

The Ebook Revolution:
Concerns and Challenges for Libraries

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The Electronic Book Revolution has hit the American mainstream with the advent of the Apple Ipad, the Amazon Kindle, and the Barnes and Noble Nook, to name a few of the more popular e-readers of current times. In fact, the Ebook revolution has hit such popularity that a Google search of the simple term, "Ebooks" brings about over 23 million hits. For an avid book lover such as myself, the feel of a hardcover book, the paper, the glorious smell of cracking open the spine upon reading, the Ebook is a topic I find fascinating. For many reasons, the Ebook brings the world of print books into a technological advancement not seen since the printing press which Gutenberg invented in 1440.

The digitization of books is one of those advancements taken on by many projects across the world, the two most notable being Project Gutenberg and Google Books. Comparable to creating a digital library, these projects essentially take the work of art and bring it to the masses, much as the way the printing press did of the bible and numerous other written works. Both projects stay true that only uncopyrighted works are able to be downloaded, which is a plus for authors and publishers whose precious work needs to be protected. Another interesting aspect of the Google Books project according to its website is that it has partnered with libraries! This exciting venture keeps libraries in tune with the Google technology for both librarians and patrons, and also reminds the mainstream public just how important libraries are in the world of books and Ebooks. According to the Google Books site, "We've partnered with renowned libraries around the world to include their collections in Book Search. For Library Project books that are still in copyright, our results are like a card catalog; we show you info about the book and, generally, a few snippets of text showing your search term in context. For Library Project books that are out of copyright, however, you can read and download the entire book," allowing those libraries catalogues to be extended into the Google world, which not only provides more

exposure across the internet for the book itself, but also the public library's collection holding the book through a direct link to WorldCat. The ability to download a book is exciting for the Ebook reader whose collection has now just expanded twofold by being able to access the file through Google Books and libraries across the world. By comparison, the Project Gutenberg wiki site is also enabling the same with access to over 34,000 Ebooks in the public domain.

The history of the Ebook is one that begins with the printing press, but within the past 10 years has moved in such a rapid pace that it appears this phenomenon has become more revolutionary than its predecessor. According to the article, "Electronic Books" by Donald T. Hawkins in 2000, he claims that, "It is not a difficult conceptual jump to move from databases of article abstracts to databases of the full text of articles to Ebooks. Although one can find references to Ebooks in the professional literature at least as far back as the 1980s, as with many research endeavors, the Internet and World Wide Web have provided a major impetus to bring them out of the realm of the research laboratory and into the practical marketplace as viable consumer products," bringing to light that the concept of Ebooks is one that has been brewing for many years and one that librarians and the public should be able to grasp as easily as the internet. In fact, by comparing the Ebook format to that of the electronic database and article extraction, Hawkins brings the Ebook product into the library and academic realm. He goes on to further describe the terminology and types of Ebooks that are still used such as downloadable Ebooks and dedicated Ebook readers.

Libraries are those facilities which have brought the newest of the new technology into the realm of the public hands, given the budget is available of course. Their acceptance of the Ebook medium has been somewhat slow to the advent of the technology. An article published in the April 15th edition of Library Journal suggests that this new technology in 2000 was slow to

being embraced by librarians but that patrons were demanding the format. The article claims that librarians viewed the technology as a threat and therefore were not bringing it to the forefront for its patrons. The article continues into a case study of the Algonquin, IL public library's use of Ereaders and Ebooks and describes their use as an adventure. "At the Algonquin library, the four Rocket Ebook Readers purchased last May have been in constant circulation since August, each with long waiting' lists. Four additional readers have been added. The library has had to feel its way through staff training and new policies, but that's what makes this new adventure intriguing and satisfying," the author further supports the idea of the popularity of Ebooks, and those in the library and that the constant circulation remains proof that librarians need to be accepting of the technology as another medium rather than a challenge.

The Ebook medium needs to be reviewed by librarians as one more available tool for its patrons just as it promotes the use of the internet and social networking tools. When looked at in this type of manner, Ebooks become a technological tool, much like Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, email, reference text services, online catalogue searches and other web enabled programs used by the library everyday. In the article, "The Mental Geography of Ebooks" by Tony Horava, he describes just how vast the use of an Ebook in the cultural and conceptual view as, "The telescoping of space and time provides a highly flexible form for dialogue and exchange, but even more important is the radically new dimension of how collaborative space can function not only as an "intersubjective" exchange but also simultaneously with other forms of scholarly engagement." When breaking down this clever statement, Horava determines that the digital format of the Ebook being highly flexible is also highly collaborative, a use of Ebooks probably not considered before. Horava brings about the notion that Ebooks are more than just a digitized

copy of a printed book, but a tool for sharing much like that of other social networking tools named.

