

Kate Sheehan

The eBook Revolution

A Primer for Librarians on
the Front Lines



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on the Front Lines

Kate Sheehan



AN IMPRINT OF ABC-CLIO, LLC
Santa Barbara, California • Denver, Colorado • Oxford, England

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sheehan, Kate, 1978–

The ebook revolution : a primer for librarians on the front lines / Kate Sheehan.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978–1–61069–183–3 (pbk.) — ISBN 978–1–61069–184–0 (ebook)

1. Libraries—Special collections—Electronic books. 2. Electronic books. 3. Libraries and electronic publishing. I. Title.

Z692.E4S54 2013

025.2'84—dc23 2012036186

ISBN: 978–1–61069–183–3

EISBN: 978–1–61069–184–0

17 16 15 14 13 1 2 3 4 5

This book is also available on the World Wide Web as an eBook.

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An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC

ABC-CLIO, LLC

130 Cremona Drive, P.O. Box 1911

Santa Barbara, California 93116-1911

This book is printed on acid-free paper 

Manufactured in the United States of America

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A very large number of people have been kind and helpful as I've worked on this project. I'm terribly afraid I'll miss someone, but will do my utmost to be complete. Since this book has coincided with pregnancy, a number of people have asked me to compare the two. I'm not sure that's possible, but I will say that both book and baby (even a short book with a limited audience and a relatively easy pregnancy) bring out people's generosity and have a general restore-your-faith-in-humanity effect.

Many thanks to Linda Braun and Sarah Ludwig who put me in touch with the wonderful Barbara Ittner at Libraries Unlimited (should anyone doubt the value of publishing, editors like Barbara make the whole business worthwhile) and encouraged me to submit my original book proposal. Sarah also let me drink all of her coffee while she read my proposal and made excellent suggestions for improvement.

An astonishing group of book people spoke to me about their jobs and the book ecosystem. I learned huge amounts from Ruth Liebmann, Michael Porter, Mike Shatzkin, Jess Johns, Jamie LaRue, Monique Sendze, Andromeda Yelton, Juliet Grames, Bronwen Hruska, Eric Hansen, Steve Cauffman, Kendall Wiggin, Dan Suchy, and Molly Raphael. Lee Rainie of the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project was kind enough to let me look at some of the data ahead of publication so that I could meet my own publication deadline. He's long been a friend to libraries, and I am grateful for the chance to include more up-to-date information as well as the great work Pew has done in providing all of us with nonpartisan data and reports. Pew was also generous in letting me use their charts, including re-creating them with the resolution needed for print publication.

My coworkers have been enormously patient about and supportive of my second job. Mike Simonds, Amy Terlaga, Tom Sweda, Melissa Lefebvre, Carol Yarrison, Jessica Venturo, Ben Shum, Gen Francis, Jenn Clark, Ted Mackewitz, Mary Llewellyn, Steven Pisani, Robin Fitch, Nancy Mazer, and Joan Shamatovich at Bibliomation headquarters have all listened to me complain and cheered me on. Amy and Jessica in particular have had to put up with the fact that even though I've been eating, sleeping, and breathing eBooks, I still have to check with them on half the OverDrive support requests I attempt to answer.

Christopher Platt and Heather McCormack very kindly suggested me as a panelist at Digital Book World 2012, which was a fantastic experience, and I am forever in their debt for putting my name on the table. Heather let me follow her around the conference, introducing me to a million people and the best donut I have ever had.

The Connecticut Ebook Task Force, led by Ernie DiMattia, has been a wonderful group to work and talk eBooks with and they've let me piggyback on our work, using vendor presentations and interviews with librarians to ask a million questions and take notes that have ended up in these pages. Their indulgence has been much appreciated.

Similarly, Patrick Hogan at ALA TechSource asked me to cover Tools of Change and I happily agreed. As with Digital Book World, the exposure to a publishing conference was enlightening and has informed much of my work on this book. I'm grateful for the opportunity to write about the conference and the chance to learn more about publishing.

Karen Schneider (known to my family as my library fairy godmother) and Brett Bonfield have both talked about eBooks with me and helped clarify a lot of my thinking. They also spent a weekend workshopping an essay about HarperCollins and OverDrive for *Publishers Weekly* that led to this book. I owe them both a lifetime supply of oatmeal.

