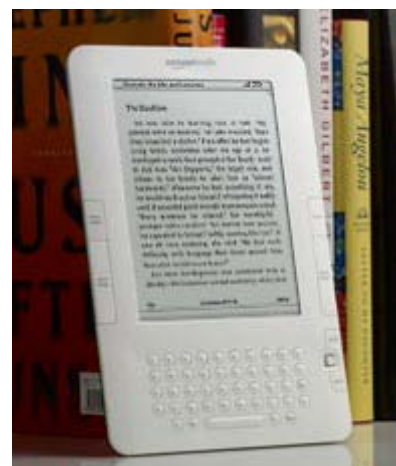




Ralph Scott

An iPad, a Nook and a Kindle



The Wired to the World editor recently had a chance to explore an iPad, a Nook and a Kindle. A group of these e-book readers were purchased recently as test beds for potential e-book reader public loaner machines in Joyner Library at East Carolina University. A number of issues still have to be worked out regarding the payment method by which books are actually downloaded to the devices for public use. In the meantime it was interesting to watch people compare the three e-book readers. The hands down favorite for glitz and show was the iPad. New users were simply spellbound by the color screen and interactive display. After one look at the color iPad, people discarded the Nook and Kindle as poor black and white second choices. The book reader in the iPad is significantly better than the readers in the two other e-book machines. Many prospective purchasers don't even know that if you want a Kindle, there is a Kindle app for the iPad! However the Apple e-book reader is of a much better design and will probably soon become the standard for others to try to match. Turning pages is done with an intuitive flip of the finger. The iPad also has a large number of apps you can download and also includes e-mail reader programs [Microsoft Exchange, AOL, etc.], iTunes and

Safari [the Apple web browser]. The iPad functions much as a small laptop or netbook computer would work, plus it has the really great e-book reader. However multi-tasking is not possible and the iPad is physically larger and more bulky to carry than the two other e-book readers. There are two versions of the iPad: Wi-Fi [\$499] and 3G [\$629]. This price is for the 16GB version, 32GB [\$599, \$729] and 64 GB [\$699, \$829] versions are also available. The cheaper Wi-Fi versions work on home, private and public Wi-Fi networks. The 3G version works anywhere AT&T cell phone service is available. Various versions of the device are available with increasing expensive memory modules. The iPad is available at various Apple stores and computer retail outlets. The manual for the iPad is available via the Web, which is not particularly handy when you are out of range of a network. The iPad also has auto-page rotation which means that you can switch from horizontal format to vertical format by just turning the device. You can sync the device with your computer just like you do for an iPod. It is not possible to multi-task with the iPad, and Java based applications will not work at present on the device. The iPad has a built-in electronic touch keyboard.

The Kindle tested is a second generation model that is currently selling for \$189 in a Wi-Fi version. This is a considerable reduction from the earlier introductory price of almost \$500. The Kindle can be purchased directly from Amazon on the Web or at retail outlets such as Target and Best Buy. The Kindle is smaller and lighter in weight, something to think about in an e-book reader you are going to hold in your hand. The main drawback of the Kindle is the five-function control switch. This takes some getting used to and is not particularly intuitive. How you poke the switch around to do various functions can be frustrating to learn. It's not particularly clear for example how you advance the selection bar down to the next line on the screen. Several people found this to be a frustrating navigation issue when they first tried to use the Kindle. The Kindle folks have designed one switch to do a variety of tasks. It's called the five function switch because it moves in four directions, plus you can press it in (#5). There are also four buttons on the side of the Kindle that move the pages forward and back and do other various tasks that you have to read the manual to find out about. A copy of the Kindle manual is supplied with the machine. It is fairly long and covers all the tasks that the Kindle can do.

