting collection of material in languages other than English was also purchased to facilitate the trial of the eContent management platform.

The two pilot libraries utilised an eContent management platform supplied by our technology partner Odilo, to smoothly integrate digital content (ePub, PDF, MP3 and MP4 files) into their online catalogues providing a seamless discovery, access and download experience for their library members.

To facilitate the acquisition of eContent from Australian publishers, the SLNSW developed a NSW Public Library Agreement for Purchasing Electronic Content. The agreement creates a framework which supports perpetual access rights, content preservation and accessibility. The agreement stipulates a one copy one loan model as a default with the flexibility to accommodate greater concurrency at the discretion of the rights holder. The agreement also permits segmented content acquisition and shared consortia collections.

The platform can apply digital rights management and concurrent access rules in accordance with the terms and conditions negotiated.

At the time of submitting this abstract indyreads™ was mid-way through the trial period and will conclude in October 2016. The initial results have been promising with the platform launched and a growing number of local publishers and authors providing content.

The paper will provide a full analysis of indyreads with a specific focus on the technology utilised, the development and application of a new licensing agreement and the establishment of direct partnerships with local publishers and authors for the provision of digital content. Future directions beyond the pilot including the possibility of a statewide rollout of the initiative will also be discussed.

## **Background**

In 2015 the SLNSW commenced a 12 month pilot of a local eContent management platform and a new licensing model for the acquisition of digital content in partnership with two public libraries. The pilot referred to as indyreads™ aimed to test a model which could provide the wider NSW public library network with the necessary technical infrastructure and legal framework to enable them to operate as community aggregators of locally published digital content. The hope being that the eContent management platform would provide the pilot site communities with a greater diversity of locally important content sourced directly from community authors and independent publishers under terms and conditions which support the core mission of libraries and provide a sustainable business model for all parties. Digitised material sourced from the local studies collections of the pilot sites was also uploaded onto the pilot platform.

The genesis of the indyreads™ pilot can be traced back to the beginning of the current decade, a period fraught with frustration for public libraries interested in meeting the growing community demand for eBooks. At that point in time the exponential growth in eBooks sales in the US appeared to be unfettered. Closer to home the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) made the bold prediction that Australian

library print and eBook collections would establish a 50:50 equilibrium by 2020 (ALIA 2013a, 1-2). In this context public libraries proactively explored options to deliver eBooks to their communities and in doing so discovered numerous obstacles relating to eBook availability, licensing, collection management and end user accessibility (ALIA 2013b, 2-7).

In response to these concerns NSW.net, a service within the Public Library Services Branch of the SLNSW, developed a dedicated eLending web portal (Balharrie, 2013). The portal aimed to provide the NSW public library network with up to date information on the rapidly evolving eLending landscape, in order to promote discussion and inform strategic planning. A full day seminar was also organised in 2013 to further explore the issues faced by libraries endeavoring to provide community access to eBooks and to also highlight areas of innovation.

The seminar's keynote presenter was Jamie LaRue, the then Director of the Douglas County Libraries (DCL) in the US. Jamie's presentation focused on the development of the DCL model, a bespoke in-house eContent management platform which enabled the library to purchase digital content directly from publishers, apply DRM where appropriate and deliver content via the libraries' online catalogue (LaRue, 2013). The DCL model was motivated by a number of factors which included the unwillingness of some of the major publishers to provide public libraries with digital content, exorbitant pricing practices for available content and the prevalence of metered access licensing models over perpetual access licenses (*ibid.*). DCL was also concerned about the unfavorable business models of the prominent eBook aggregators and the poor UX of the proprietary eBook platform solutions which were frustrating library patrons and staff

responsible for assisting clients. The issues outlined by Jamie LaRue resonated with attendees at the seminar.