Librarians are wonderful people, and I have been lucky to have some fantastic colleagues and friends. Librarians from Bibliomation's libraries have discussed eBooks with me at countless meetings and let me pick their brains about what they'd like to know more about. Connecticut's abundance of fabulous librarians has been a boon to me. Rebecca Stine, Jaime Hammond, Lisa Carlucci Thomas, Merry Uk, Abby Sesselberg, Gretchen Caserotti, John Blyberg, Jill Dugas Hughes, Ramona Harten, Debbie Herman, and Sharon Brettschneider have all been willing eBook discussion partners, and I can't believe so much talent is crammed into this small state. There are, of course, wonderful librarians everywhere, and Jason Griffey, Cindi Trainor, Kathryn Greenhill, Barbara Genco, and Josh Hadro have all let me bounce ideas off of them and offered helpful feedback. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention Twitter and all of the librarians, writers, and publishing types there. They've been great fun to talk shop with. It's surprising what you can learn in 140-character bursts.

Of course, my family and friends have put up with a lot of book- and baby-talk, stress, and general obsessiveness. My lovely and supportive parents, Jeanne and Kevin Sheehan; my sibling-in-laws (I can't believe I lucked into this family) Adrienne and Ron Conti, Mark and Joanne Giannelli, and Glen and Patti Giannelli; and my nearest and dearest (and surprisingly nonlibrarian) friends, Louisa Pyle and Laura Lamp, have all made the last several months bearable. Most importantly, Gary Giannelli, my amazing husband who has put up with my nights and weekends (and our dinner table conversation) being consumed by eBooks, research, and writing and who has been stuck with the vast majority of domestic chores, including new and daunting tasks like assembling baby gear. You're astounding and I can't wait to cross this next threshold with you.

INTRODUCTION

eBooks. Did you just sigh? I've noticed that librarians sigh heavily when eBooks come up. Most of the public and school librarians I interact with want to know more about eBooks and wish they had time to do more research on all things eBook. In the meantime, they have enormous patron demand, shrinking budgets, and a library to run. Not to mention the inevitable "eBooks are destroying libraries" conversations with friends, relatives, and anyone else who finds out you're a librarian (we've all had the eBook chat with our doctors, right? Nothing says "I want to talk about the demise of my profession" like a paper gown).

Everybody knows something about eBooks, but nobody feels like they know enough. In any group of librarians, I've found that most will profess confusion and a feeling of being underinformed about eBooks, yet the group often knows more than they realize. eBooks can be an emotional subject for many of us (see the "demise of my profession" conversation above). Like most librarians, I knew that I should know more about eBooks, and I followed my colleagues who seemed to be on top of things, but I never felt like I knew enough. The decision by HarperCollins to limit library eBooks to 26 circulations was a watershed moment for me. I realized that I had been assuming that the status quo would prevail and that at some point, other publishers would work with libraries. Unconscious entitlement had made me lazy, thinking that publishers would have to come around, because libraries have always been here and always will be here.

The more I dug into eBooks, the more overwhelming it all seemed—the sense of trying to drink from a fire hose exacerbated by my newfound sense of urgency. Most days, I was glad that this was a professional side interest,

not my main job. Still thinking of eBooks as a minor interest, I approached Libraries Unlimited looking to write an entirely different book. A few conversations with editor Barbara Ittner later and I was writing a proposal for a book on eBooks. Once eBooks went from being a casual professional dalliance to a part-time job, the fire hose actually became harder to manage in many ways. Every day things are changing; new data, new publishers, and new perspectives emerge hourly. Keeping up with every aspect of all things eBook is a full-time job (and then some). I've been reading everything I can about eBooks for the past several months, and it's shown me how many things I don't know and how many books, articles, and blog posts I'll never be able to get to. And then a publisher or tech company or bookseller makes a major announcement and everything is different again. A friend suggested I just stop writing at some point, leave several blank pages, and say that things are changing too fast, so you can write your own ending here. Blank pages or no, that's what's going to happen—much of the content here will be different by the time you're holding this book in your hands (or looking at it on your eReader) and the ending will be something entirely new.

