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eReaders and Apps: Two Librarians Weigh In

E-READERS AND APPS: TWO LIBRARIANS WEIGH IN

by

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When the Amazon Kindle's first generation device was released to the entire world in 2007, no one yet knew the impact this device would have on how consumers read. The Amazon Kindle was a pioneer in the soon-to-be wild world of e-readers. Now, in late 2011, there are over ten different companies offering many different options for consumers. How do we know which brands are good and which brands are not? Should we even considering buying an e-reader if the technology is just going to fade away in a few years or will the technology grow exponentially into something we never imagined? In terms of libraries, what does the e-reader mean for us and should we even care? To begin to answer these questions, librarians must take a look at the actual technology itself and how it can help our patrons. This question can be asked across many boards of librarianship: academic, public, and school libraries should all be thinking about e-readers. In a world of little money for libraries, we need to assess each option and consider its strengths and weaknesses for our needs.

We hope this article can do a little bit of everything stated above.

Literature Review

While the e-book market has been around since 2000 when the volunteer effort Project Gutenberg began, library literature contained few articles about e-reading devices until 2006 when Sony debuted its reader for e-books at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) on January 4, 2006. In the intervening four years the library literature on e-readers falls into several categories. First, in the largest category—nine articles--are the anecdotal articles written by librarians about their experiences with e-books and e-reading devices. One wrote of her quotes to reduce her carbon footprint, another wrote of how the devices bored him, and yet another wrote of her initial reservations and how she's now convinced that e-reader devices are the next big thing.

Seven news stories reported that the Kindle could be had for the low price of \$399, that the CES showcased the latest cutting edge products, and reported the Kindle's popularity with customers. Yet seven stories also compared e-reading devices with each other. In 2010 School Library Journal compared the Kobo and Alex, North Carolina Libraries compared iPad, Kindle, and nook. In 2009 School Library Monthly compared Cool-er with Kindle and Reader, Information Today compared the Kindle DX to the Kindle 2, and EContent compared Plastic Logic's with the Kindle and Sony Reader.

Four articles discussed the data gathered from surveys. An informal survey of teens published in Voice of Youth Advocates revealed that teens don't use their mobile devices for leisure reading. A pilot test using focus groups comparing the Kindle and the Sony Reader at Lloyd Sealy Library, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, at the City University of New York determined that the devices were an added expense rather than a substitute for print books and those librarians should look at adding electronic content through existing means. Librarians at National Institute of Standards and Technology's (NIST) Research Library surveyed two focus groups comprised of scientists, engineers, and administrative staff asking them which e-book device they preferred for their work-related reading and why—and they learned that being able to read PDFs was the main requirement of their users. The final research survey investigates technological and business developments in the e-books area by comparing various data sets.

Three articles fell into the “how I did it at my library” articles. Lauren Barack described a Kindle program that brought Kindle readers to her K-4 classroom after a larger pilot project debuted in 2009 that put kindles into the hands of 7th and 8th graders at the middle school in Seneca, Illinois. Another article published in Library Media Connection in 2010 described a program that cataloged, publicized, and did collection development for twenty Kindles in a school library media center. In 2009 American Libraries shared how librarians at Penn State University approached Sony Electronics about a partnership in which they donated 100 PRS-505 E-Book Readers to the Penn State University Libraries.

The other categories included philosophical musings on what the advent of the Kindle means for the right to read and an end to privacy and an article comparing the carbon footprint of e-reader ownership to personal library ownership. In the end, the author suggested that it “is not safe to assume that either a book or a Kindle is environmentally superior to the other.”

Brand Comparisons

This section will compare and contrast two of the leading competitors in e-reader technology: the Kindle 3, and the Simple Touch Nook. While the Apple iPad is a very popular device, it will not be discussed as it is not a dedicated e-reader.

