On the Dublin Core front

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The Killer Kindle

ABSTRACT
This article discusses electronic books, the impact Amazon's Kindle is having on the industry, and the means by which academic libraries will need to respond to the growing popularity of this medium.

KEYWORDS
electronic books ; e-books ; Kindle ; Google Books

"He slides into second with a stand up double." – Jerry Coleman

*E*lectronic books (e-books) in their many forms are a key area of interest for libraries. Writing this as the dog days of summer approach the East Coast, I am thinking of several e-book-related questions that will need attention in the coming year:

- What impact will the Kindle have on teaching and learning?
- What is the relationship between books, which are still purchased in large numbers, and e-books, which often duplicate their printed counterpart?
- Where do smart phones and Google Books fit into this matrix?

AMAZON'S KINDLE

"Does anyone know of a good solution for reading the Kindle in the pool (on a raft of course)? I've been sealing my Kindle in a ziplock storage bag – gallon size … but I'm afraid it needs to breathe."[1]

The homepage of Amazon devotes its most precious real estate to marketing the Kindle, now in two varieties: regular (Kindle 2) and jumbo size (Kindle DX). Returning from a trip to California earlier this year, I sat next to a passenger reading from his Kindle 2. Comfortably on his lap he cradled the device, which seemed less hefty and more maneuverable than the cloth back I had packed for the flight. The thought of carrying another electronic device, in addition to my laptop and BlackBerry, is not immediately attractive, but it's enticing to think of having countless books and other files not only

available at my fingertips, but on a device so portable it would lighten my carry-on by several pounds. [2] In a recent posting to his "Another Dean's View" blog, Mike Roy, Dean of Library and Information Services at Middlebury College, raised the question of what would happen in college libraries if the demise of the printed monograph happened due to users growing comfort with reading books on screen.[3] The idea of students and faculty reading from devices such as the Kindle rather than printed books isn't as hard for me to envision as is the means by which libraries would license the content that populates these e-book readers. The image of Kindles as ubiquitous as cell phones becomes even clearer if these devices also doubled as mini laptops, providing reading comfort with a reasonably-sized keyboard and access to the "cloud."

The current Amazon model for e-books is such that one owns the book upon purchase. Scaling this model so that libraries could provide unlimited access to Kindle versions of books would require an adjustment. Could it be the downloaded book expires at the end of some time period? Might there be a subscription model whereby downloads are purchased at a fraction of the cost, perhaps after a one-time or annual payment is made by the institution? Could Kindle versions be shared, so that they continue to sell at or near the typical price for asynchronous uses, and at a higher rate for concurrent uses?

As Roy notes later in his above-referenced blog post, "In the new world of e-books, the resource sharing that we've enjoyed in the world of analog books is very much in question."[3] Extending this theme, what is the future of interlibrary loan under a mostly e-book universe, especially if licensing or technology restrict the practice? How will libraries that have performed collaborative book purchasing, which often means sharing fewer copies of books than there are institutions in the collaborative, continue this practice with e-books? If electronic journals (e-journals) offer any insight, the answer is "not inexpensively." Will consorting libraries purchase large packages of publisher offerings, similar to the notorious "big deal" e-journal packages, which bundle quality content with larger quantities of mediocre content? Similar to the ways a critical mass of smart phone users has forced institutions to develop applications that work on mobile devices, a time may be spawning when libraries will need to provide Kindle-friendly ways of content download.

E- AND P-BOOKS: COMPLEMENTS OR COMPETITORS?

E-books, although still in their early development, seem headed for popularity. At my institution, use of a recently-purchased e-book aggregation is stronger than I would have expected, indication that students appetite for all things digital extends to electronic monographs. It would be helpful, however, to have a more qualitative understanding of how these e-books are being used, what research need they are meeting, and the satisfaction users have with the interface. My suspicion is much of the use, as can be the case with large collections of e-journals, is driven by convenience, since keyword access to some 30,000 electronic books, as in my library's case, offers a high success rate. This discoverability is powerful, but what I've seen in a few encounters, and have heard several times from colleagues, is when it comes to accessing the content – using it, reading it, absorbing it -- students want the print book. One could argue the limits on page printing are a factor, or even the increasing "greenness" of college students. Yet I think there is something else -- a hard-wired way students have grown up interacting with books -- that is feeding this desire. Clearly library budgets cannot support a model whereby both print and electronic formats for the same title are purchased, especially in these economic times. So how will we manage this dilemma? Will it largely vaporize the way the print-versus-electronic-journal issue has, landing firmly on the side of electronic? E-journals are probably not a model to look to for guidance with this phenomenon, unless we're discussing reference books, encyclopedias, or other texts whose uses tend to be modular.

SMART PHONES, GOOGLE, ETC.

Earlier this year, Amazon released an application that allows iPhone users to download and read Kindle-version e-books. Release of this popular application came on the heels of Google's release of an iPhone application that supports Google Books. Two questions immediately emerge:

> ● Are people comfortable reading from a screen the size of the iPhone?
> ● What is the relationship between Amazon and Google in the e-book marketplace?

At least one commentator believes the "iPhone is a Kindle killer," since carrying a Kindle is far more inconvenient than an iPhone. [5] She continues with an equally compelling argument: "Members of the generation that grew up playing Game Boys and telling time on their cell phones will have absolutely no problem reading from a small device."[6] Whether Kindle as a reading device succeeds or fails is perhaps a less important question to Amazon than whether it can maintain its position as a leading e-book vendor. Presently, Amazon sets e-book prices and generally receives a larger percentage from the sale than its competitors. Scribd, for example, keeps only 20% from the sale of each e-book, and allows publishers to set prices.[7]   Where Google fits into this picture may influence Amazon's future market position. As of this writing, the U.S. Justice Department is investigating whether Google's settlement with the Association of American Publishers and the Authors Guild has antitrust implications. If the proposed settlement passes the Justice Department's review and is subsequently approved by the courts, one would expect Google to vigorously market its millions of digitized books in an attempt to go head-to-head with Amazon.

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