OPEN
ACCESS E-BOOKS

By Jennifer Dekker

L ibraries have changed so much over the last 25 years that readers at least occasionally lament the loss of printed book collections and a cherished, if nostalgic, ideal of what a library is. Quiet spaces have been replaced by computing centres, foyers are home to coffee bars, and browsing library shelves may not offer as many treasures as it once did. The days of getting lost in a mass of interesting, eclectic, old, and lovely books sometimes feel as though they are over.

But electronic content, and specifically e-books, has advantages for both library and reader. Aside from saving space on library shelves, e-books provide clients with a vast range of material for low cost. Some e-book collections offer features that a printed book never could: links to knowledge tools such as dictionaries or atlases, the ability to instantly change text size, and excellent search functions. E-books also offer historical content that many libraries would never have been able to acquire in print. The research value of these texts is undeniable.

Being able to take full advantage of e-books can be challenging though, especially when they are available on various platforms, have unique collection features, and look completely different onscreen. Regardless, when one can read the original text written by the Venerable Bede, or Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (or Tacitus, or Virgil, and so on), the advantages of e-books make challenges seem insignificant by comparison.

Here are a few open access e-book collections to consider:

PERSEUS DIGITAL LIBRARY (A.K.A. PERSEUS HOPPER)
www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper

Perseus's flagship collection, started in 1987, covers the history, literature, and culture of the Greco-Roman world. Newer projects include Arabic and German collections, 19th-century American history, and Renaissance and non-literary papyri. It includes both primary texts as well analytical works. Features of the Perseus library are impressive: clicking on most words in the digital text gives the reader de finitions, parses, dictionary entries, and frequency statistics. The reader can choose from various types of Greek font display, or can display in Unicode or in transliteration from the Arabic collection. Tables of contents are included with hyperlinks to sections or chapters of works for easy navigation. One can also choose to view the text grouped by chapter, book, or folio page. Perseus Digital Library is a valuable addition to any classics or history collection.

While books printed on paper are embraced for their warmth, portability, and ease of use, e-books offer an important opportunity for collection development. The potential for filling in historical gaps while not burdening library shelves is but one reason to provide access to e-

THE INTERNET ARCHIVE
archive.org

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The Internet Archive is a digital portal containing many types of online information, but the Texts section is the focus here. Within Texts, one can search Canadian library collections, as well as American libraries, Project Gutenberg (see below for more information), a substantial collection from 10 natural history museums, a children's library, and others. The Canadian libraries include several academic libraries, Library and Archives Canada, the Toronto Reference Library, Havergal College, the Ontario Legislative Library, and others. What is most impressive about this portal (apart from fantastic collections) is the speed with which one downloads colour images, and the options for downloading files. Readers can choose from "fl ip book" (software fl ips pages as though one were reading a print book), .pdf, full text (text only), or DJVU, which installs a reader enabling high-quality and easy-to-read images onscreen. The Internet Archive is vast and wonderful. It presents research and reading possibilities that are too numerous to describe here. Visit the site to see for yourself.

PROJECT GUTENBERG
gutenberg.org/wiki

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This volunteer initiative to digitize texts that are no longer protected by copyright began in 1971 and has an open and simple philosophy: provide as many texts as possible for as little cost to the widest audience possible. The texts are all available in "plain vanilla ASCII," which means that they are delivered quickly over slow internet connections and without any special formatting. At one time, content was mainly literary, but recent additions to Project Gutenberg indicate that content is much broader. One of the top downloads is *Manual of Surgery, First Volume: General Surgery*. There are more than 25,000 texts in the Project Gutenberg collection but new e-books are added every day. This is a multilingual collection with many minor languages represented. It also contains audio books, sheet and recorded music, and archival moving pictures.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO BOOKS ONLINE
link.library.utoronto.ca/booksonline

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At the time of writing, this collection contained 858 works from the University of Toronto library that are no longer protected by copyright. This means that all content is published before 1923. The collection comprises scanned images of books, enabling readers to see original typeface, pagination, and any marginalia or author signature appearing on pages. Enhanced features of this database include the option to change image size and the ability to skip to highlights, including illustrations, tables, or indexes. If the reader prefers to see only the text rather than the page image, the View Text option is available.

books. Although this article has not directly addressed the issue of marketing, it is hoped that the collections of e-books mentioned here cause librarians to think about how best to present the positive features of e-books to readers who are not yet aware of the advantages of this format.

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