Kindle 3 (starting at \$114)

Kindle 3 is the latest offering from Amazon.com. There are four models available for consumers to choose from: Wi-Fi only (\$139), Wi-Fi only with special offers (\$114), Wi-Fi + 3G (\$189), and Wi-Fi + 3G with special offers (\$139). The models with special offers include sponsored screensavers and ads that run along the bottom part of the screen. Amazon says that the ads do not interfere with reading. Compared with the previous generation Kindle, this new Kindle has:

- 21% smaller with the same 6 inch viewing screen
- 17% lighter and 50% improved screen contrast (8.5 ounces)
- Double storage
- Faster, quieter page turns
- Built-in Wi-Fi
- Enhanced PDF reader
- Soft-touch textured back

The biggest drawback of the Amazon Kindle (until recently) was that users were unable to borrow e-books from their library's OverDrive e-book program. However, that all changed with an announcement on September 21st, 2011 by the official Amazon Kindle team in the Kindle forums on their website. Borrowing Kindle books from libraries include the following unique features:

- Whispersync automatically updates and saves a reader's bookmarks, margin notes and highlights
- Read anywhere – even if patrons do not have their Kindle with them, they can read library books on other Kindle app devices (iPad, iPhone, etc...)
- Real page numbers – page numbers in borrowed books match real page numbers from the actual book
- Face-book & Twitter integration – readers can share favorite passages from their books with friends and family

- Wireless delivery – library books can be downloaded via Wi-Fi so users do not have to side-load their books through a USB cord

These recent changes have given the Kindle a leg up against the competition that they did not have before. Another rumored change that could make the Kindle a no-brainer is the addition of a subscription-based library of e-books that users could borrow and return like Netflix. At this point, it is just a rumor, but it makes one wonder if this rumor turns out to be true, could it have an effect on library usage? If Amazon is serious about this idea, there is one big problem: the publishers. Amazon and book publishers have been fighting for years over e-book pricing and the publishers won that battle. What makes Amazon think they will not win this fight too? It will be interesting to see how this rumor pans out, if it does at all.

On September 28, 2011, Amazon's president Jeff Bezos announced that they would be introducing the Kindle Fire (\$199) and the Kindle Touch (with (\$149) and without 3G (\$99)). The new Kindle Fire is a tablet, which Amazon hopes will be huge competition to the Apple iPad (starting at \$499). They also announced that they would be reducing the price of the current Kindle 3 from \$139 to \$79 (Newman, 2011). This could be big news for libraries, especially since the Kindle is now able to download and borrow library e-books. \$79 is a reasonable price if libraries are looking to buy an e-reader for their collection.

One Librarian's Input on the 2nd Generation 3G Kindle

Written by Rebecca

My love of books and information compelled my decision to become a librarian and so initially the hubbub over e-readers was a bit like a mosquito buzzing in my ear; I wanted it to go away. There were too many drawbacks to e-reader for me to consider owning one and using one regularly. Forget about one ever replacing print books. For instance, I love sharing my books with others, and that process is limited with e-books, though I could hand over my e-reader to a trustworthy friend or relative. And the biggest deal breaker for me was the issue of compatibility: There is no universal format for e-book delivery.

Then there were the myriad of aesthetic issues: Was the e-ink pleasant to look at? How did the e-reader feel in my hands? As a kinesthetic learner, my passion for books relies upon my ability to touch the book, feel each page, and turn them and extends to enjoying them sensually by inhaling their aroma or being turned off by their foul stench—which of course is a plus with the e-reader since digital copies cannot be tainted by borrowers who smoke cigarettes, cigars, pipes, or other substances.

My first foray into e-reading entailed downloading an app to my early generation Blackberry and navigating it with a pearl. The experience: Odious. My next e-reading experience improved with a mobile phone upgrade to the Motorola Droid X Android. I downloaded the Kindle app, fell in love with the touch-screen navigation, and enjoyed reading on the phone's screen which was triple the size of the Blackberry's but still about a third the size of a regular e-reader or Kindle. Next, I sampled Overdrive on my Motorola Droid X Android and failed to commit to the experiment. Perhaps it was choice of books. While Secretariat is an award-winning book, having to wait several weeks for its availability and then having it disappear before I finished reading it was a rude experience.