One of the key points made by LaRue (2013) highlighted the exciting opportunities available to public libraries to incorporate a greater diversity of digital content beyond the traditional output of mainstream publishers into their collections. LaRue noted that the democratization of the means of publishing and distribution had facilitated the rapid growth of independent publishers and self-published authors, many of whom publish content of local importance to the communities in which they live. Between 2009 and 2012 the number of independent titles published in the US jumped from approximately 40,000 to 290,000 titles (ibid.) The output of self-published titles jumped from 29,000 titles in 2004 to 766,000 by 2009 (LaRue, 2013b). Furthermore many of these titles were published in a digital format which allowed the content creators and publishers to distribute their works further afield than had previously been possible with print. By 2014 DCL had purchased over 35,000 digital titles directly from 35 publishers representing more than 900 imprints under a perpetual access licence and often at a discounted price (ALIA 2014, 10-12). A significant proportion of the content was licensed for library eLending for the first time as the commercial eBook aggregators were primarily focused on mainstream content. Over the past three years there have been several variations on the DCL model implemented in North America, Vancouver Public Library (Douglas, 2016) and the Connecticut statewide platform being the most recent examples (Enis, 2016).

One outcome of the NSW.net eLending Portal and the Digital Frontiers seminars was a groundswell of interest from members of the NSW public library network for the pilot of a

local eContent management platform similar in scope to the DCL model. This was further supported by the increasing occurrence of libraries reporting an inability to host and manage digital works from local publishers and self-published authors who were seeking to sell their works directly to the library. Direct sales of this nature for print titles have for many years been a common occurrence. The shift to digital publishing has exposed deficiencies in the system's infrastructure of the public library network. Legacy library management systems do not have the capacity to host and manage digital files which require digital rights management (DRM) and commercial eBook aggregator platforms tend not to be interested in permitting libraries to independently license content for hosting on their platforms. A number of authors had also approached the SLNSW reporting similar concerns.

### **The indyreads™ pilot**

In consideration of the issues outlined above, in 2014 the SLNSW decided to pursue a trial of a local eContent management platform and to explore the opportunities available to work with community authors and independent and mid-list publishers to investigate ways of making locally important content more readily available to readers. The platform would also be evaluated for its suitability to host and distribute digitised local studies material with a specific emphasis on eBooks (EPUB and PDF) and oral histories (MP3 and MP4).

### **Platform selection**

Central to the success of the pilot was the selection of a suitable eContent management platform to host and manage the circulation of digital content and apply DRM as required. On closer inspection it was determined that the replication of the bespoke DCL eContent management solution was not a viable option primarily due to the significant cost associated with building and maintaining a similar platform.

The timing of the pilot was fortuitous however, in that a Spanish based library technology systems vendor, Odilo, had decided to partner with DCL to create a commercial SaaS version of the DCL platform referred to as OdiloTK (DWB, 2013). The Odilo platform promised to provide the same flexibility as the DCL solution whilst also conforming to the ReadersFirst Principles which advocate for a better end user experience by requiring eContent providers to deeply integrate their platforms into a client's library management system (ReadersFirst, 2016). A best practice example would allow a library patron to search, discover, loan, download, return and manage reservations for eBook content from within the library's OPAC.

The OdiloTK solution could also host a diversity of digital formats including ePub, PDF, MP3, MP4 & JPEG files and promised an intuitive file and metadata import and export workflow for clients. Another important feature of the product was the ability to manage consortial and segmented collections. To administer DRM, Odilo had incorporated the industry standard Adobe Content Server (ACS) into the backend of their platform and had created an intuitive administration interface to upload content onto the ACS. The library could also easily implement a range of concurrency options from one copy one loan through to unlimited concurrent access. Content requiring no DRM could be made available for download to non-library members or alternatively restricted to registered

clients. To facilitate patron access to content OdiloTK offered a multi device interface built using AJAX technologies which make it suitable to deliver content across mobile devices, tablets, eReaders and PCs. Free OdiloTK reading Apps are available for IOS and Android mobile devices. A comprehensive analytics module was also provided. Satisfied with the functionality of the solution, a meeting was arranged between the CEO of Odilo and the SLNSW which resulted in a free 12 month pilot of the OdiloTK and Odilo Consortia products.