As I've worked on this project, I've tried to keep my colleagues in mind. I work for a consortium of public and school libraries in Connecticut. Every one of our librarians is strapped for time. Their budgets are lean, their staffing is bare-bones, and their door counts are huge. Any one of the topics in this book could merit a book on its own, but I've tried to boil it down to the essentials (read: short sections you can read while you're trying to do two other things) and give the reader an overview of the eBook ecosystem. It's easy to get caught up in library vendors and practices, and those are things that librarians are good at learning about. There are already excellent resources available for someone who wants to pick an eBook vendor or pilot an eReader lending program. I've touched on those topics, but spent the most time on the things I hear librarians ask about: the nuts and bolts of eBooks, how publishers view eBooks, and the impact of Amazon. eBooks are evolving inside and outside of libraries, and I've spent more time looking at the eBook world outside of libraries. Right now, publishers and companies like Amazon and Apple hold far more power than libraries or library vendors. That's always been the case, but with eBooks, the constant state of change makes that power imbalance all the more noticeable. I'm not trying to suggest or encourage any animosity between libraries and other eBook stakeholders, but we have very different goals and needs. As we feel our way through the eBook revolution, advocacy for library interests will be critical.

This book is not intended to be comprehensive, and I'm aware of the irony of publishing a print book about eBooks. Even if you're reading this as an eBook, it still went through the traditional publishing process. I wrote most of it in late 2011 and early 2012 with revisions in the spring of 2012 and a few small revisions in July and September 2012, so it will be automatically out of date by the time it gets into your hands. To keep it as useful as

possible, it's intended as a primer to the big-picture issues around eBooks. My own background is in public libraries and that's my primary audience. If you've been following eBook news avidly, I hope you'll find some new resources and perspectives here. If you've been feeling like you're too busy to do anything about eBooks, I hope this is the book for you. You can read it straight through or dip in and out of sections. I've tried to keep the paragraphs and sections short, as is the convention online, because I imagine a harried colleague paging through this while she tries to eat her sandwich in peace. This is not a buying guide or complete education on digital content. There are bullet lists of suggestions, guidelines, and resources throughout the book. I took the word "primer" seriously and tried to cover the basics of both eBooks generally and eBooks in libraries. I hope you find this book useful. There is also a companion site, ebookprimer.com, where I will post updates to the content here, and eBook and publishing news that affects libraries.

CHAPTER 1

eBook Basics

THE SCENT OF AN EBOOK

Any discussion about books, libraries, and eBooks will inevitably include at least one comment (usually several comments) about the scent of a book, the feel of paper, or the heft of a printed tome. These are all wonderful and lovely things, to be sure, but they're not going to derail the cultural and technological shift before us. Horses smell better than cars, and gorgeous wooden radios feel nicer than plasma-screen televisions, but sensory experiences aren't completely driving our information consumption decisions. Print is not dead. As Eli Neiburger says, books aren't obsolete, they're outmoded (Neiburger 2011b).

Personally, I'm still buying, borrowing, and using a lot of print books. Most of the books I've cited in these pages are books that I have paper copies of. But there's no denying the centrality of the screen in most of our lives. Although I still favor paper books, I do most of my reading on screens. Librarians are besieged with requests for eBooks daily. We may get a little glassy-eyed when we inhale deeply in a used-book store, but even if you loathe eReaders, there's no denying their growing popularity. Print is by no means dead. As many people writing about eBooks and technology have observed, the radio was not replaced by the television. While it's tempting to liken the rise of eBooks to the shift from tapes to CDs, the radio/television metaphor may be more apt. Different people will prefer different formats, and eBooks will evolve capabilities that print can't match. Conversely, print will doubtless be preferred for certain types of books or information.

The first eBook was born out of Michael Hart's vision of what the Internet would become. In 1971, Hart typed the Declaration of Independence into a mainframe and shared it with a few other people, giving birth to what would eventually be known as Project Gutenberg. Since that time, the humble electronic text has become tremendously more complicated. File format, digital rights management (DRM), hardware, and licensing all play crucial roles in how we consume eBooks.

EBOOK HARDWARE

Hardware is the area of the eBook world that is the easiest to talk about at cocktail parties. File formats and DRM (the software that stops readers from easily sharing eBooks—more on that later) just don't have the cachet of a shiny new gadget. As with file formats, there are a lot of eBook readers out there, but only a few dominate the market, so we'll focus on those here.

