

# Chapter 7

## E-Books in Digital Libraries

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter will introduce a definition and an analysis of user needs when reading electronic books. The way users interact with e-books is explored in a section on e-reading with an overview of different types of readings and their implications on design. Finally the description of an evaluation initiative aimed at studying e-book usability in context, the Active Reading Track in INEX is provided. Specific attention will be paid to the role e-books play in academia and the studies that look into visibility, popularity and accessibility of electronic titles with students and scholars.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The printed book (p-book) as a means of storing and presenting information has a long history and is now firmly embedded in modern culture with an associated infrastructure of bookshops and libraries. The public library system was set up in order to guarantee access to the printed word for all. Recent developments in computer technology have led to the development of the electronic book (e-book), basically the contents of a book made available to the reader in electronic form. For such a young market, the e-book market has

seen various formats come and go. First the CD-ROM based book and then the dedicated e-book reading device have appeared and subsequently disappeared, largely because of the increased development of the World Wide Web and its ability to deliver interactive multimedia content to a desktop PC.

Public libraries have generally been slow to react to the arrival of e-books, not least because they usually lack the resources necessary to undertake the required research and development work. However, some studies have been conducted in conjunction with public library authorities. For example, McKnight and Dearnley (McKnight & Dearnley, 2003) reported on a study undertaken

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in 2001/2002 in which Rocket eBook dedicated devices were loaned to library patrons in the same way that books were loaned. They found that in addition to lukewarm reactions to the devices from patrons, institutional considerations generally militated against the lending of dedicated hardware. Dearnley, McKnight & Morris (Dearnley et al, 2004) report on a study in which general purpose PDA devices were loaned to library patrons in order to read e-books. They note that in order to read fiction, linear reading which stirs the imagination and offers an 'escape', an e-book platform must be comfortable and usable for extended periods of time. The PDAs lacked this potential in terms of both display size and battery life.

As noted above, the Web has become the dominant delivery medium in many areas and various content providers now offer a service to libraries through which their patrons can download e-books to their home PC. Libraries typically do not have a research and development budget within which to develop and test such services. Additionally, the providers tend to be US-based, with the consequent bias to the books on offer through their system.

The development of the Web has also been fuelled by the improved network infrastructure and increased speed of access via broadband. However, while many people now have the ability to download files with relative ease and at reasonable speed, e-books are still relatively expensive for individual readers and require considerable effort to seek them out.

There exists a considerable number of free e-books available over the Web, which has been increased dramatically by the growing number of initiatives for scanning and making available on-line large collection of existing titles. In fact, next to well established large repositories of free e-books for humanities such as those produced by Project Gutenberg<sup>1</sup> and Oxford Text Archive (OTA), there is now a flourishing of digitisation projects such the Million Books<sup>2</sup> and Google Print<sup>3</sup> aiming at giving access to even larger corpora of

books in electronic format via web interfaces. As these are getting increasingly sophisticated and effective it is reasonable to suggest that the dream of a real digital library to guarantee access to the digital word for all is going to come true very soon.

However, their use is limited for the average reader by few well-known factors. The first is in finding them: they are scattered across many sites with no obvious organising principle even within sites. Once found, the books lack a suitable interface to make reading/using them easy and enjoyable. While both these issues are being addressed by researchers, users complain about the limited (when it comes to currency) choice of available books and the fact that still it is mainly old material to be scanned and made available on line, which is a problem for publishers to solve hopefully when redefining their market strategies.

## **2. VISIBILITY**

Visibility is becoming an even more crucial issue as many more titles than before are made available on-line. Finding the right title in a readable format is a very tricky task, and it is not a coincidence that the most popular e-commerce site for books, Amazon has acquired a large e-book seller, MobyPocket.com and is currently behind the most successful e-readers on the market: Kindle and Kindle II. Among the other famous features that have made the fortune of Amazon the use of user profile and collaborative filtering in order to suggest what to buy next, make it a very interesting combination. Amazon offers a combination of search, browse and filtering in a very easy to use interface, providing users with a combination of pull and push strategies so that it is almost impossible to miss a title available. Ideally, an equally supportive, effective and easy to use system could be designed to allow for access e-books in an e-library environment. The library metaphor should be kept at a high level in order to take advantage of the existing user familiarity

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