### **The NSW Public Library Agreement for Purchasing Electronic Content**

To facilitate the acquisition of content from publishers and authors, the SLNSW commissioned a copyright specialist to develop a licensing document referred to as the NSW Public Library Agreement for Purchasing Electronic Content. This agreement contains the basic principles of the DCL purchasing agreement (Mary Minow, 2012) however due to the differences in US & Australian copyright law it was not possible to retain the plain English nature of the US agreement.

The core principles of the new agreement are:

- Perpetual access rights and the right to migrate the content to an alternative platform as long as the original lending terms are adhered to
- A one copy, one loan model as the default with the flexibility to negotiate alternative forms of concurrent access
- Archiving rights - the right to make a replacement copy should the original file become obsolete and a new copy cannot be found at a reasonable price
- The right to make an accessible copy for users with a disability should a suitable accessible copy not be commercially available

- Flexibility to accommodate consortial access

The agreement will be made freely available to the NSW public library network to facilitate the direct acquisition of digital content from local publishers and authors.

### **Public library pilot sites**

The selection of the pilot sites was a critical factor in the success of the pilot and subsequent evaluation of the platform and licence agreement. Leichhardt Library and Parramatta City Libraries were approached to participate on the basis of their pioneering efforts in the eLending space. In 2014 Leichhardt Library was independently exploring options to host locally acquired digital content and had commenced preliminary conversations with Australian publishers for the acquisition of content. These preliminary discussions proved to be very beneficial and helped to fast-track the acquisition of content for the pilot. Leichhardt Library had also undertaken an extensive digitisation project, having digitised over 70% of their local studies collection by the commencement of the pilot. This provided ready access to digitised historical content in a diversity of formats which could be immediately hosted on the OdiloTK platform. Prior to the pilot Parramatta City Library had expressed interest in developing their in-house system's capability to independently manage digital content acquired locally. Parramatta City Library had also pioneered a large scale eLending device program and created a sophisticated charging station system and workflows to facilitate the lending of devices. Both services were concerned with the prevailing eLending ecosystem and viewed participation in the indyreads pilot as an opportunity to enrich their collections with a greater diversity of Australian content.

The pilot sites also utilised two different Integrated Library Management Systems (ILMS) which would allow a broader evaluation of the Odilo API restful integration into the online catalogues.

### **Content licensing**

A critical success factor for the indyreads pilot, was the willingness of Australian publishers and self-published authors to partner directly with public libraries to sell digital content under the terms and conditions of the licence agreement and at a price point which was sustainable to all. Would independent publishers view eLending as an opportunity to connect authors with an avid community of readers and potentially expand their readership base or would they perceive such initiatives as potentially undermining their revenue streams?

At the commencement of the pilot a select list of approximately 100 Australian independent and open access publishers was compiled. An introductory email was forwarded to the publishers which provided a brief overview of the initiative, including information on the platform and the key tenets of the licence agreement. Publishers were also invited to contact the SLNSW for a copy of the purchase agreement and for further information on the pilot. Within a week over 30 publishers had requested a copy of the agreement and expressed a general interest in participating in the pilot. A number of the publishers having reviewed the agreement were happy to proceed as a pilot partner. Other publishers were more cautious and required further clarification on particular clauses within the agreement. Several publishers indicated that they were interested in the pilot but did not have sufficient resources on hand to participate. If a

publisher did not respond to the initial email there was no follow up call due to the limited resources available for content licensing.

