
E-books and Readers' Advisory

E-books are on the minds of publishers, authors, and readers these days. And they should be on the minds of librarians as well. As with any new format for materials, there are challenges and issues that libraries face in adding e-books to their collections. Some libraries are already invested in the process, licensing e-book collections from vendors and even circulating preloaded e-book readers to users. Other institutions are waiting to see how the market shakes out and whether a platform neutral e-book format will make it possible for libraries to support any e-book user, regardless of whether they use a Kindle, a Nook, an iPad, a Sony Reader, or one of the other myriad readers out there. Beyond the collection and technological issues, e-book readers also offer readers' advisors some new challenges in working with users. Any time a new format is introduced in libraries, we need to look at how that format affects the reader's approach to the material. In the following piece, Katie Dunneback gives an overview of e-books and readers' advisory that is a useful opening of the discussion of how we incorporate e-books into our practice as readers advisors. Dunneback is Consultant with East Central Library Services in Bettendorf, Iowa, where she is one of the lead providers of readers' advisory continuing education. She has presented programs on e-books and RA/library issues for Library Journal's E-book Summit, "eBooks: Libraries at the Tipping Point"; the 2011 Iowa Small Library Online Conference; and the 2011 Tools of Change Conference. Dunneback is coauthor of the Everything Romance chapter in *Integrated Advisory Service: Breaking Through the Book Boundary to Better Serve Library Users*. She is a member of the Iowa Center for the Book Advisory Board and was a member of the inaugural The Reading List Council in 2007.—Editor

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From the first e-text keyed in to a computer file using plain vanilla ASCII by Michael Hart at the University of Illinois in 1971 (it was the Declaration of Independence), the usage and development of e-books have grown by leaps and bounds.¹ As the speed of progress with regard to e-book technology is also ever increasing, this article will focus on an overview of considerations for technology, collection development and circulation issues, and providing advisory services for e-books in libraries. E-books have been freed from the Pandora's box in the library world. We cannot stuff them back in and must figure out how to deal with the issues surrounding them.

TECHNICAL ISSUES

The first point of business to understand is that e-books do not enjoy the same sort of protections under copyright law

as physical books do. The First Sale Doctrine is the exception to copyright law that allows for the transfer and disposal of a lawfully acquired and tangible copy of a work.² This is the section of copyright law that allows for libraries to operate in a lawful manner. In *Complete Copyright*, Carrie Russell notes that with the passage of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) of 1998, one of the unresolved issues was the “creation of a ‘digital first sale doctrine.’” Digital copies appear to still be subject to the First Sale Doctrine as long as they are tied to a tangible medium such as a CD or DVD.³

With intangible digital copies, you have lost the right to dispose of it as you wish (other than outright deleting it) and are in effect licensing access to a file. To control the access according to the license, publishers assign what is known as digital rights management (DRM) to files. DMCA essentially bars libraries from purchasing electronic copies of books themselves, setting up a file server, and distributing the files to their patrons as they see fit without the content creator’s explicit consent on each transaction. It could be done if your library wanted to set itself up as a direct distributor of a publisher’s titles rather than going through a vendor, but as you are still only licensing access, a library would have to invest significant money and manpower in developing a robust system that would appease content providers who insist on the presence of DRM. In this time of decreasing budgets and increased demand of library services, each institution must determine where they will get the most bang for their buck. Currently, I am unaware of any library dealing directly with publishers as direct distributor.

If you do decide to go with a commercial distributor or invest in the development of a distribution system of your own, file formats should be your number one consideration. Project Gutenberg continues to code their books as plain vanilla ASCII as “99% of the hardware and software a person is likely to run into can read and search these files.”⁴ In September 2007, the EPUB format was adopted by the International Digital Publishing Forum (IDPF) as the standard format for digital publications.⁵ Publishers and distributors use many other formats, some of which are proprietary in nature. Many publishers, as already mentioned, also use DRM to restrict unauthorized access to the files. DRM code exists separately from file format code, but they are sometimes used in conjunction with each other to control access to e-book files, such as with Amazon’s Kindle files. In order to access a file that has been encoded with DRM, users need to have access to the key to unlock it. As most publishers license Adobe’s DRM code, this means users will need to have an Adobe account tied to the device they are using to access the file. Anonymous authorization is available, but the file cannot then be transferred to another device. The same is true for Amazon’s proprietary DRM. It is possible for multiple copies of an e-book to have the same filetype (.epub) but different DRM schemes, thereby forcing a user to need access to multiple programs to unlock each copy of the file.⁶ If an EPUB format book is encoded with DRM, it is no longer considered the open version of the format.