In the article, “The Future of the Ebook Reader is not the Future of Ebooks,” Nancy Herther examines many positives and negatives of the Ebook and the technologies of the Ebook readers. She makes a statement that, “On the other hand, in his book *Everything Bad Is Good For You :How Today's Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter* (Riverhead Trade Books, 2006), Steven Johnson claims that all the TV people watch and all the video games they play actually help develop different parts of their brains, especially as these products have grown more complex and demanding over time. Whichever scenario you pick, statistics seem to indicate an important cultural trend is arising,” pointing to not only a popular book but also knowledge that indeed not everything bad is truly bad. The Ebook therefore often thought of as bad to the printed book, the world of librarians and that of the reader is not necessarily bad, but offers evidence that brain development is actually impacted in a positive manner simply because of the use of the technology and its complexity. She continues to discuss the flexible nature of the Ebook both and its thriving nature in alternative formats, perhaps even through the constant reinventing of products and changing users perceptions.

Changing perceptions of a reader is perhaps the biggest revolution in the Ebook medium. Horava describes this changing perception as the Ebook, “creates a new understanding of the function of browsing, as it relates to our desire to spawn new expressions of the self through the generation of new narrative expressions.” The perception of the user in Ebooks can compare most to that of current social networking tools and their ability to share. As Horava uses the term ‘expressions of the self’, so do users of social networking tools as they Tweet, or post a photo on Flickr, or write on a friend’s wall in Facebook, the user is expressing one’s self. The

reader also becomes one involved in technology through using these technologies and engaging in sharing. Through the use of Ebooks, a reader and the perception of just who a reader is, perhaps seen as someone 'bookish' or uninvolved in the world around them, becomes just the opposite. The function of browsing, once done in the bookstore by browsing bookshelves or done through the internet by browsing pages, is now also done with the Ebook reader, browsing through Ebooks and sharing Ebooks with friends. This sharing concept makes reading a social event once again, different from that of a book club, while still keeping the solitary peace most readers enjoy.

This underlying nature of sharing, sharing books, thoughts, words on 'paper' through the Ebook format is one that is truly revolutionary. It is through these ideas that makes the technology unique for libraries, and different from that of just databases and article searches.

The nature of the Ebook is also making it possible to bring the concept of reading and books into a new technological world expanding its consumer and reading base. The Ebook industry is a business, one that can be looked at as an extension or arm of the publishing world. While publishers are in the business of making money, as librarians, our goals are much more culturally inept, wanting to bring the love of reading, literacy and literature to the public, and make the access available for free. One of the Ebook challenges is that of copyright and bringing materials to the public for free so that libraries can maintain free access for all. Google Books for instance is one of the major controversies recently settled to the delight of those who own the copyrighted material. Yet, the Ebook medium and access of those Ebooks is not without its controversies.

There are debates over the lack of industry standards in Ebook formats, Ebook readers, copyrighting and piracy. There are debates over the mere idea of Ebooks and their concept as the demise of print books. There are also debates on money, who makes the money and how much money is made through the publishing of Ebooks. Librarians are not strangers to these debates and one could compare these arguments to that of the rise of the internet still going on today.

Some of these downfalls of the Ebook are outlined in Hawkin's article, those being several items that users should consider when using Ebooks and Ereaders. Some readers may not be able to visually adjust with such physical components as the printed word vs. the digital word and the ease of reading on a digital device. Others may feel the lighting of the screen on the reader is not sufficient or too imposing such as on a backlit screen. Pagination is also another physical component readers may not like, especially when referencing the book, for example on a printed book, page 42 may be different than the Ebook page 42. Hawkins does also say that Ebooks are not for everyone.

