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Perspective

E and P: What I Ignored

Most of the [January 2014 Cites & Insights](#) (14.1) was a WORDS essay, BOOKS, E AND P. I was pleased that “and” was the appropriate connector rather than the “versus” I would have used in years past, as (I believe) many or most of the items discussed are about the relationships of ebooks and print books rather than the old and increasingly silly idea that it has to be one or the other.

Which does not mean there won't continue to be people insisting that everybody will (or should) migrate to ebooks and some insisting that ebooks are somehow evil.

As I was completing the fourth and fifth sections of the massive ebook discussion that make up most of *this* issue, I got to thinking about something I didn't discuss in that essay. To wit: one possible motivation behind some comments and stances on ebooks and pbooks or content and container.

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There's No Difference

That's the core opinion involved, stated in many different ways: Only the words matter, not the way they're presented; there's no meaningful difference between an ebook and a pbook; any preference for print books is likely generational; etc., etc.

There's a special version of this that I won't argue with: “I see no difference between ebooks and pbooks—they're all just words to me.” Whether you're being a reductionist or really can't see a difference, it's fine: It's your choice. It's less fine when you extend that to “and therefore there's no difference for *anybody*.” Which usually leads to “and since

ebooks are [more modern | digital | don't kill trees | vastly cheaper], therefore print books [will | should | must] go away real soon now."

When you say there's no difference between the two—that only the words matter, that the container's irrelevant—and that this is *generally* or *universally* true, you're being dogmatic and attempting to tell other people how they should think.

Consider this quotation:

It's easy to forget amidst the technological splendor that the codex is an extremely useful tool. Humanists often work on research projects that involve examining multiple texts and comparing them, sometimes moving from book to book and sometimes from passage to passage within those books. Spreading several books on a desk and flipping back and forth between passages is relatively easy, and much easier than trying to do the same thing on any current ebook reader. Annotating a book with pencil in hand is also faster and easier than doing it on any ebook readers I've yet seen.

I assert that many of you take that paragraph less seriously than the paragraph at the bottom of page 5 and top of page 6 of the [January 2014 Cites & Insights](#) (two-column version). The content hasn't changed at all. For that matter, neither has the overall container. I've just changed the typography from 10pt. Berkeley justified to 11pt. Comic Sans centered. I'm guessing that for many readers this has the effect of rendering a well-written paragraph into childish babble or something close to it.

If a simple change of typeface affects the way content influences us as readers, how can you assert that there can't be meaningful differences *for any reasonable person* between text in a printed book and text on an ereader?

What I hear is either reductionism or a desire to see a given outcome and a willingness to ignore people's preferences (or deride them as delusional) in order to get that outcome. In some cases, it's simple digiphilia: If it's digital, it *must* be better. In other cases, it's more bizarre—e.g., librarians who really *would* like to get rid of those annoying physical books, and therefore presume that it's only a matter of time before everyone reads ebooks, *because that's what the librarians want to see happen*.

Preferences

If you *prefer* ebooks, for whatever reasons, I neither fault your preference nor would argue against it—as long as you’re willing to allow other people *their* preferences.

It seems increasingly clear that, if people are allowed to have preferences, both print books and ebooks will have healthy futures. And that public libraries have healthy futures circulating print books (and, of course, doing many other things).

Intersections

It Seems Like the Obvious Case: Ebooks as Textbooks

Ever since I started writing about ebook possibilities, I’ve said that the easiest and most obvious market segment that could yield multi-billion-dollar ebook sales (in the U.S. alone) was textbooks. I was particularly thinking of K12 textbooks and the possibility that potential future back problems among students could be reduced by substituting a one-pound ereader for 10, 15 or 20 (or more) pounds of textbooks.

Textbooks are a *big* marketplace: Around \$14 billion dollars in the U.S. alone, [based on the figures I could find](#). They are also, I suspect, a highly profitable marketplace, one with assured sales and captive audiences.