Overall licensing negotiations proved to be a lengthy undertaking often stretching beyond six months. This was primarily a reflection on the size of the publishing operations and available resources on hand to undertake negotiations and related administrative tasks. To gain a better understanding of the independent publishing sector and to explore partnership opportunities, the pilot coordinator attended the annual Small Press Network Publishing Conference. The event highlighted the incredible passion which drives independent publishers and also the hard work required to produce a quality book. It became apparent that many small publishers run their operations on a shoestring budget, with limited staff, many of whom perform multiple tasks from editing to marketing and distribution. It was therefore necessary to be understanding of these dynamics and patient during the licensing process. In a number of instances due to the finite timeframe of the pilot it was necessary to place negotiations with publishers on hold even though they were happy to participate. We anticipate continuing to work with these publishers in the future.

During the pilot over 600 titles were purchased from Australian independent publishers and self-published authors under the licence agreement. A secure file transfer protocol server (SFTP) was commissioned for the purposes of importing data files, storage and export. Guidelines were provided to participating publishers requesting that all files use the ISBN number as the naming convention for data and cover image files. The format preference was EPUB although PDFs were also accepted in some instances. Metadata

was typically supplied in an Excel spreadsheet and contained the following basic fields; author, title, publisher, date of publication, ISBN, subject/genre headings and title blurb. Dropbox proved to be the most popular means for transferring data files to the SLNSW. Once received the data was checked and cleaned before being moved to the SFTP server for batch transfer and upload onto the Odilo platform.

The type of content acquired from publishing pilot partners was eclectic and ranged from a substantial quantity of contemporary Australian literature through to a collection of popular genre fiction. Recent research undertaken by Emmett Stinson (2016) concluded that there has been a shift over the years in the mediation of Australian literary production from mainstream publishers to small and independent publishers. Our observations based on the select inventory of publishing pilot partner concurs with Stinson's assertion.

In addition to purchasing content directly from Australian publishers, content was also acquired from the Odilo Marketplace. Odilo has a rapidly expanding collection of material which they have licensed for distribution via their Marketplace module. The Marketplace collection includes a large array of small press and independent published content from international publishers often sold under a perpetual access licence. Whilst negotiations with Australian publishers were underway a starting collection of material was purchased from the Odilo Marketplace to facilitate the trial of the eContent management platform.

Mid-way through the pilot Odilo licensed over 200,000 self published titles from the aggregator Smashwords. To assist in the selection of self-published material the SLNSW requested from Odilo a list of best selling Australian Smashword authors. The list was cross-checked with the Goodreads website to help verify quality titles, a time consuming process! The SLNSW has subsequently asked Odilo to investigate the possibility of running the Smashwords author/title database against the Goodreads website in order to provide author/title/genre lists curated by Goodreads member ratings. This would provide an invaluable collection development tool and help address concerns by librarians over the quality of self-published content and the difficulties faced in identifying suitable material.

With an increasing interest in self-publishing by Australian authors, motivated by the desire to have greater creative and financial control over their works (Zwar, Throsby & Longden, 2015), it is important that libraries give self published content due consideration when developing their collections. The self-published content purchased for the indyreads pilot has recorded surprisingly strong circulation figures. The majority of the self-published content selected falls into the genre fiction category. Justin Fox (2016) argues that there is an increasing number of self-published genre fiction authors attracting a fan base of voracious readers. Furthermore the market share of Amazon eBook sales for self-published authors has been growing rapidly at the expense of mainstream publishers whose digital sales have been in decline (ibid).

## **Integration**

To facilitate the integration of the OdiloTK platform into a client's ILMS, a fully functional set of APIs is provided. All APIs are implemented as RESTful Web services over HTTPS using JSON for data exchange. The initial aim was to achieve patron authentication, title availability, loan, return a loan, place a hold and remove a hold within the two pilot site online catalogues via API. Whilst a deep level of systems integration in accordance to the ReadersFirst principles was a desired outcome we were realistic that this may not be possible within the pilot's timeframe.

