

Is the Macmillan boycott working?

As of the date of publication, 79 library systems and consortia [have ceased to purchase Macmillan eBooks](#) in protest of their new sales policy, which [limits library eLending](#). These libraries represent 1,163 locations in 28 states, and serve 47.9 million people, which is equivalent to the total population of California plus the population of New York City.

Is it making a difference?

Analysis shows that despite Macmillan's claims about desiring to "restore balance," the embargo is merely an attempt by Macmillan to boost revenue in the same way that they increased their base price to libraries from \$40.00 to \$60.00 in 2018. Here's how it works:

Liane Moriarty's *Nine Perfect Strangers* was released in November 2018. At Fairfax County Public Library (FCPL) which serves 1.1 million residents in northern Virginia, 400 readers requested the book before its release; in response, FCPL purchased 67 copies at \$60.00 each. Adjusting for OverDrive's negotiated percentage, Macmillan earned \$2010.00.

What if *Nine Perfect Strangers* had been released in November 2019? [According to Macmillan, 8%](#), or 32, of the 400 readers who wanted the book would have purchased it rather than waiting. These 32 retail purchases will have generated \$336.00. After the embargo, the library purchases 62 copies to cover the remaining 368 readers who were willing to wait. At Macmillan's new pricing, this creates \$1845.00 in revenue for the company. In total, they receive \$2181.00, which is an 8.5% increase over a release that was not embargoed.

However, FCPL has ceased to purchase Macmillan eBooks and Macmillan has traded \$336.00 in retail sales for \$2010.00 in library sales, a loss of 83%.

In other words, the boycotting libraries are making a difference, creating an 83% loss in revenue instead of an 8.5% gain. If about one in 10 library systems cease to purchase Macmillan eBooks, they will offset the gains Macmillan hoped to make and ensure that its revenue is flat. For every library that boycotts after that, Macmillan will see a net loss on the embargo strategy.

Are we at one in 10?

Not quite, although we are close. In the 2017 IMLS Public Library Survey, 7162 libraries recorded spending on electronic materials. Of those, 605 libraries are currently boycotting Macmillan eBooks, or 8.45%.

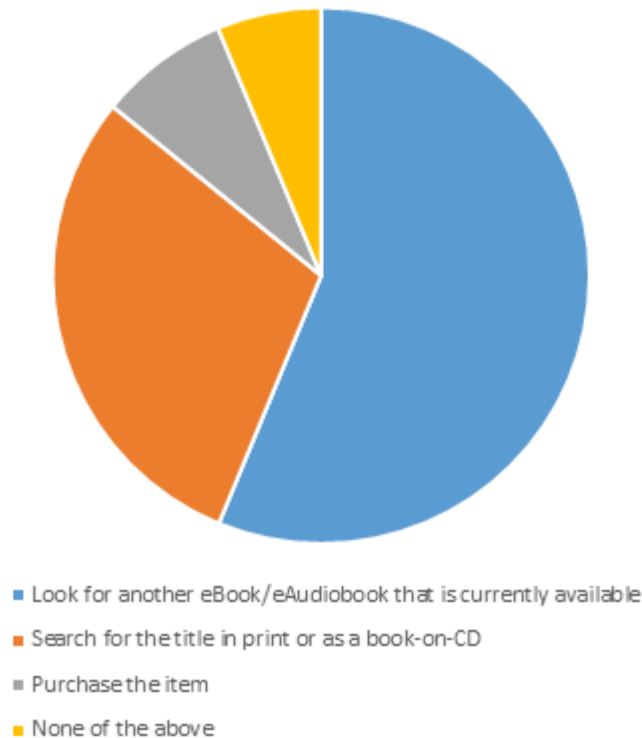
Other impacts to Macmillan authors

In the meantime, we are looking at the results of the boycott to determine impact to patrons. At the Washington Digital Library Consortium (WDLC), serving 826,000 Washington State residents, we saw that circulation in the last two months of the year (during the boycott) fell only 2% below expectation. Since Macmillan represented approximately 5% of our circulation in the prior year, we conclude that readers who normally would have discovered Macmillan books are discovering Macmillan's competitor authors instead. FCPL saw no decrease in circulation over the same time period.

These numbers are in line with the findings of a [library eBook reader survey](#) conducted the Jefferson County Library in Port Hadlock, WA. When patrons were asked about their next step after deciding not to place a hold on an eBook (usually due to wait time), they reported the following:

Answers	Count	%
Look for another eBook/eAudiobook that is currently available	501	56%
Search for the title in print or as a book-on-CD	264	30%
Purchase the item	70	8%
None of the above	56	6%
Grand Total	891	

If I choose not to place a hold on an item, I am most likely to:



Conclusion

In the 2019 webcast launching #eBooksforall, Columbus (Ohio) Metropolitan Library CEO Patrick Losinski stated that libraries are not competitors with publishers; we are collaborators. This is true, but we are also, first and foremost, important customers. We predictably spend millions of dollars every year across the lists. And with eBooks, we are the only way for publishers to earn revenue from the millions of people who want to read books but cannot or will not pay retail prices.

And as cooperative customers who truly value Macmillan's product, we have tried for five months to communicate our dissatisfaction with its new terms, requesting that it drop the embargo and explaining [why it is important to us](#). In our opinion, a national outcry from a valuable customer is reason enough alone Macmillan to drop the embargo. However, it appears willing to gamble that despite libraries' frustrations, we will continue to pay the bills. The boycotting libraries have said no, and we invite other libraries to join us. Collectively, we can ensure that embargoes are too expensive for any publisher to implement.

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