Your Computer

It's been possible to read eBooks on your computer since the first time you sat down in front of a monitor and keyboard. Depending on the file type and DRM, you may have to open your eBook in specific software, but computers have always been eBook-friendly hardware. Their portability leaves something to be desired—reading on a laptop screen while waiting in line at the grocery store doesn't work for most of us, but they're familiar and many people already own them. You can easily open a PDF or text file on your computer or you can use eBook reader software found online or provided by most eBook vendors.

Your Smartphone

Like your computer, your smartphone has always been capable of storing and displaying eBooks. Even those early (now terribly clunky) Palm Pilots could display eBooks (that was Mobipocket's original market). More recent smartphones have access to apps for eBooks and apps that are eBooks. Reading on a phone may strain the eyes, but is probably more gratifying than checking eMail while you're in a checkout line.

Kindle

Although there were eBook readers available well before the Kindle, Amazon's device was groundbreaking. The Kindle was released in 2007, and Oprah declared it one of her "favorite things" in 2008. The Kindle is the most popular eReader on the market. The screen of the original Kindle

employs E Ink technology that, unlike a computer screen, is not backlit. E Ink can be read in direct sunlight and is perceived as being easier on the eyes (though newer LCD screens are not as tiring to use as older backlit screens) (Bolton 2010). However, E Ink is currently available only in black-and-white. The year 2011 saw the release of the Kindle Fire, an LCD tablet from Amazon. The Fire has a color screen and can be used to watch movies and television shows, and browse the web. In September 2012, Amazon revised the entire Kindle line, phasing out the larger-screen DX and the Kindle Touch, and introducing the Paperwhite, a Kindle with a new front-lit screen. Amazon also gave the Paperwhite an improved battery life, making it the flagship of the Kindle eReader devices. The company also expanded the Kindle Fire devices to include high definition (HD) versions, one with a seven-inch display and two with 8.9-inch displays. The most expensive version includes 4G connectivity, which means it can connect to the internet using either wifi or AT&T's cellular network. The Kindle, Kindle Paperwhite, and Kindle Keyboard all have two price points: one with "special offers" and one without. The "special offers" are ads that play on the device's screen saver and appear on the bottom of the home screen. The new Kindle Fire line originally did not have the option to remove the special offers, but Amazon responded to complaints by allowing Fire HD owners to pay \$15 to opt-out of the ads (Biggs 2012). However, "special offers" is listed as feature of the Fire line of Kindles. Amazon's sales figures are closely guarded, but one estimate has 5.5 million Kindle Fires being sold in the 2011 holiday season.

The device allowed Amazon to move from selling books to publishing them. Amazon produces both eBooks and Kindle Singles, which are shorter works, written expressly for Kindle users. Authors can self-publish through Amazon's Kindle store, blurring the lines between bookseller, publisher, and technology company.

Nook

Barnes & Noble's eReader, like the Kindle, limits its user to the inventory of the bookseller who produces it. Unlike Amazon, Barnes & Noble does not offer a self-publishing component to their eBook business. Barnes & Noble does make the Nook in both E Ink and color. The color Nook is built on the Android platform, and Barnes & Noble offers apps and web browsing on the device. Magazines are also popular on the color Nook, as the screen displays the content more faithfully than E Ink can. In 2011, Barnes & Noble released the Nook Tablet, which, like the Amazon Fire, is designed to be a media consumption device, with apps for movie and television viewing preinstalled. The Nook Color has many of the same tablet features, though the apps for movie and television streaming are not preinstalled. The other Nook is the Nook SimpleTouch, an E Ink reader with a touch

screen. Barnes & Noble released the Nook SimpleTouch with GlowLight in the spring of 2012, an E Ink reader with a built-in front light that allows the reader to see the E Ink screen in dim lighting, prompting David Pogue to say “there’s no better E Ink model than this new glowing Nook” (Pogue 2012). In 2012, Barnes & Noble announced that the Nook SimpleTouch would be free and the Nook Color would be \$99 (half its original cost), with a one-year subscription to the *New York Times* on the devices. This was announced as a promotion, and a PaidContent.org story reported there would be a similar arrangement for subscribers to *People Magazine*, with Time, Inc. (*People Magazine*’s publisher) splitting the cost of the discounted Nooks with Barnes & Noble (Owen 2012a). There were also rumors in early 2012 that Barnes & Noble was considering spinning the Nook business off into a separate company. In April of 2012, Microsoft and Barnes & Noble formed an alliance (even though Microsoft was suing Barnes & Noble over the Nook a year earlier), with Microsoft investing \$300 million in a new subsidiary company. Barnes & Noble will own 82.4 percent of the new company, and Microsoft will own 17.6 percent. The new company will include both Barnes & Noble’s digital and college businesses (Smith 2012).