However, the real appeal to me with e-readers and e-books was the quick delivery of the product to the device, which bypassed the need to leave the house, battle traffic and park, and deal with what I felt was declining levels of service at local chain bookstores. When my partner bought a Kindle for me in March 2011 I downloaded free books and was reluctant to purchase titles. Originally, my main use for it was going to be playing Scrabble. Still, I succumbed and started cross-referencing new titles I wanted to read with the public library's catalog because I did not want to buy a title when I could get it for free. I take advantage of sampling books before committing to buy, which is a normal practice of mine in libraries before I borrow and at brick and mortar bookstores before I purchase. But nowadays, I mostly cannot wait for the public library to order a new book. And when I see that 6 or 8 folks are already waiting, or on hold, for a copy of a book, then I go ahead and purchase a book via my Kindle.

Another plus for e-readers is the portability of content. Whether you're traveling with books for work or vacation or school, carry a large number of titles is a snap. Yet, I almost growled at a flight attendant

recently. She bullied me into turning off my Kindle and I wanted to argue with her, that the Kindle did not fall into her category of “battery-operated devices,” as I do not replace its batteries. Still, I complied because I didn’t want to be one of those librarians who make headlines begin dragged off flights by the air marshal. But now, it seems, that I’ll have to tuck along a back up print book to read when portable devices are not allowed.

One drawback about the Kindle specifically, is that when you make notes with your Kindle or annotations those are uploaded to a cloud server. Essentially they become Amazon’s property. If you become a person of interest in a crime, Amazon has the right to hand your records over to the FBI/CIA. They also can remove titles from your Kindle at any time if a mistake is made on their behalf and they mistakenly sell an unauthorized copy of a work.

Kinesthetically, I don’t love how my Kindle feels in my hands. But, after getting to know it the past six months, we’re on friendlier terms. I’m also getting to know my iPad now and learning to like reading EBSCOhost e-books on it.

The Simple Touch Nook (\$139)

Like the Amazon Kindle, the Nook e-reader has evolved over the past few years. When Barnes & Noble released the first generation Nook in 2009, response was iffy at best. The device was glitchy and unresponsive at times. Through firmware updates, the first generation Nook has become a worthy contender in the e-reader competition. However, Barnes & Noble’s latest e-reader offering is the best yet, according to Consumer Reports, and is the first time their e-reader recommendation has not been a Kindle. The following features are big improvements over the first generation Nook:

- 6 inch touchscreen with 50% more contrast than original Nook
- Lighter than a paperback (7.48 ounces)
- 2 month battery life on one charge
- 80% less flashing on page turns
- Connect with friends and family using Nook Friends™
- In-store support and free Wi-Fi
- Borrow and read public library books

Barnes & Noble has a third e-reader, the Color Nook, which also been successful. Since it has a backlit screen and no E-ink, it could be considered closer to the Apple iPad than a dedicated e-reader device.

If Barnes & Noble continues down this path of success with the new Simple Touch e-reader, they will stay in the competition for years to come.

One Librarian’s Input on the 1st-Generation Nook

Written by Alison:

I remember when the buzz of e-readers first began making noise around the internet. My first reaction was one of shock and horror. I thought, “Why in the world would people like this? Books are written to have their pages turned!” I have always loved books. I love the feel of the pages in my fingers and I love how they smell when they first make their way onto book shelves. Sometimes I even love the smell of old, well-read books (as long as they don’t reek of smoke).

Partly, I think I reacted this way because I was in the middle of my master’s degree in information science and it was my love of books and information that convinced me to go for this degree. As I made my way through classes and learned how technology is completely changing the way libraries (and books) are looked at, I thought to myself, “You know, I could get on board with this.”