To me, thinking about it naively a decade or so ago, it seemed as though e-textbooks could be a win-win situation. Students, especially in K12 but also in higher ed, could have more up-to-date materials at a lower price and not have to haul all those books around; publishers could retain decent profits while eliminating printing and distribution costs. For higher ed, I overlooked one *big* factor on the student side: Used textbooks. The used-textbook marketplace (well supported by many college bookstores) would seem to encourage publishers to push ebooks (since, at least until DRM goes away and first-sale gets sorted out, there’s no used ebook market)—but unless publishers lower prices substantially, that’s a disincentive for students to want etextbooks.

That’s by way of preface to Part 4 of a five-part ebook overview: Noting that I always thought etextbooks were a good idea, more so than trade books, but may not have been looking at enough factors. The reality has turned out to be tricky.

This installment is almost entirely in chronological order, as I couldn’t find subtopic clusters that make sense. It’s also in INTERSECTIONS rather than WORDS or MEDIA because etextbooks, even more than ebooks in general, are about the intersection of policy, technology and

media. Note that I have zero knowledge of K12 since 1962 and no classroom knowledge of higher education in the last 45 years. Back when I went to UC Berkeley (with \$0 tuition and not much more than that in fees), I don't remember spending much more than \$100 *total* on textbooks for a semester—although that could be faulty memory.

2010

This is recent enough that good-quality eInk readers, even ones with screens large enough for typical textbooks (e.g., the Kindle DX), were readily available at plausible prices and institutions were starting to experiment with them.

Can e-books gather dust?

While this item appeared in Doug Johnson's *Blue Skunk Blog* [on February 20, 2010](#), it's not by Johnson—it's email from Janet HasBrouck, a teacher-librarian at Arcadia High School in Arcadia, California, posted with her permission.

The second introductory paragraph gives a sense of just how long some folks have believed etextbooks were not only an inevitable 100% replacement for print textbooks, they were *right around the corner*:

More than 20 years ago, the district did away with lockers at the HS and MSs for various reasons, one of which was the stated fact by administrators that "everything will be on CD so who needs a locker?" Well, here we are in 2010 and students are now carrying 30 to 40 pounds of books worth about \$400 on their backs. Did I mention that we are a high achieving high school with 3600 students, many classes, and 84,000 textbooks?

So in 1990, there were school administrators touting the end of print textbooks—with them being replaced by CD-ROMs! Just reading "30 to 40 pounds of books" makes my back hurt a little...

HasBrouck notes that she's been asked several times over the past decade to check into the availability of etextbooks, "but for reasons that you and your followers have stated, the books have often not been available or they are more expensive, etc." She notes that some publishers have been including a sort of etextbook (on CD-ROM or possibly online) *along with* the adopted and paid for printed textbooks.

However, one interesting factor has arisen that was not mentioned by other commenters. Students don't want to use the books in e-format of either kind. They pretty much don't want to read on a computer. Parents don't understand the e-books. Most of the copies of the books on CD that came with the adoptions are sitting in boxes in our increasingly crowded textbook storage area and we can't give them away. The ELL texts have especially helpful tools included with the CDs, but we

can't convince students and parents to use them. You can probably say that this is a communication or PR problem, but it is a problem that is not being discussed here at my school or here by your followers. [Emphasis added.]

You're going to see variations on that comment a number of times. There's more to the post (and other Johnson posts that generated the response), but I'll close by quoting one clause that resonates in so many fields: "We seem to make assumptions about students and technology that are often not true." Ah, the Digital Generation!

The comments are (with the exception of a spammet or two) interesting and involve a fair amount of back-and-forth. Scott McLeod begins by wondering whether the problem is reading on a computer—or the fact that these are *textbooks*? (He also notes that students need their own laptops for etextbooks to work well.) Michael Doyle responds that even students who *will* read textbooks may find print textbooks easier on the eyes, especially if they're using "the \$299 back to school special [laptop] from 2 years ago." And that, even with a high-quality laptop, some publishers do a crappy job of etextbook editions—sometimes looking like "they've been made with a mid 1990s scanner." On the other hand, if a child has both versions, they don't need to lug that heavy book back and forth. Another commenter says "Virtually all my avid readers turn their noses up at the thought of reading an ebook"—and that when students go to the web for anything other than a "factoid," they tend to hit the print button.