iPad/Tablets

The iPad is not strictly an eReader, but a tablet computer. However, with the iPad came the advent of the iBook store. The iPad has also given rise to book apps. T. S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” despite the fact that “a \$14 version of a famously enigmatic early 20th-century poem written by a decidedly unsexy dead guy—and in the public domain, no less!—would hardly seem the sort of thing to become a hit in the iTunes app store” (L. Miller 2011), made a surprising splash when it was released in app form. Although the iPad is the dominant tablet on the market right now, other tablet computers are eBook friendly. Android tablets are manufactured by a variety of companies and run the Android operating system, an open-source system that runs on tablets and phones. In 2011, iPad had 57.6 percent of the global tablet market and Android had 39.1 percent, a 10 percent increase over 2010 due in large part to the Kindle Fire and Barnes & Noble tablet (M. Miller 2011).

Sony

Sony’s eReader is near and dear to many a librarian’s heart. The original Sony eReader came out in 2006, and by 2009 Sony had partnered with Overdrive to make library eBooks available to owners of the device (Patel 2009). There have been several generations of the Sony eReader, but in 2011 Sony released a single reader and discontinued all of their previous

models. The Reader Wi-Fi is a black-and-white E Ink touch-screen device. Sony books have their own file format, BBeB Book (LRF), but the eReader will also display ePub, PDFs (portable document format), and plain text. They've been trailing behind Kindles and Nooks in the eReader market, but Digital Book World predicts a possible resurgence for Sony in 2012 with the launch of Pottermore, the Harry Potter eBook platform (Greenfield 2011b).

Kobo

Kobo launched at the CTIA trade show, a technology show with an emphasis on wireless devices, in 2010. Initially, the eReader was sold by Borders, though Kobo prided itself on interoperability, releasing a "Powered by Kobo" application for iPhone/iPad, BlackBerry, Palm Pre, and Android phones at the same time as their first eReader (Hambien 2010). Kobo was a spin-off of Indigo Books & Music, a large Canadian chain of bookstores, and Indigo remains a major investor in the company (Sapieha 2012). Kobo's line of eReaders includes the Kobo Mini (a five-inch touchscreen E Ink reader), the Kobo Touch (a six-inch touch-screen eReader available with or without offers), the Kobo Glo (a six-inch touch-screen E Ink reader with a built-in front light), and the Kobo Arc (a seven-inch color tablet). Kobo sells its devices across the world, and the 2011 holiday season proved to be a strong one for the company, with a 10-fold increase in Kobo ownership from their preholiday numbers (Biba 2012). Following in Amazon's footsteps, Kobo plans to launch a publishing division in 2012 (Pilkington 2011).

Gadgets in Your Library

Kindles and iPads rule the marketplace. It's easy to scoff at the idea of reading an entire novel on a phone, but smartphones are getting larger and users are getting accustomed to reading on handheld devices. If you're thinking of buying gadgets for your library staff to practice on, the most popular devices are always going to be safe bets. If the cost of an iPad is too high, consider asking staff with iPhones or iPads to show their colleagues how to access eBooks on them. Although there are some differences between iPads, iPhones, and iPod Touches, the basic principles of use are similar. They can also serve double duty as devices for roaming reference. For the best library gadget insight, I recommend Jason Griffey's blog, workshops, and publications. His main blog can be found here—<http://jasongriffey.net/wp/>—and he writes about gadgets for ALA TechSource regularly: <http://www.alatechsource.org/blogger/16>.

FILE FORMATS

When you save a document in Microsoft Word, your computer appends a file type to your document name. You click “Save As,” christen your document “The Great American Novel,” and Word adds “.doc” or “.docx” to the end. Similarly, when you buy music online (I’ll assume that my readers are purchasing instead of pirating their songs), you may seek out Mp3s or AAC files. These are different types of file formats, and like all digital content, eBooks come in a myriad of formats.

Right now, file formats seem to be inextricably linked to readers, but that is slowly changing. When personal computers (PCs) were still a novelty, files created on Macintosh computers could not be read on PCs (then often called IBM-compatible machines) and vice versa. A document written in Microsoft Word couldn’t be opened by MacWrite. Today, those once-impossible barriers are relatively inconsequential. eBooks are still in their infancy, and file formats are important apart from their associated hardware.