In addition to my love of books, I love technology (I can blame my Dad for that one). Whenever something new comes out, I want it! That doesn’t mean that I normally get it, but if I can get my hands on the newest cell phone or mp3 player or laptop, I will.

Eventually, this is how I began to feel about e-readers. I never really liked the first Kindle, but when the Barnes & Noble Nook came out, I fell in love with it. I loved the way it looked (yes, I am one of those terrible people who judges a book by its cover) and I thought it was really cool the way they integrated a

touchscreen. When I heard about that, I remember thinking, "Boy, if they get the touchscreen right like Apple has, this will be awesome!" Well... not quite. It's not so bad that I can't handle it, but it is definitely not the quality of touchscreen I have come to enjoy from my Apple iPod Touch. In fact, I think the touchscreen on the Nook worked better before the last firmware upgrade. However, I do enjoy being able to read in bed without having my arms aching from the weight of a heavy book. Nor do I have to worry about turning pages when my arms are warm underneath my blankets - my hand is already there, ready to push a button.

My husband was hesitant when I told him I wanted one. "Will you actually use it?" Of course I was offended at first, but then I realized that he was right. If I am going to pay over \$200 for something that I will use simply to read with, I needed to make sure that I would actually use it. So, I did some research. Could I use my Nook to read articles for school? Yes (most of them, anyway)! Could I download books from the library? Yes! Could I get free books and books for cheap? Yes! After I answered these three questions, I knew it would be worth it for me. And it has been.

For the longest time, the Nook was the only e-reader on the market that was compatible with downloading e-books from public libraries. This was one of the main reasons I wanted to buy the Nook. I was not keen on spending loads of money on downloading books, so to know that I would be able to get free books from the public library was a huge draw. The biggest drawback, however, was that unlike most books in a library, there was only one copy of e-books through the OverDrive service and if there was a long line of patrons on hold for the same book it took weeks to get it and since you usually only get 7 to 14 day checkouts with e-books I was never able to finish one.

One of the coolest things about the Nook is that I can take it into my local Barnes & Noble, sit down, grab some Starbucks and read books for free for an hour. In addition to that, they give you in-store coupons and there is also free Wi-Fi so you can take advantage of the web browser on the Nook (not the best, but to be fair it's still in the beta stage). After over a year and a half of usage, I can say that I still love my Nook. Yes, the newest Kindle is a few ounces lighter than mine, and the pages might turn a little faster, but the Nook is what I chose and would choose again. Also, I still read print books. I love them and always will, but I think my print books are glad for the extra shelf space my Nook has given them.

e-reader Apps for Blackberry, iPhone, and Android

There are three major cell phone operating systems dominating the market these days: Blackberry, Apple, and Android. Since e-readers and e-books have become so popular over the last few years, each e-reader company has developed free applications (apps) for the cell phones that run these operating systems. As of right now, none of the Nook apps are able to read library e-books. With the introduction of the ability of the Kindle to read e-books from libraries, it will be interesting to see if they integrate this ability into their apps.

OverDrive (e-book supplier for many libraries) recently created an Apple iPod/iPhone app that allows patrons to read their downloadable e-books directly on their devices. This is great news for libraries that use OverDrive. What a wonderful way to encourage patrons to read e-books!

The following information also includes functions that come with the applications.

Blackberry

Kindle – The Kindle for Blackberry app is currently in Beta testing and can only be accessed from the Blackberry's built-in browser. There is no actual app to download from the Blackberry App World website.

- Automatically syncs last read page on Kindle device
- Create bookmarks and view annotations
- Search and browse the Kindle book store
- Users are NOT able to read newspapers, magazines and blogs using this app

Nook – The Nook e-reader for Blackberry app can only be accessed from the Blackberry's built-in browser. There is no actual app to download from the Blackberry App World website.