Toward the end, Johnson chimes in with a set of things that have to happen before etextbooks could become ubiquitous—a set that does *not* allow for actual user preference. He closes: "The adoption of e-text books is more of a political process than a technical one."

E-book for the classroom, of the classroom and by the classroom

Sara Thompson posted this [on March 5, 2010](#) at *Epist*. It springs from a brown-bag presentation, "Encounters with E-Texts," at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), with Catherine Prendergast of the Undergraduate Rhetoric Program speaking. The description of the event: Prendergast would discuss "the process of adopting an e-text from preliminary research and implementation to student evaluation and feedback. Join us for a peek between the pages of teaching with e-textbooks."

Useful background: the UIUC program is big (about 4,000 students per year) and paper textbooks normally cost about \$130. The idea was to develop a UIUC-centric etext that would work better, be cheaper, be accessible and be more flexible. The etextbook included video interviews on such topics as citation styles and research methods, for example.

But the most surprising part to me was how customizable the instructors wanted this text to be. The Rhetoric Department includes several different classes, each taught by several different instructors. They

wanted to be able to rearrange the chapters for each class (the students purchase a log-in to the book, which then identifies them to a specific section and instructor). Plus, the instructors can leave different “notes” throughout the text, which look like small thumbtacks off to the margin with prompts like “Think about such-and-such questions while reading this section.” or “Be prepared to discuss your reaction to this part in class.” Even though all the classes are using the same e-textbook, each instructor can tailor the experience for their students from within the text itself—setting up links to other sections of the book, inserting exercises, incorporating media. What they envision this being in the end is a textbook and an LMS (like Blackboard, Compass) all rolled into one.

The Rhetoric Department used an outside vendor, “which turned out to be a miserable experience”—but it also retained copyright and started working with another department to get the etextbook they actually *wanted*.

I’m tossing this in as example of trying to do something significantly new and different with etextbooks. How successful was it? Is it a generalizable model? Did it actually save money for the students? Those are different questions, and there might be answers by now. I see that *Writing @ the University of Illinois* appears as an etextbook for \$27.95 and is used in Rhetoric 100 through 105. The concept—locally-tailored etexts that go beyond print textbooks and lower costs while increasing flexibility—seems almost unarguably good.

Business school ditches Kindle DX after trial run

That’s the headline on Jacqui Cheng’s [May 13, 2010 story](#) at *ars technica*. The lede:

The Kindle isn’t doing as well in academic environments as Amazon—and educators—had originally hoped. The Darden Business School at the University of Virginia is near the end of its Kindle “experiment,” already concluding that students are not into the Kindle when it comes to classroom learning. They are, however, fans of the Kindle when it comes to using it as a personal reading device.

These were Kindle DX ereaders, the big-screen ones that seem particularly well suited to textbooks—but they’re still eInk readers, with all the limitations implicit in that technology. (No color, no video, not very good graphics, so-so resolution.) The story notes that Arizona State and Princeton also ran Kindle tests that didn’t go very well.

In this case, when Darden students were surveyed midterm, 75 to 80% said they would *not* recommend the Kindle DX to incoming students as classroom devices—but 90 to 95% *would* recommend it as a personal reading device. Those are impressive numbers. Darden didn’t see this as a failure of ereaders—just the Kindle.

Unfortunately, the story mostly offers survey results; it doesn't indicate *why* the Kindle DX didn't work well. Some comments offer suggestions, including a detailed list from an MBA student who was in one of the experiments. It's a good comment stream—including those who basically say that one problem is that e-textbooks need to be wholly redone to work well. (A number of other items reference the same experiment; they're notable mostly for the much longer and more argumentative streams of comments. I'll spare you some of them.)

