

Best Practice

Syndicated Usage

This best practice guidance was updated in October 2026 and applies to content that is syndicated and available on multiple platforms.

Background

Many publishers disseminate their content through different channels (syndication). This optimises user experience by facilitating discovery, but can adversely affect usage reporting. This best practice guidance explains how usage may be reported for syndicated content in compliance with the COUNTER Code of Practice.

This guidance applies to Release 5.1 of the COUNTER Code of Practice (R5.1).

Conventions

Per the [Code of Practice](#), this best practice guidance uses the following convention:

The keywords MUST (or REQUIRED), MUST NOT, SHOULD (or RECOMMENDED), SHOULD NOT (or NOT RECOMMENDED), and OPTIONAL in this document are to be interpreted as described in [RFC 2119](#).

Who can share syndicated usage

- Where COUNTER metrics are being shared, both the syndication platform (Third Party) and the original publisher (First Party) MUST be independently audited as COUNTER-compliant.
- We recommend that usage metrics be shared from the Third Party syndication platform back to the First Party.
- Where raw usage data is being shared, the Third Party does not need to be COUNTER-compliant. The First Party is responsible for processing the data in line with the Code of Practice. It must be clearly stated on the First Party's website that they are processing the data.

Global reporting

- The Third Party SHOULD share raw usage information with the First Party, which the First Party then processes in compliance with the COUNTER Code of Practice. Where raw usage data cannot be shared, and the Third Party intends to share COUNTER-processed usage data with the First Party, both MUST be independently COUNTER-compliant.
- Where the Third Party is COUNTER compliant, it may deliver global reports directly to report consumers when these are requested. It SHOULD share information with the First Party about when global COUNTER reports are being called for the syndicated content.
- The First Party may deliver aggregated global usage reports (i.e. their own global reports plus the global usage from Third Parties) but MUST clearly mark the platforms on which usage occurred in the Platform field using the namespace SYNDICATED:{platform name},

so that syndicated usage can be identified and excluded when creating a Standard View from a COUNTER Report.

Institutional reporting

- Institutional reports **MUST** only be shared where the Third Party and the First Party can guarantee that the authentication identifiers match exactly. Acceptable matches include
 - OpenAthens or Shibboleth sign-ins that can be very specifically tied to one institution.
 - IP ranges where the Third Party and First Party share an IP database.
 - Third Parties delivering the IP addresses used to access syndicated content as part of the raw usage data sent to the First Party, provided this can be done without breaching privacy regulations, such that the First Party can use their own IP database to attribute the syndicated usage to institutions.
 - GetFTR, which shares the First Party's internal Customer/Institution ID with the Third Party as part of the entitlement check process.
 - Explicit institutional matching, in which the First Party's institutional identifiers are shared with the Third Party. Third Parties may include users who are outside of the shared IP ranges where the users are verified using their institutional email address.
- Institutional reports **MUST NOT** be shared based on 'best-guess' institutional matching where the First Party and Third Party have different IP databases.

What Third Parties can do with institutional reports

- The Third Party may deliver institutional reports directly to report consumers when these are requested, provided there is a clear notification on their report interface that this usage information is also available from the First Party.
- If the Third Party offers institutional usage reports directly to report consumers, it **SHOULD** share information with the First Party about when COUNTER reports are being called for the syndicated content, and by which institutions.

What First Parties can do with institutional reports

- The First Party **MUST** clearly mark the platforms on which usage occurred in the Platform field using the namespace SYNDICATED:{platform name}, so that syndicated usage can be identified within COUNTER Reports and excluded when creating a Standard View from a COUNTER Report.
- The First Party **MUST** allow syndicated usage to be excluded from their global and institutional reports in tabular format. The next breaking release of the Code of Practice will include a change to the COUNTER API (formerly sushi) to create a new Report_Attribute which will permit similar exclusion there.

Appendix: Glossary of Terms

- First Party. Report providers and publisher platforms offering scholarly content to end users and reporting usage directly to libraries. In the context of this best practice, a publisher such as Springer Nature or an aggregator such as EBSCO with AI systems embedded in their platforms.
- Original publisher. See First Party.

- Syndication platform. See Third Party.
- Third Party. Services making use of First Party content to deliver services to end users. Third Parties should report usage to First Parties, and may also report usage to libraries. In a COUNTER context, a service such as ResearchGate.