The screen is easy to read and the type size can be changed for those who have vision issues. The Kindle comes in two versions, the six inch original version (\$189) and the nine inch DX (\$489). Both versions have “global wireless” [more about this later!] through AT&T [i.e. 3G network]. The smaller version does not have a native PDF reader and you have to first convert the PDF files to an intermediate format for reading on the Kindle. The nine inch version has a built in PDF file reader. The more expensive Kindle has the auto-rotation feature, while the \$189 version has book rotation with a manual switch. The Kindle bookstore claims to have 600,000 books and you can download 1.8 million books from the Internet Archive [www.archive.org] using a beta Kindle download program that translates the archive files into ones that can be read on the Kindle. The batteries will last longer in the Kindle if you turn the network connection off. You can use the USB connector to charge up the Kindle or connect it up to your computer. It is possible to download audio books with the Kindle and listen to them via the built-in speakers. A simple Web browser is included and it works with the Internet up to a point. The browser is listed as an experimental feature of Kindle and will not download all Web sites, especially those that are graphically intensive. In short it is a poor substitute for Safari. The Kindle has a small button keyboard at the bottom of the screen.

The Nook is sold at Barnes and Noble stores and selected other retailers, and comes in two versions: Wi-Fi for \$149 and a Wi-Fi + 3G version for \$199. It is smaller than the Kindle and uses a second color screen for navigation

in place of the five function switch found on the Kindle. The second color screen I think is actually an improvement in functionality over the switch; however, the e-book text you read is still in black and white. The Nook has an added feature that allows you to “rent” your e-books to friends for up to 18 days at a time. To transfer these e-books to a friend’s device [computer, Nook, or handheld] you need to download the Nook e-book reader software which you can get at iTunes [for which of course you need to have an iTunes account]. The Nook also has a beta version of a browser, but I was unable to test it out because it would not connect with my local Wi-Fi network. Most networks require an ID/Password and it’s not clear yet how to input this information into the Nook. The Nook would connect up with my network, but then it was dropped because the required login was not provided. Like the Kindle, the Nook also includes a built-in dictionary. The Nook also has a beta version of the free in-store e-book reader that allows you to read complete books. A chess game and Sudoku are included with the Nook. Barnes and Noble claims that you can read for “up to ten days” with the wireless turned off. This “feature” was not tested, although battery drain did seem a little less with the Nook than the other readers. On the other hand this might be simply because I could not get the Wi-Fi to work. The Nook reads PDF files in native format along with several other file formats including JPG, GIF, PNG, BMP, but not the Kindle Amazon AMZ formatted files. Since the Nook is the lightest weight of the three readers I guess if I were going to read for “up to ten days” away from a power source, then I might prefer the Nook. Some people

actually found the Nook easier to use than the Kindle and it is certainly less bulky than the iPad. The Nook has a built-in electronic touch keyboard that is sort of small, hard to get to and use.

E-book readers are growing in popularity and they certainly make sense for those who travel and want to carry a large number of books with them and don’t want to pack several boxes of books to take along. They even would be useful for occasional light reading and are certainly handy gadgets to have. However they still do have some major drawbacks. For one they are still relatively expensive compared to a \$4.00 paperback at the airport bookstore. For another, you don’t actually, as Kindle users found out recently, own the books you bought, you rent them! You pay about the same price as you do for even hardbacks on sale for your e-book, but ownership of the e-books rests with the vendor and they can be taken back at will anytime they wish when you connect up with the network. And speaking of networks, I decided to take my three e-book readers with me down to the River to the cottage to see how they would work there. Wouldn’t you know that major portions of eastern North Carolina are in a deep communications black hole that is not served by the AT&T network! Just look at the service map for AT&T and you will see what I mean. Just like telephones, while some people use cell phones, others still cling to their land-line phones, so e-book readers will be liked by some, while others will want to hang on to their paper copies. A longer article documenting the progress made with public access E- book readers at East Carolina is forthcoming.

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Electronic articles can be submitted online at <http://www.ncl.ecu.edu>

- To submit you must login; if needed you can register using the link in the header.
- We use the *Chicago Manual of Style* (15th edition, 2003).
- We have a rolling deadline, articles are juried when received.
- Publication of approved articles is in about 3-9 months depending on space available.
- For additional information, contact Ralph Scott scottr@ecu.edu.