Prior to commencing the pilot, Leichhardt Library and Parramatta City Library liaised directly with their ILMS providers to determine the willingness of the vendors to invest the time and resources required to achieve deep integration between the systems. After conversing with SIRSI, Parramatta City Library indicated that the vendor was mid-way through beta testing the OdiloTK API integration with the SIRSI eResource Central module and anticipated that the API would be certified mid-way through the pilot. Unfortunately the certification did not transpire during the pilot period due to ongoing technical issues. The OdiloTK API has subsequently been certified by SIRSI. At the time of writing this paper Parramatta City Library was in the midst of activating the API.

Leichhardt Library utilises the Aurora ILMS and is an official Aurora Information Technology (AIT) software development and test partner. After hearing an overview of the pilot AIT agreed to undertake the necessary development work to integrate the OdiloTK API into Aurora Montage, the ILMS digital discovery layer. At the official pilot launch in February 2016, AIT provided a beta demonstration of the integration, which was a remarkable outcome given the short development timeframe. The API

functionality implemented into Montage included search and discovery, authentication, item availability, loan and download. During the course of the pilot refinements to the API have been made and a variety of technical issues resolved. The pilot has provided a valuable insight into the complexities associated with systems integration and the time and effort required to achieve the desired functionality. Such undertakings represent a significant investment in resources by all stakeholders.

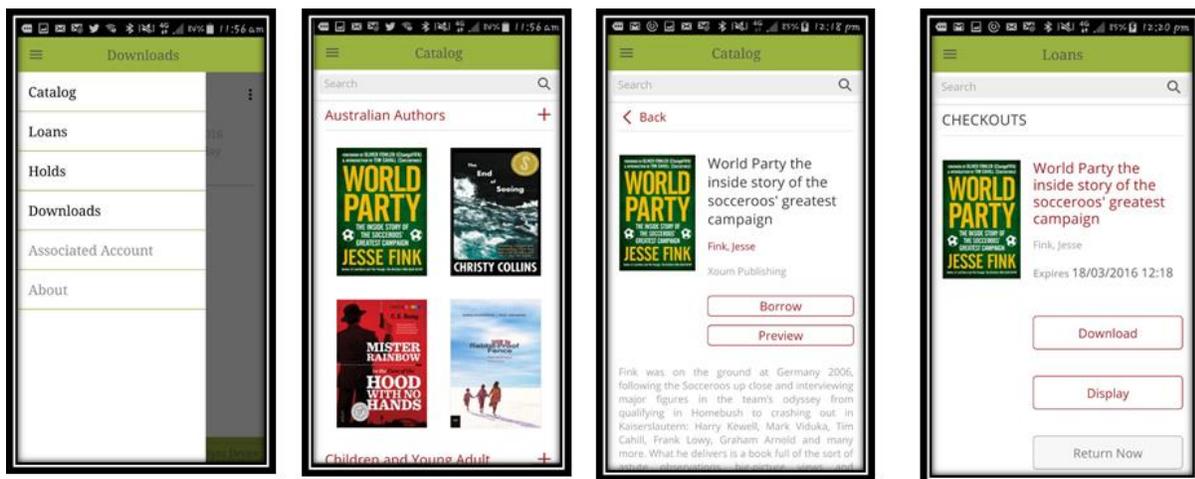
To enable patron access to the standalone indyreads™ portal, SIP2 authentication was deployed. As an interim measure whilst the OdiloTK API integration work was underway, MARC records for the indyreads™ collection were imported into the pilot site catalogues, each record contained the OdiloTK record ID in the 856 field. This allows library patrons to search and discover indyreads™ titles, clients are redirected to the indyreads portal for loans at which point they are prompted to login and authenticate.

## **Evaluation**

The indyreads™ pilot commenced in July 2015 and concluded in September 2016. The standalone indyreads discovery portal was handed over to the pilot sites in September 2015 at which point staff training occurred and licensed content and digitised local studies material was uploaded onto the platform. Public access to the indyreads browser portal and IOS and Android Apps commenced after the launch date in February 2016. At the conclusion of the pilot there had been 535 loans and 479 downloads. These figures whilst modest need to be viewed in the context that the opening collection™ only contained several hundred titles. The collection grew

substantially in the latter months of the trial to over 1000 titles by the conclusion of the pilot.

