

Chapter 55

One Year Forward: The 2013 Update to the E-Readers and E-Books in Public Libraries Survey

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ABSTRACT

With the prevalence of affordable e-Readers in the consumer marketplace and library users increasingly having access to lendable e-Books from their local library institutions, library administrators continue to have difficulty in determining the immediate and long term effect of these technologies on their organizations. This chapter attempts to provide administrators with a brief overview of the current e-Reader and e-Book technology landscape and describe trends and issues. To help Administrators better understand their library users' experiences and expectations with e-Readers and e-Books, the researcher conducted a survey of 70 individuals. This survey is a follow-up to 2012's E-Readers and E-Books in Public Libraries: Measuring Library Patron Expectations research project. Using the same survey questions, format and potential respondent pool, One Year Forward demonstrates that patrons are increasingly demanding access to e-Books and e-Readers. Library patrons are finding these services more easy to use than in the past. Users clearly see value in these services both now and in the future. The results of this research project should be difficult for any library administrator to ignore.

INTRODUCTION

Few technologies have had as profound an impact on public libraries as the adoption of affordable e-Readers and e-Books. Like all disruptive technologies, e-Books and e-Readers have had a mixed reception by public library Administrators and other library professionals. This has been especially true over the last few years while the e-Book and e-Reader marketplace has been in flux. Many see the huge benefits that these technologies offer, such as portability, ease of use and remote access to materials. Others see potential problems, such as increased costs, legal issues pertaining to lending and the possible reduction of physical materials in the library.

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One Year Forward is an attempt by the researcher to bring library Administrators up-to-date on the changes in the e-Reader and e-Book landscape. The marketplace for both e-Readers and e-Books has altered incredibly in the months since the *e-Readers and e-Books In Public Libraries* research project was undertaken. Library Administrators should absolutely be aware of these events and how those changes have affected the experiences and expectations of public library users. To help Administrators recognize the needs of their users, a survey is another key component of this report. Over the course of several weeks, 70 individuals were asked about their experience with e-Books and e-Readers. The results of this survey should further cement the notion that library users are increasingly demanding these types of services from their local institutions.

SURVEY OF RELATED LITERATURE

For the last few years, it has been hard to read any library-related publication, journal or trade magazine without seeing mention of the term e-Book or e-Reader. For many professionals in the field, these technologies have seemingly sprung from nowhere and have suddenly plopped themselves into the world of public libraries. In reality, this is far from the truth. E-books have co-existed with both public and academic libraries for quite some time. Public and academic libraries have experimented with the loaning of e-Books to library users for the last decade and have met with varying degrees of success.

The main cause for the newly apparent prevalence of e-Books and e-Readers is the extremely low cost of these technologies. Major manufacturers, such as Sony, Apple, Amazon and Barnes and Noble have been able to lower production costs of their e-Readers and tablets, thus making them affordable and more readably accessible to consumers. Over the last few years, ownership of technology items, such as tablets and e-Readers, has continued to increase rapidly. An often cited Pew Research Center poll that was published in 2012 revealed that the percentage of Adults that owned either of these two items had jumped from 18% to 29% (Buckely, 2013). At this rate, it will not be long before the majority of patrons that use public libraries own either a tablet, e-Reader or both. As such, there will be even more demand for materials that can be used on these devices. Already, some statistics demonstrate that demand for e-Books and other materials, such as downloadable audiobooks is hitting record levels. Public libraries, over the last year, have seen a huge rise in the amount of circulations of their e-Books. Of particular note is that during the 2012 holiday season, transactions were especially high. Some library systems broke single-day circulation records around the Christmas holiday, when most “dramatic growth occurred among users of iPad, Kindle Fire, and Android devices” (Enis, 2013). For 2013, public libraries should expect increased demand for their downloadable services, particularly after consumer devices experience another inevitable price drop.

Many libraries or library consortia have witnessed this increased demand and have tried to accommodate it. However, some changes in the marketplace have caused them to pause and re-assess how much budgetary commitment they can make towards supplying e-Books to their users. Approximately 12 months ago, much anger from public library professionals was directed at major publishers for their adoption of new pricing models for loanable e-Books, for the destruction model of loanable e-Books and also for the reluctance to allow their materials to be lent at all. Some publishers instituted a rule stating that particular books could only circulate a certain number of times before they had to be re-purchased.

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