

To Kindle or Not to Kindle, That is the Question!

I recently asked a library director if he was planning to purchase any e-book readers for patron check-outs in his library system. The response I got was basically “Not on my watch!” It’s interesting to me that librarians who are often quick to espouse all sorts of radical opinions revolving around the general concept of “freedom to read,” suddenly get cold feet when confronted with new technologies. I can remember director resistance to: microfilm, maps, Cliff Notes, what was then called “audio-visuals,” talking books, NetLibrary, computers, laptops, netbooks, cell phones, internet access, art in libraries, plants in libraries, food in libraries, cats in libraries - the list goes on. You get it idea. Today the favorite new tool to boot out the library is the e-book reader.

This is sad, because like it or not, e-book readers in some form are here to stay. For my review of some current e-book devices, see the Wired to the World column in this issue entitled “A Pad, a Nook and a Kindle.” It seems sad that given the current economy that libraries would not at least make some attempt at providing free e-book readers on loan to patrons. Yes, I know there are issues regarding downloading the books on these readers, but I believe we can work out these issues so that our patrons can use these handy portable devices. Not everyone will be happy with these readers, just like some are not happy with microfilm, but increasingly I believe e-book readers will become widespread in our society. Recently the Department of Education has issued a reminder to all educational systems that accessibility is mandated for all required classroom devices [<http://campustechnology.com/articles/2010/06/29/department-of-ed-lays-down-law-on-kindle-e-reader-usage.aspx>]. In its re-affirmation of the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 the Department of Education “ask[s] that you take steps to ensure that your college or university refrains from requiring the use of the any electronic book reader, or other similar technology, in a teaching or classroom environment as long as the device remains inaccessible to individuals who are blind or have low vision.” The key here is that the request pertains to “teaching or classroom environment” which would not necessarily include voluntary use in a library. Many libraries also have other reading devices for blind and low vision readers and the State Library has a division that supports the blind and visually handicapped. Why not give e-book readers a try in your library? I think you will find that some patrons will like using them.

Letters to the editor should be addressed to the editor and sent to Joyner Library, East Fifth Street, Greenville, NC 27858, or by electronic mail (scottr@ecu.edu). We reserve the right to edit all submissions. If you are interested in writing for *North Carolina Libraries* or would like consideration for news and product information, please send brief information to the editor at the above address.

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