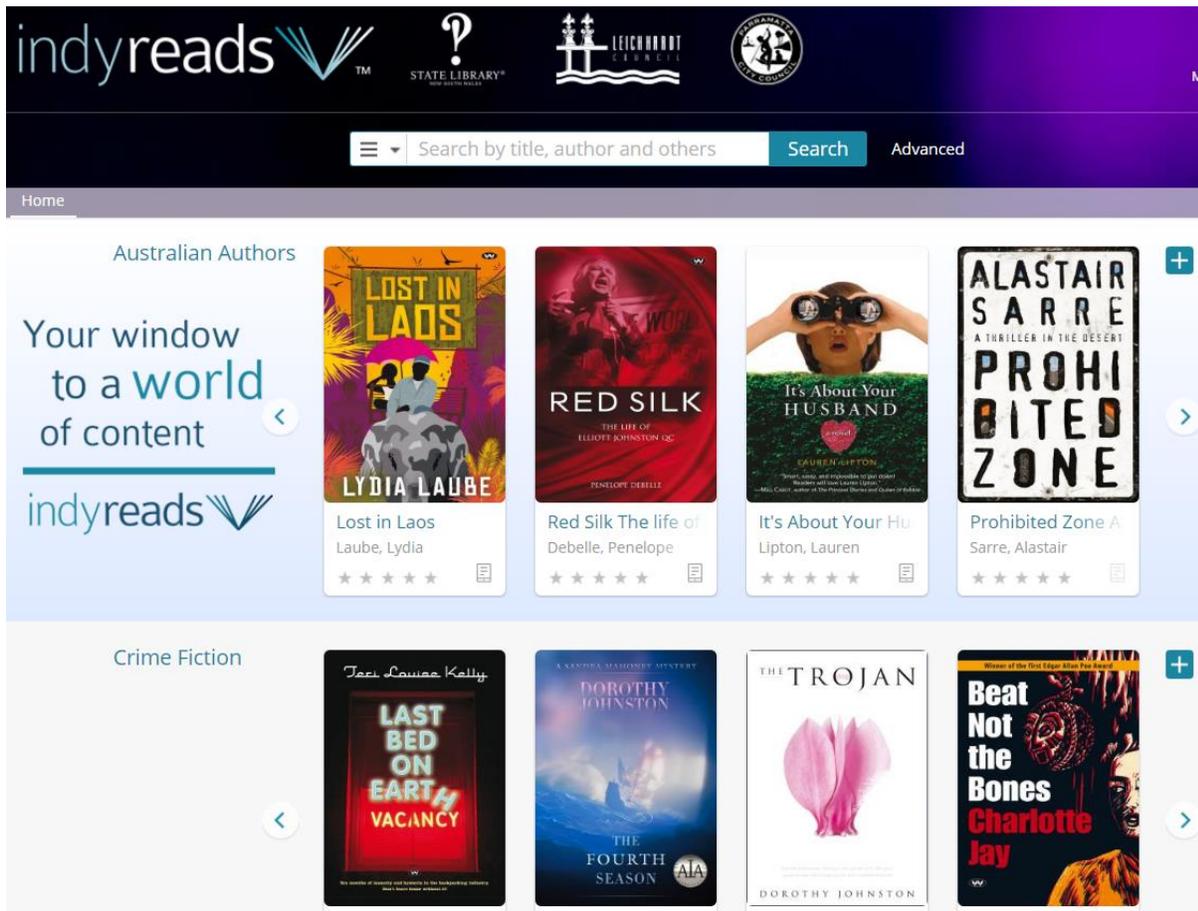
Overall the pilot sites were very satisfied with the front end functionality and user interface of the OdiloTK platform which provides client access to content across mobile devices, tablets and PCs. The Odilo Android and IOS Apps were intuitive to use, robust and offered similar functionality to the browser portal and a comparable end user experience. The pilot sites, both of whom used pre-existing eBook aggregators, observed that providing client access to eBooks across multiple aggregator platforms and Apps created confusion for end users. This is a common problem for libraries across Australia and it would be advantageous to explore options for creating a unified App which works across all aggregator platforms, similar to the Library Simplified solution in the US.