There are a tremendous number of eBook formats, but for simplicity’s sake, we’ll focus on the most popular here. There are other formats on the wane, like Sony’s BroadBand eBook (BBeB), which the company is phasing out in favor of ePub. (“eBook formats” eBook Architects). You may also encounter some formats that aren’t really formats, like Smashwords, which is an eBook distributor that allows anyone to upload a Microsoft Word file, which the site then converts into 10 different formats (“eBook formats” eBook Architects).

Amazon (.azw, .mobi)

In 2005, Amazon purchased Mobipocket, a company devoted to eBook reading on mobile devices (“About Mobipocket”). Amazon developed the Mobipocket format into the .azw format for the Kindle. It can be read on the Amazon Kindle and Kindle apps. In 2011, Amazon announced the Kindle Format 8 (KF8), which replaced the previous format, called Mobi 7. Amazon also informed publishers that they would begin the process of shutting down Mobipocket in late 2011 (Hoffelder 2011). KF8 supports HTML and CSS, including the ability to specify a downloadable font, create animation, incorporate sounds, and let text flow around high-quality graphics (Shankland 2011). Amazon offers information and publisher tools for working with their format at <http://www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html?docId=1000729511>

ePub (.epub)

The ePub format is the digital publishing standard of the International Digital Publishing Forum, a nonprofit organization made up of publishing

and technology companies (International Digital Publishing Forum “Epub”). It can be read on most eReaders, with the notable exception of the Amazon Kindle. ePub3 is the newest release of the ePub standard. It includes specifications for web content, such as HTML 5, CSS, images, audio, and video. It also includes media overlays, which allow for the synchronization of text and audio (International Digital Publishing Forum “Epub3 Overview”). As this standard is more widely used and its features exploited, we will likely see eBooks that are more like apps and less like printed books. eBooks already have games, customized calculators (in diet and exercise books, for example), and interactivity built in. ePub3 will allow for an expansion of these types of features, and authors will begin writing with that in mind.

At Digital Book World 2012, there was a panel discussion on ePub3 that I found enlightening. The move to ePub3, while much touted, is not as smooth as those of us outside the publishing business might assume. Peter Balis, director, digital business development at John Wiley & Sons, said that digital-content providers want to “coalesce around ePub3,” and while the rest of the panelists agreed, they were concerned about some limitations in the new format specification. Specifically, the conversation focused on reflowable versus fixed layouts. For most straight text, reflowable is fine and doesn’t alter the content of the book in any way. Readers can change the font or the size of the text, and read on large computer screens or tiny cell phone screens. Reflowable eBooks allow for all of that. ePub3 actively discourages fixed layouts and does not provide technical specifications for achieving fixed layouts. When publishers want to create eBooks for books that benefit from a fixed layout, like many children’s books, craft books, graphic novels, manga, cookbooks, poetry, and, in the case of Simon & Schuster, the Folger Shakespeare Library, they are left with creating a separate product for each eBook reader. The panelists discussed the limitations of this process, not least of which is the increased workload and reduced ability to automate processes to produce one title as an eBook for multiple platforms. Should each version have its own ISBN? If one platform can support certain enhancements, and another platform can support different enhancements, is calling an eBook “enhanced” meaningful to consumers? A set of best practices for ePub3 and fixed layout was mentioned as a solution, though the difficulties of forging agreement between retailers and publishers are not insignificant.

PDF (.pdf)

PDF is a file format created by Adobe. PDFs can be viewed on almost any computer, eReader, or mobile device. However, PDFs are intended to preserve formatting, making them less easy to read on smaller screens, such as those on phones and eReaders (“eBook formats” eBook Architects).

XPS (.xps)

The XML Paper Specification (XPS) is Microsoft's alternative to the PDF (Windows Dev Center). Baker and Taylor's Blio platform uses XPS files.

OTHER FORMATS

eBooks can also be published in HTML, plain text, or a wide range of proprietary formats associated with specific readers. Librarians familiar with Project Gutenberg have likely seen the list of available eBook formats there, which includes both HTML and plain text.