And with that, we come to one of the cruxes of the discussion: e-book readers. You need to factor it into your readers’ advisory interview. If your library offers an e-book service, can the reader the patron will be using access those books? Almost any computerized device these days has the capability of being an e-book reader if it has the right software installed. Computers can be e-book readers and probably are the most versatile devices when it comes to file formats. The drawback is most people don’t want to do their leisure reading on a computer, especially if they spend most of their day working at a computer. E-ink technology devices like the Amazon Kindle, Sony Reader, and Barnes and Noble Nook, to name the three most popular as of this writing, provide the most book-like reading experience. However, the Amazon Kindle proprietary DRM code is not currently compatible with the systems of e-book providers for libraries. An additional concern about the e-ink technology available in the United States is that it currently only reproduces images and text in black and white. Illustrated content, like graphic novels, is less successful on e-ink readers. This is where LCD based systems like the iPad, iPod Touch, and nookColor excel. In November 2010, the *New York Times* reported on the announcement of color e-ink technology by a Chinese company, Hanvon.⁷ I would safely speculate on the arrival of color e-ink technology in the North American market in the next two years, which will broaden the appeal of e-ink e-book readers. As it is in 2010, we have seen the price threshold of \$100 for a dedicated e-book reader broken—by \$1, but broken nonetheless—with the Aluratek Libre. As the price barrier lowers, libraries will likely see an increasing number of e-book adopters. These will include tech-savvy younger users as well as those older users with sight issues who may appreciate the ability to resize text.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT AND CIRCULATION

Collection development of any sort is dependent upon awareness. If we are to develop effective and useful collections for our patrons, we must be aware what titles are out there. There are a number of ways to accomplish this in the e-book world. Many traditionally published popular titles are also being released as e-books these days, but it is important to be aware of any that may have a delayed digital release. *Library Journal*’s Barbara Hoffert has begun to include e-book ISBN’s in her Prepub Alerts.⁸ The *USA Today* best-seller list includes notations for e-books for those titles where the e-book format was the most-purchased format.⁹ On November 10, 2010, the *New York Times* announced it will be compiling a best-seller list for e-books.¹⁰ Obviously, e-books have become entrenched in the public consciousness. What about the books which may not make the best-seller lists? The “midlist” authors? For books where a print edition exists, we can turn to standard review outlets such as *Publishers Weekly* and *Library Journal*. But what about those which do not have a print edition? *Library Journal* is exploring the possibilities

of expanding their reviews to include digital-first or digital-only titles.¹¹ Outside of the traditional broad coverage review outlets, librarians should also pay attention to genre-specific outlets like RT Book Reviews which include reviews of digital-first and digital-only titles. For previews of books, librarians are one of the target audiences for the NetGalley service where publishers make digital advance reader copies available for review. Book bloggers are another rising outlet for publisher publicity efforts, and these readers tend to read broadly in terms of both content as well as format.

In personal conversations with *Library Journal's* Heather McCormack, we have discussed the issue of titles in digital format that are not available for library distribution. This is a significant concern. A number of rising star authors currently have some titles only available in a digital format and are not necessarily available for distribution to libraries. Examples of this are specialty and independent presses whose business model is that of digital-first/-only (DF/DO) publishing. This is a point where libraries need to become involved in conversations with publishers to work out mutually beneficial solutions. A number of DF/DO publishers are making their books available to libraries through third-party vendors. As the economy and the publishing market change, I believe we will be seeing more and more DF/DO publishers crop up and established publishers move to a DF/DO business model either fully themselves or by spinning off new divisions and imprints. One example of this is Carina Press, a division of Harlequin Enterprises, Ltd. Launched in June 2010, Carina Press has made a splash in the romance genre with authors already popular in the e-book market as well as authors with print publishing histories. They have recently begun republishing Jennifer Greene's early titles, so if you are looking for replacement copies, you are going to have to go digital. A more prominent example of an author going digital is Stephen King with his short story, "UR," currently only available through Amazon. With the proselytizing of the advantages of digital self-publishing by author J. A. Konrath, as well as similar ventures by popular marketing entrepreneur and public speaker Seth Godin, we may be seeing more and more popular authors bypassing traditional publishing ventures for some, if not all, of their future work.