indyreads™ App various screenshots

## Admin portal

The pilot sites reported that the OdiloTK administrator portal was easy to use and allowed the libraries to independently upload content onto the platform. Towards the end of the pilot Odilo implemented bulk batch upload functionality which negated the need to send the files to the Odilo technical team for processing. The ability for administrators to easily create curated carousels of content for the front end browser portal and Apps was a useful tool for marketing purposes and helped to provide a fresh and constantly evolving collection of titles for clients to browse. The analytics module provided a multitude of reporting functionality which could be exported in Excel or PDF formats. The OdiloTK Marketplace was somewhat cumbersome to use and improved workflows have been suggested to the vendor. Upgrades to the OdiloTK solution are implemented on a quarterly schedule.



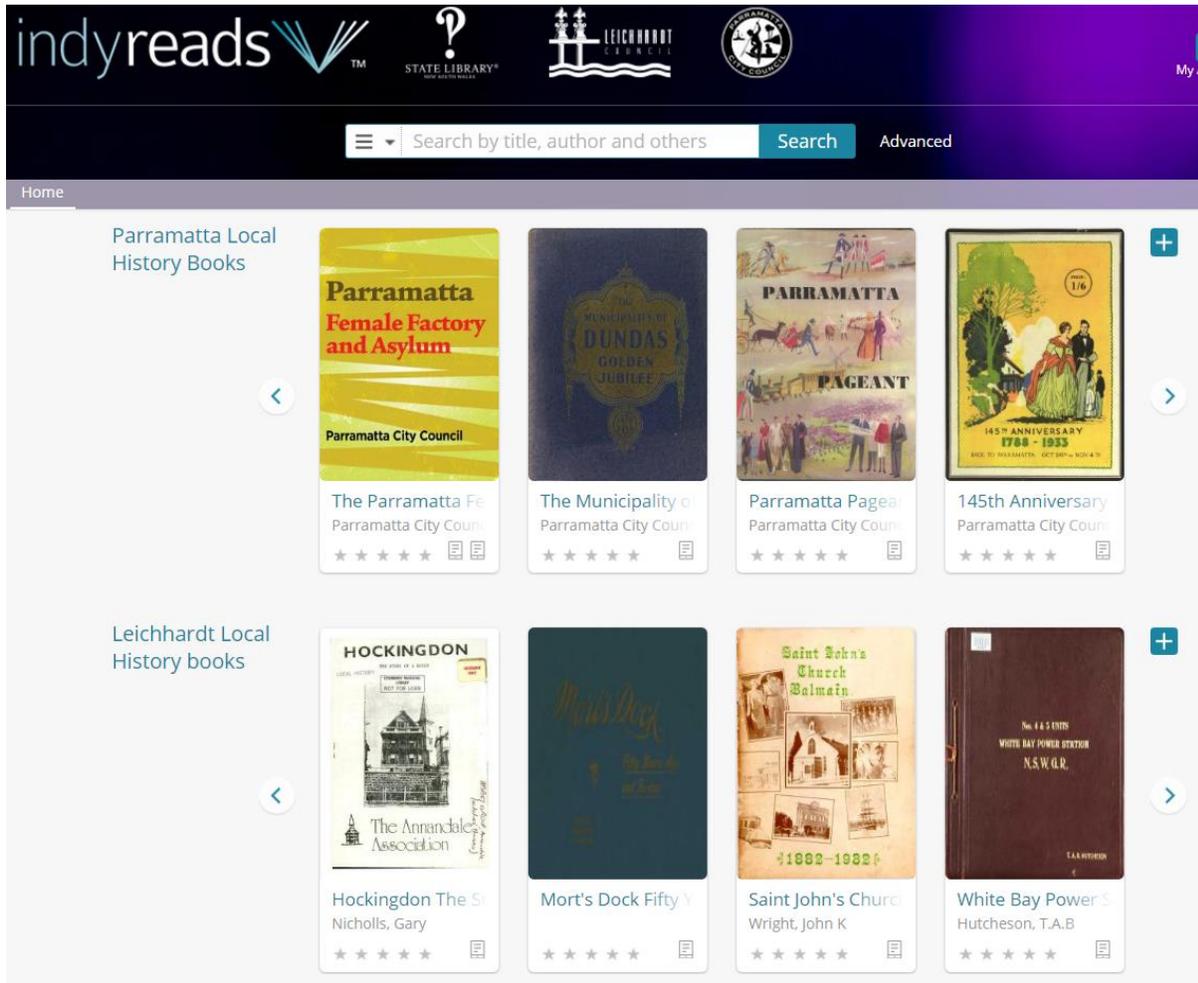
## indyreads™ browser portal

As indicated earlier the deep integration of the OdiloTK solution into the pilot libraries ILMS was at best limited. Further work needs to be undertaken to enhance indyreads™ functionality within Aurora Montage and to improve the stability of the OdiloTK API. We anticipate that the SIRS I integration will be activated at Parramatta City Library before the end of 2016.

Our success in licensing content directly from local independent publishers using the pilot licence agreement indicates a willingness by this segment of the market to explore direct partnerships with libraries. The challenge for smaller publishers and the authors they represent is finding an audience in a marketplace saturated by competing titles. Public libraries provide publishers and authors with the opportunity to connect with a diverse clientele of avid readers and the possibility of building their readership base. Going forward we believe that there are exciting opportunities to build upon the relationship between publishers, libraries and their patrons.

The OdiloTK platform also proved to be an effective solution for hosting digitised local studies material. Over the course of the pilot Leichhardt Library uploaded over 70 digitised works from their local studies collection which included important historical books, the complete Leichhardt Historical Journal collection (an ongoing publication) in PDF and a collection of oral histories in MP3 and the corresponding interview transcripts in PDF. Parramatta City Library uploaded a smaller batch of ePub and PDF