Apple announced their entry into the textbook-publishing business with iBooks2 and iBooks Author. The iBooks 2.0 format is a modification of the ePub standard (Bjarnason 2012), with proprietary elements (largely CSS components) that prevent iBooks 2 files from being read by standard ePub readers (Glazman 2012). This shift away from the open standard surprised many, and the ramifications of another file format remain to be seen (Bott 2012).

Are your eyes crossed yet?

The seeming free-for-all in eBook formats can be confusing. Just to add a little more confusion to the mix, there is software called Calibre that can convert files from one type of eBook format to another. However, it does not work on copyrighted material. It is possible to download plug-ins for Calibre that will illegally convert newer titles and allow a book purchased on a Kindle to be read on a Nook. If the comments on David Pogue's post about these plug-ins and other eBook reader compatibility issues (<http://pogue.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/10/how-compatible-are-rival-e-readers/>) are any indication, many people don't understand that it's illegal to do so. Their confusion is understandable: buying a book from Amazon doesn't prevent a reader from taking that book into a Barnes & Noble to read, but eBooks are not the same as physical books. Fortunately, mainstream tech writers like Pogue write about these issues regularly and can be used as a double check when your instincts are telling you that this super software your patron is enthusing about does not belong on library computers.

eReader and tablet reviews are everywhere online, and you likely already have a favorite review source. David Pogue writes frequently about eReaders and tablets for the *New York Times*, and sites like CNET include reviews of eReaders and tablets. The Pew Internet and American Life Project is an excellent place to get statistics on device ownership and use (<http://pewinternet.org/>).

A NOTE ON TABLETS VERSUS EREADERS

Although the iPad is the dominant tablet on the market at this time, and the Kindle and Nook are the two most prominent eReaders, there are a variety of devices available. Sony's eReader has been popular with libraries, since it too could use library eBooks. Other eReader devices do exist, and many accept library eBooks. Android tablets abound as well. The eReader may be a transitional device, with multiuse tablets taking precedence in the long term, but right now librarians are likely to see both tablets and eReaders cross their desk.

All three major commercial vendors—Amazon, Apple, and Barnes & Noble—have the same thing in common: they sell a piece of hardware that locks the consumer in to buying content from the same company. There are ways around this, of course. Apple's app store offers a variety of book-related apps, including those for the Kindle and the Nook. It's therefore possible to buy an iPad and read books from a variety of vendors on it. The Nook Color can be turned into a tablet device using the Android operating system, either through "rooting," which overwrites the Nook's software, or through a micro SD card with the Android system installed, creating a dual-boot device. Both Amazon and Barnes & Noble have gotten into the tablet business, which makes sense, as consumers are looking for multiuse devices, and both companies can sell a wider variety of media to owners of their tablets.

Devices sold by the same companies that sell content for those devices are going to optimize the process for purchasing content from that company. People who buy Kindles are likely to buy almost all of the content for that device from Amazon, and people who buy Nooks are going to shop at Barnes & Noble. There are companies devoted entirely to making accessories for handheld devices. But once a reader purchases an eReader, they are largely committed to purchasing all of their books from that same company. Moving from one company to another is as onerous a shift as moving from Mac to PC was 15 years ago. As publishers consider dropping DRM, that may be changing.

IS AN EBOOK A BOOK?

Underpinning much of the conversation about eBooks is the persistent question: is an eBook a book? It's tempting to compare eBooks to their predecessors in the move to digital media. Mp3s changed how we purchase and consume music—musicians still make albums, but we can cherry-pick the bits we like, buying only the upbeat Lady Gaga songs we like to listen to while we exercise and ignoring her ballads. eBooks aren't yet producing a wave of chapter purchasing, although ventures like Byliner, Kindle Singles,

- [Beyond Belief: My Secret Life Inside Scientology and My Harrowing Escape for free](#)
- [Hobsbawm: History and Politics for free](#)
- [Where the Red Fern Grows here](#)
- [click Spy Wars: Moles, Mysteries, and Deadly Games for free](#)

- <http://berttrotman.com/library/Founder--A-Portrait-of-the-First-Rothschild-and-His-Time.pdf>
- <http://pittiger.com/lib/The-Economist--23-April-2016-.pdf>
- <http://weddingcellist.com/lib/Emergency--This-Book-Will-Save-Your-Life.pdf>
- <http://berttrotman.com/library/Spy-Wars--Moles--Mysteries--and-Deadly-Games.pdf>