Circulation of popular titles is always an issue. E-books are generally treated the same as physical copies of books when it comes to circulation. If the library owns one "copy" of the digital format, it can only be lent out to one person at a time under the model currently employed by most distributors. This is the scheme that DRM facilitates. There are multiple lending schemes libraries have employed to facilitate access to digital format titles. One of the more popular schemes is to engage a vendor like NetLibrary or Overdrive to provide content while the patrons provide the devices on which to read the content. Some libraries have chosen to provide devices onto which they load the titles. For libraries employing this scheme and using devices that can access a store, patron-driven acquisition is sometimes also deployed. Putting the power of acquisition in the hands of patrons can

be at once empowering and also in need of careful management. There are a couple of drawbacks to the scheme of providing the devices themselves. The first is that the license for the operating software may prohibit usage by libraries. This is a concern to discuss with your institution's legal counsel when considering this option. The other is how many devices the library will own in proportion to the number of titles. If all of the devices are out, that can make the entire digital collection unavailable to the remainder of your patrons even if the titles are not in use by the person currently in possession of the device. The benefit to the library lending out e-book readers is for the section of their population who do not have Internet access or a personal computer at home, let alone an e-book reader. Ultimately, there is no one perfect solution to this dilemma.

ADVISORY SERVICES

Books are the brand of libraries. All formats of books. All Formats. With the need of an intermediary technology on which to read the story, e-books present a fascinating area of advisory for librarians. We need to be able to be advisors of technology in addition to content. As we have seen with audiobooks, the format you use to access the story expands the appeal factors of the content. Library patrons come to us for help in figuring out the best possible reading experience. With audiobooks, as long as the patron had a device that played the physical format, it didn't matter what the device was because the device itself contributed minimally to the reading experience. With e-book readers, this is not the case.

Display options are the most easily understood component in determining appeal factors in regards to e-book readers. Readers utilizing e-ink technology can achieve an immersive experience similar to reading a print book. Keep in mind that the quality of the resolution will vary from brand to brand and model to model as new generations are released. Also you need to be aware of any additional technology layers, such as touch screens, added to the viewing panel. While the addition of a touch screen will degrade resolution, it will allow for the user to move pages by using their fingers as opposed to buttons, which may aid in the immersive experience. The size and weight of the device are also important. Some readers prefer hardbacks to paperbacks and vice versa. The various devices can be correlated to holding a book of either size. This brings up another factor, as some people want to feel like they are still holding a book: what accessories, namely covers, are available for the devices? Library patrons' physical restrictions contribute to a satisfactory reading experience that can be helped or hindered by the reading devices available. Does the patron need to have access to very large type or text-to-speech capability? What if the patron has arthritis and can't hold a heavy device for an extended period of time? This convergence of readers' advisory and consumer information reference requires excellence in the skill set common to reference services and readers' advisory services.