historical titles. High usage analytics for historical materials indicate that the portal is an effective platform to manage and distribute content to the public. The platform does not however provide archival functionality.



### Local Studies Material

In conclusion, the pilot demonstrated that the indyreads platform combined with the licence agreement allows libraries to become autonomous aggregators of locally important content. On the basis of the pilot evaluation the SLNSW will explore opportunities to make the indyreads platform available to all NSW public libraries in mid

2017. In the interim Leichhardt Library and Parramatta City Library will continue to use the platform and license content from their communities.

In 2017 it is anticipated that the pilot libraries will commence a trial of an exciting new Australian self-publishing platform. The platform provides aspiring authors with a writing, distribution and social networking solution which has the potential to integrate into the indyreads™ ecosystem. Aspiring community authors will be invited to join the free indyreads™ self-publishing community. Writing workshops will be held at the libraries to support aspiring authors and to promote the indyreads initiative and corresponding online self-publishing community. The unique analytics functionality of the platform will provide the libraries with reader engagement data for titles. This feature will help identify quality works for acquisition into the indyreads collection.

Whilst the rapid growth in eBook sales over the early part of this decade has plateaued it is important that libraries do not become complacent despite some of the earlier issues which created angst for libraries being resolved. The current lull in sales of eBooks provides libraries with the time to redefine their role in the digital publishing sphere. The indyreads™ pilot has been a strategic undertaking by the SLNSW and our partners to explore the opportunities for public libraries to support community publishers and authors and ensure a greater diversity of voices are represented in our collections for current and future generations.

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