- Automatic download of latest e-book purchases
- Bookmarks and dictionary functions

- Portrait or landscape display options
- Customizable fonts, margins and page turns

Apple

Kindle – The Kindle with Whispersync app for iPhone is easily accessible from Apple’s iTunes store either online from a user’s computer or on the user’s actual device. The dedicated app has many features:

- Shop the Kindle store
- Read magazines and newspapers in addition to books
- Customize the reading interface with different fonts, background colors and either portrait or landscape mode
- Instant word lookup with dictionary
- Turn pages by shaking the device or flicking the touchscreen backwards or forwards

Nook – The Nook for iPhone app is easily accessible from Apple’s iTunes store either online from a user’s computer or on the user’s actual device. The dedicated app has many features:

- Use the LendMe™ option to lend books to other Nook users
- Sync your current reading position to other reading devices, including the Nook
- Multiple font types and adjustable font sizes
- Brightness control and customizable background and text color
- Create notes, bookmarks, and highlights
- Built in dictionary for quick word lookup

Android

Kindle – The Kindle for Android app is easily accessible from the Android Market website or on a user’s phone.

- Shop the Kindle store and download books automatically
- Customized background colors, font sizes, and either portrait or landscape mode
- Tap or flick the “page” to turn
- Instant dictionary word lookup and search within text

Nook – The Nook for Android app is easily accessible through the Android Market website or through the user’s cell phone.

- Use the LendMe™ option to lend books to other Nook users
- Built in dictionary for quick word lookup
- Create notes, bookmarks, and highlights
- Sync your current reading position to other reading devices, including the Nook
- Ability to side-load ePub files to the device for reading

Implications for Libraries

In libraries where their patrons are very interested in e-books, the libraries themselves should be very interested in integrating Kindles and/or Nooks into their collections. These devices are becoming ever more popular and are also becoming cheaper. We all know that paper books will never go away, but libraries do need to keep up with the latest technology, as long as patrons want it and will use it. Ruth Keeler Memorial Library already has six Nooks that they lend out to patrons. The director of the library, Carolyn Reznick says, “An e-book or an audio book, it’s the same thing, we’re delivering content and we’re delivering it for free.” Each Nook they lend comes pre-loaded with 35 books and includes titles from classic fiction to current popular novels. When their library introduced the Nook for checkout, every single device was checked out on the first day (Ganga, 2011). This library is a great example of what we can do with current e-reader technology and it is apparent that patrons want it and will use it. In the American Library Association’s 2011 Study on Public Library Funding & Technology Access, they found that at the time of the study, 28% of public libraries were offering e-reader devices for patron checkout.

Where does this leave academic libraries? Academic libraries are a little different in that since they are geared towards a specific purpose (the academic advancement of their student population), they need to be more concerned with the acquiring of print and electronic journals, electronic databases and other such materials than with popular fiction and nonfiction. It makes sense that public libraries would have

great success with lending e-reader devices that are loaded with the latest popular fiction and nonfiction, but what would an academic library load it with? According to Library Journal's 2010 Survey on the Penetration of Ebook Use, academic libraries are buying the following amounts of e-books for their collections:

- 89% scholarly monographs
- 84% non-circulating reference materials
- 39% general adult non-fiction
- 18% general adult fiction
- 11% bestsellers
- 8% other

Academic libraries will need to stay in touch with their particular campus community over the next few years to see if students and faculty are receptive to using e-reader devices with the e-books they do purchase.

Conclusions

Many people (librarians included) would probably admit that they were apprehensive about the introduction of e-readers and e-books into our lives. Librarians in particular are worried about how their patrons will use this new technology. One of the biggest concerns libraries of all kinds should have, however, is if the technology keeps changing, what will libraries do with the devices and e-books they currently have? Will they still be usable and relevant? Since money is such a big issue in our economy these days, libraries are concerned (and definitely should be) about these types of issues. Each library should take its own patrons and community into consideration when talking about these devices and technologies. Conversations on these topics will continue for many years to come and librarians should be aware of everything going on so that we can be as prepared as possible for our patrons.

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