As the device used to access the digital format contributes

appeal factors to the reading experience, so does the digital format alter some appeal factors considered inherent to the book reading experience. The impact of digitization of books and stories on appeal factors is most prominently felt with pacing. In her discussion of appeal factors at the “eBooks: Libraries at the Tipping Point” online conference, Neal Wyatt noted the lack of physical indication as to how much left you have of the book to read. Some e-book reading devices and software programs are able to compensate with indications of page numbers; however, this is not the same as the sensation of less than fifty pages in your right hand and you must absolutely finish the book tonight even if it’s 2:00 a.m. and you must be up at 5:00 a.m. for a critical-to-your-career meeting. The reader will need to rely entirely on narrative drive to feel the pace of the story. Pacing is also affected by how much text is visible on the screen, so the larger the text, the less there is to indicate how quickly the story is moving. As the layout of the page changes, this can also affect the tone of the story. When you see large blocks of texts on the page, this can indicate a description rich story, possibly intended to be a leisurely read, or an indulgence of rich details. Short paragraphs with lots of dialogue can mean snappy or quick-witted characters. If the visual cues are not there, will the reader tire of the story more quickly? Richly detailed books may also not be the best type of book to read on an e-book reader, especially if the reader is one who likes to do what I call the fan and scan to check for previously revealed information. It is not easy to jump between points in the book if you do not know exactly where you are going. Re-readers, particularly if they only read certain parts of the book, may find this lack of ability frustrating. There is something to be said for the spine breaks occurring where the good parts of the book are.

The readers’ advisory interview must and will evolve as e-books become more and more entrenched in library collections. Readers’ advisory trainers should begin including discussions of the technology in continuing education sessions even if their library does not currently offer e-books as part of the collection. Culturally, the traditional printed codex has become the invisible technology with regard to reading. As future generations grow up with technology on which to read e-books, and conversely as that technology “grows up,” we may find other devices that are able to occupy the same invisible space as the codex. We may even find the art of storytelling evolving to adapt to the advantages provided by digital technology, kindred the branching off of printed storytelling from oral storytelling. This emerging arena is where I think we will truly see the next phase of readers’ advisory services develop.

CONCLUSION

With the entry into digital collections, a library must consider many implications. In some ways, libraries have already dealt with issues of interlibrary loan functions with the advent of online journal collections. We must take this a step further when dealing with leisure reading collection. A great majority of library patrons have been conditioned to the availability of

most any book they are in want of through resource sharing efforts. With the cost of setting up a digital collection as well as the cost of the materials themselves, small- and medium-sized libraries may find it more cost effective to create or join a larger consortium to provide a wide range of digital content.

At the conclusion of my portion of the panel discussion on e-books and readers’ advisory at the “eBooks: Libraries at the Tipping Point” online conference, I included a slide titled “Ponderings” with two questions: “How do we serve our patrons on the ‘wrong’ side of the digital divide if the midlist goes digital and copyright/DRM does not change?” and “What are the implications of recommending titles we cannot provide as an institution?” I believe we need to address these questions as a profession as we move further into the world of e-books. A concrete solution to them isn’t likely, but knowing where we stand will allow us to move forward in conversations with publishers and content providers, and we need to have those conversations. We should invite publishing professionals to the conversations we have in our spaces and take the time to participate in the conversations happening in their spaces.

The opportunity to have an impact on the future of publishing is in our hands, and we cannot let it slip through our fingers. We are experts in connecting readers to books. Those skills will carry us into the future no matter the format. Adaptation is the hallmark of successful evolution. It’s not always easy, but with adaptation, we will be opening ourselves and our patrons to an expanded world of leisure reading opportunities.

E-BOOK RESOURCES

eReaders, eTc.—Wiki by Karen Burns outlining her likes and dislikes of the e-readers she has tested in the course of her position as part of the administrative team of the WILBOR OverDrive consortium—<http://ereaderslibs.pbworks.com>

DearAuthor.com eReader Buying Guides—<http://dearauthor.com/wordpress/tag/buying-guide>

RT Book Reviews—www.rtbookreviews.com

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NOTE FROM COLUMN EDITOR BARRY TROTT

The response to Tara Williamson's column in vol. 50, no. 3 has been so strong that I would like to refer those interested in reading more to several additional resources: Joyce Saricks' At Leisure column on Whole-Collection Readers' Advisory (*Booklist* 3/1/2011 and 4/1/2011), Katie Stover's "Reading with Your Ears: Readers' Advisory and Audio Books," (*RUSQ* vol. 42, no. 4), and Neal Wyatt's work including the last chapter in *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Nonfiction*, the Redefining RA series in *Library Journal*, and her monthly "RA Crossroads" whole collection RA column in *Booksmack!*