Other controversies of the Ebook and the Ereader in public libraries involves creating policies and enabling users to interact with the machines in ways that benefit the reader and also keep the investment of the library intact. According to the "Don't Be Afraid of Ebooks" article from Library Journal, "The circulation department had to make decisions about checkout periods, renewal policies, and overdue charges. Three-week checkout, no renewal, and dollar-a-day overdue fines have worked out well, allowing patrons time to enjoy the reader's mass storage features but also rotating them to many waiting patrons," creating such policies appeared to be a win-win situation for this particular library. Yet, the library manager must also be mindful that these policies need to be fluid in order to keep up with the needs of the patron and the uses of the

technology. There is unfortunately no one policy that works for every library, just as there is not a singular policy that works for printed material. Libraries must be considerate that they are competitive with other area libraries in providing Ebook material in order to keep their patrons happy so the patrons don't stop using the service because of a bad policy.

The article, "Ebooks and Beyond, The Challenge of Public Libraries," makes a strong statement in its opening paragraph, "go digital or die" referring to the publishing industry making books available online in a variety of formats. The challenge of the public library becomes, embrace those digital books or you may die too, needing to assess the impacts technology such as the Ipad makes on the services the library offers. The author continues by saying, "Libraries need to pay closer attention to their market, their users, and adjust service types and service delivery models accordingly," comparing the library to that of a business in which they must meet the needs of their customers. The question and controversy of whether or not a library should offer Ebooks or if the Ebook is truly a threat to the library and the librarian become obsolete arguments when the other choice is to die a slow death. If the publishers are embracing the Ebook technology, and the library does not, then the patrons of the library will most likely go where the books are. The article concludes with the statement that, "The time is ripe for all libraries to analyze and implement Ebook and e-audiobook solutions tailored to their communities. Indeed, if library managers delay in this area, the coming explosion of e-readers and related electronic resources will overtake the community's patience for libraries to deliver such services," further supporting the needs of the Ebook and what the outcome will be for libraries who fail to embrace the service. The library must be seen as being on the forefront of the Ebook technology and its availability to the patrons it serves in order to stay relevant to them.

The biggest controversy of the Ebook phenomenon is the issue of access and copyright with Library Journal writer, Jason Griffey stating his famous phrase, “publishers that restrict content in an attempt to control it in the same way as they can control a print book are fighting a losing battle.” His statement brings about the notion of access, and in the public library setting, access is one area done best, making access of information a major reason patrons use the library. Yet, the Ebook challenge makes this a unique situation because even with digital restriction management software, which puts limits on the use of digital material such as Ebooks, access becomes the issue instead of the format of the medium. Griffey continues, “No single average member of the public can afford to purchase all of the potential information he/she may want to access, and so libraries distribute that financial burden across the public as a whole, acting both as collective buyer for their community and as access point. Libraries are clearly managing a problem in society. We need to think harder about what we are doing that commits us to the preservation of those same problems,” bringing to light that perhaps sometimes it’s the library and/or the librarian that is perpetuating the problem of lack of access. The library solves the problem as collective buyer of books for the masses, and the librarian must ask him/herself if through their internal Ebook policies and not using enough of their publishing influence they are perfecting their own self-fulfilling prophecy of creating such unattainable access for fear of copyright or license infringement. Just as the librarian is afraid of the threat of the Ebook, are they indeed creating the threat? Ebook polices must remain as technologically inept as the Ebook itself, and Griffey suggests even implementing a different policy for Ebooks as for print books because of the format. Librarians are champions of advocacy for libraries, the physical space, the print book, and they must also be advocates for the Ebook before someone else takes

the reins. The librarian must set the standard and the status quo with the publishing world in order to take the control back of the disbursement in their library.

Another controversy that must be addressed is that of what is commonly known as the “digital divide” both in terms of the patron and the library materials. Many libraries simply do not have the funds for Ebooks, the software needed, the ability to purchase the Ereaders needed to read the Ebooks. This inequity of dollars means an inequity of not only the Ebooks and Ereaders as physical materials in the library, but also an inequity in service. As publishers, distributors and manufactures make their products more expensive, despite their popularity, a library that is simply not able to afford the service is at a disadvantage and so are its patrons. Those patrons are also probably the most in need of technological services in order to stay above the digital divide for the education of its teens and young adults, but adults as well.

The future of Ebooks and their use in public libraries is most befitting when thinking of the access public libraries provide. According to the recent LJ/SLJ Virtual Ebook Summit research, circulation of Ebooks will rise approximately 84% in public libraries, 77% in academic libraries and 65% in school libraries. Such large increases are expected in one year, and a library directory must be ready to keep up with such demand.

