

Visualising e-journals on the go: a review of BrowZine

By Steven Chang, Librarian, Western Health

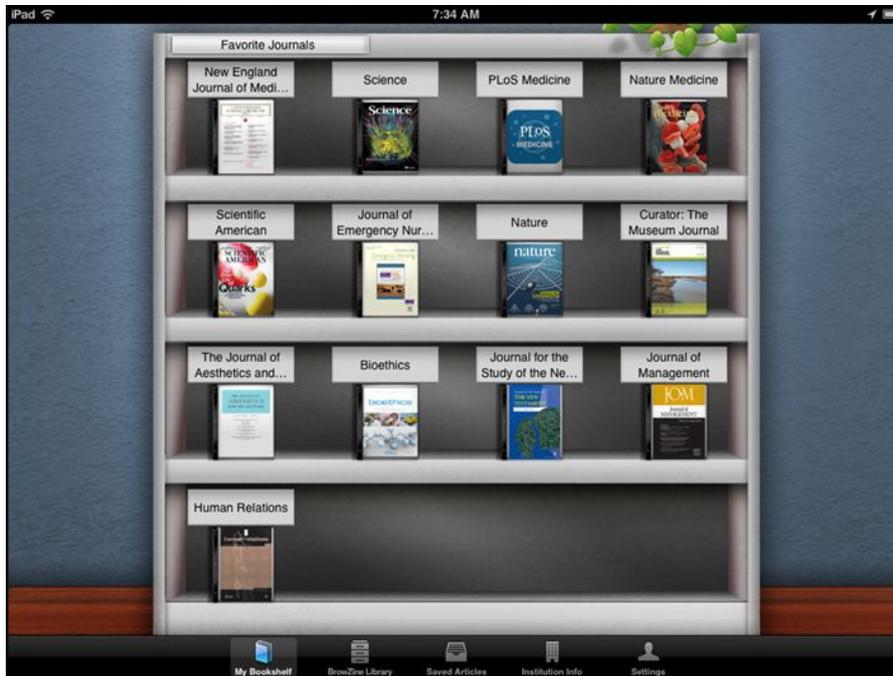
BrowZine is a timely arrival for health libraries eager to maximise exposure to their valuable e-Journal subscriptions. Providing access to these collections on mobile and tablet devices is paramount in a rapidly evolving age of 'knowledge and learning on the go', particularly for a client-base that includes busy clinical staff.

Although BrowZine has only been available since 2012, uptake has been strong in U.S. libraries and especially the health libraries field. However, Third Iron, the creators of BrowZine, have made inroads in other sectors too and are steadily expanding their presence in the Australian library landscape. Previous reviews have examined earlier iterations of BrowZine from a variety of viewpoints (1-5). This article is intended as an up-to-date review of this product from the perspective of a health librarian from an Australian hospital library service.

On first impressions, one is immediately struck by the ease of authentication that BrowZine provides. The app offers smooth entry into collections via library credentials, which are only needed once to establish ongoing access, and after which, journals are available literally at one's fingertips on smartphones, iPads and Android tablets. Bypassing the need to jump through standard 'authentication hoops' significantly lowers usability barriers for clients and makes off-site access to mobile library collections seamless and attractive compared to traditional e-portal access. Another perk for end-users is that the app is free to download – the library pays a subscription fee to make its collections available through the interface.

As its name suggests, BrowZine exists first and foremost for the purposes of browsing and reading. Third Iron have made a conscious choice to steer clear of an oft-requested search function, to avoid opening a Pandora's Box and diluting its identity. BrowZine performs exceptionally well for the functionality it promises in browsing and reading, but it firmly delineates itself from becoming any form of database or search tool.

BrowZine fits neatly into the workflows of time-poor clinicians and researchers. Articles of interest can be immediately flicked into a 'saved articles' list for later reading, allowing users to segment their time into either scanning tables of contents or engaging in deep reading of full-text papers. Importantly, articles can be directly exported to bibliographic managers such as EndNote, RefWorks, Zotero and Mendeley. This is a crucial feature for integrating BrowZine into the research process.



BrowZine's aesthetic appearance is not simply an intuitive interface, but is a critical aspect of imitating 'real' journals by visualising library collections using a digital bookshelf metaphor. The app allows users to add key library journals in their field to a personalised bookshelf. Moreover, BrowZine alerts users to freshly published issues of their favoured journals sitting on their bookshelf, and therefore naturally serves a double function as a mobile current awareness tool of sorts.

An important but understated fact is that BrowZine was established by librarians. Third Iron's CEO John Seguin possesses a Master of Library Science and has notable experience as an academic librarian (6). This common thread between BrowZine and librarians contributes to BrowZine's exceptional support services in regards to troubleshooting and responses to feedback through direct communication and active evolution of the product. More often than not, Third Iron appear to be on the same wavelength as librarians, and demonstrate a thoughtful understanding of library workflows and issues.

The BrowZine experience at Western Health Library Services has been instructive. In the short space of a few months, awareness of the app spread like wildfire among clinical and research staff, mostly organically via word-of-mouth but also through active library promotion. Monthly usage statistics provided by Third Iron indicate healthy uptake and encouraging numbers, both in terms of table-of-contents views and full-text article access. Client feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and many staff have signed up for library membership after being recommended BrowZine by colleagues. Tailored library branding is pervasive throughout the app, which ensures that clients are kept aware that their access to the literature is a service enabled by library subscriptions and expenditure.



There are few major problems with using BrowZine, as it is a well-developed product. However, full-text PDF access to articles can occasionally be sluggish depending on one's connection speed and configuration. This can be an issue for live demos and impatient users. It is not uncommon for full-text access to time out. Additionally, not all library journals can be made available through BrowZine due to metadata inconsistency – though most are, and Third Iron are continually adding to their list of supported publishers (7). Lastly, the app deliberately excludes a search functionality option, and is therefore unsuitable for literature searching. This may limit its relevance for certain groups such as undergraduate students.

Fundamentally, BrowZine is most powerful as a marketing and awareness device. Dovetailing neatly with rising trends in mobile information use, Third Iron's product is highly effective for promoting the value of core library collections that would otherwise remain invisible to many potential clients. It offers a visual approach that evokes the traditional experience of opening and leafing through periodicals in a way that cannot be emulated by web pages and databases on a PC browser. BrowZine can be firmly recommended to any scholarly library keen on boosting the visibility and accessibility of its collections in a world increasingly hungry for quality mobile information on-the-go. It is a thoughtfully designed, aesthetically attractive app that chooses its distinct strengths and excels in them where libraries need them the most.

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