The question for librarians and public libraries then becomes not about the access but how do they make this access available to its patrons in order to stay relevant, overcome the digital divide and provide services the library can afford. These constant challenges seem to be difficult, yet ideas are coming about that are making it possible to overcome.

In 2005, the Illinois State Library received a grant to make Ebooks available to its patrons, many in rural communities. The project was called, “We Can Do It” and the library

received \$130,000 from the Library Services and Technology Act making some of the challenges in Ebook service less of a problem. According to the article in the ILA Reporter, “This far-reaching cooperative project has created Ebook branches in forty-two libraries in four library systems. A potential service population of nearly 425,000 is served by the public, school, and combined public/school libraries,” bringing about Ebooks to numerous patrons across Illinois. What makes this grant award even better is that it fulfilled a need for these libraries that was not part of their service before as none of the libraries had an ebranch before being a recipient of the grant award.

Another unique tactic that which was briefly discussed in the September 1st edition of Library Journal, “A new report released by the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), "Ebook Feasibility Study for Public Libraries," includes a call for a national library buying pool to purchase Ebooks--a tactic likely to face pushback from publishers and distributors. The slightly weaker (though far more prevalent) formulation offered is to increase pressure on vendors and publishers, thus pushing for lower prices, standardized formats, and fewer digital rights management (DRM) restrictions. But libraries face firm opposition from publishers, according to the report.” Such buying power do libraries hold, and more importantly as a collective group. The pressure they will place on publishers as a result of such efforts is no doubt going to help the publishing industry see that without the millions of dollars of purchases from libraries, their business will suffer. The outcome may be a compromise, the solution may not be in the next year, but the underlying notion that the buying pool can increase the access of Ebooks to library patrons is an idea that should not be abandoned.

For scholars and students, Ebooks can according to Horava provides them, “with powerful new discovery tools, as new relations, associations, and influences revealed and shared

and new linkages across discipline.” The future of Ebooks for students and scholars becomes a world that is full of even more discovery provided by the printed book through its technological ability to share and advance research in an environment that is ever changing and supportive of such techniques.

Such discoveries and future involvement of Ebooks makes the technology even more exciting, especially for libraries. As stated, “The future of Ebooks and reading is far more complex than any single Ebook reader or internet site could ever satisfy. Following the examples of cell phones and other successful innovations, maybe we need to begin by looking at the "book" as the complicated technology that it truly is and in all the forms that it has presented itself -- from children's classics (like Pat the Bunny) to art books to popup books to atlases to cookbooks to religious classics and more. Another important issue involves reading tastes and practices. Perhaps it's time, also, to uncouple reading from books and focus on the needs, interests, and tastes of particular types of users,” the technology of Ebooks and the concept of reading is evergrowing, everchanging, and as mobile as the reader.

The future of Ebooks is far more complex than any single reader or site could satisfy because every reader is so different in the subjects they enjoy reading. One reader may be focused on books in a particular genre such as young-adult, children, mystery, or science fiction while another reader may enjoy reading all types of books from non-fiction and fiction genres. This unique nature of the reader is what makes the Ebook technology so fascinating and fluid.

What also makes this quoted statement so powerful is its acceptance of the book as a technology. The book whether in printed or electronic format is a complicated form of technology from the words put together into paragraphs by an author to the thought behind plot

construction. The paper book uses such technological details such as cover art, paper type, font style and binding, while the electronic books uses elements from the paper such as art and font, the physical nature of the paper and binding is constructed with the Ereader. The Ereader being the advancement that so many publishers and booksellers, for example those of the Nook and Kindle want to make faster, prettier, and hopefully to the advantage of the patron, more accessible.

The Ebook being such a complicated being cannot be easily summed up, and the highlights provided here are interesting details being talked about in the world of libraries and librarians. The revolution the Ebook publishers and readers have started is not going to be sideswiped such as that of Microfiche and even now what is happening with the CD-Rom. The use of mobile technology and the personal nature of sharing through technology are advancements librarians must embrace as the world did the printing press. The only way Ebooks, Ereaders and the “electronic” revolution of books will enhance a reader’s experience rather than defeat its love will be through such acceptance. Considering Ebooks as complimentary rather than a struggle to the library and its services can only expand its popularity in the community because of its ability to bring books and literature together with our digital world.

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