E-Book Readers Bomb on College Campuses

This [June 10, 2013 piece](#) by Alison Damast at *BloombergBusinessweek* goes beyond the Darden experience to discuss the results of the full seven-campus pilot program (apparently set up by Amazon?).

With students able to download class materials and textbooks easily onto the slender 10.2-ounce device, many thought the era of carrying heavy textbooks would soon be over. Just a few months later, their hopes were dashed, as students reported that the Kindle was a poor replacement for a textbook, hard to use in the classroom, and difficult to navigate.

Most schools reported that students were dissatisfied with the Kindle DX as a classroom tool and that “many students had abandoned the Kindle just a few weeks into the experiment.” The article goes into more detail about Darden's attempt: The school worked with Amazon to convert some of the case studies it uses in first-year classes, but students didn't find the setup workable even though it was customized for the Kindle DX.

Naturally, Amazon's spokesperson wasn't discouraged, saying the pilot program helped Amazon figure out how to make the Kindle a “more useful classroom tool” and “One day students could read all their schoolbooks on Kindle.”

I love this anecdote: Joe Chard, who calls himself a tech geek, was *thrilled* to be one of those selected for the Kindle DX pilot. “I felt like I won the lottery.” By November, he'd given up on the ereader in favor of reading class materials (in PDF) on his laptop.

At the other MBA program among the seven, University of Washington's Foster school, textbooks were on the Kindle but not case studies—and students had the *option* of using the Kindle. Initially, 61 of 77 students decided to use the Kindle. A quarter later, only 17 of the 61 chose to continue using the Kindle. Accessibility (as set up, the DX couldn't be used by blind students) was also an issue for four of the universities in the pilot program.

At least some of the institutions just wanted *better technology*: “The iPads are coming.” One professor said the iPad “will revolutionize executive education”—all you need is the hot device, right?

Books Are Here To Stay: Kindle and iPad Not Ready For College Classrooms

If you take the headline on [this July 7, 2010 piece](#) at *CityTownInfo.com* at face value, the professor in the previous piece is wrong: The iPad, at least in 2010, wasn't the answer either. But that's tricky. This compilation combines reports on the Kindle DX experiment with Jakob Nielsen's study having two dozen people read Ernest Hemingway short stories in print and on the iPad, Kindle and desktop PCs. "The results show that when compared to print, reading speeds on the iPad declined by 6.2 percent and 10.7 percent on the Kindle. Nielson argues that universities will most likely avoid e-readers if further studies prove that they negatively affect reading speeds."

I think the mashup is less than convincing. Half is largely based on the story just discussed and a related story; the other on a Nielsen report and [mashable coverage](#). The Nielsen study is very close to being anecdotal and deals with reading fiction closely, not normal textbook use.

2011

Kindle so-so for students, UW study concludes

This item, which appeared [on May 2, 2011](#) on *Brier Dudley's Blog* (on the *Seattle Times'* site), appears to be reporting on the same Kindle DX experiment—but in an extended version involving what might be the most natural audience for ereaders: computer science students at the University of Washington.

"There is no e-reader that supports what we found these students doing," first author Alex Thayer, a UW doctoral student in design and engineering, said in a release. "It remains to be seen how to design one. It's a great space to get in to, there's a lot of opportunity."

Seven months into the study, more than 60 percent of the students had stopped using their Kindle regularly for academic reading—and these were computer science students, who are presumably more sympathetic to an electronic book.

It wasn't a huge sample: 39 first-year grad students in computer science and engineering. Some of the conclusions from the report: Students did most reading in a "fixed location"; students found it difficult to switch reading techniques (e.g., from skimming to full reading) on the Kindle; and "cognitive mapping"—using physical cues—was harder.

Hannah Hickey posted a similar story [on May 2, 2011](#) at *UW Today*; I'll add a couple of quotations from Charlotte Lee, a UW assistant professor who was one of several authors of the report on the study:

“E-readers are not where they need to be in order to support academic reading,” Lee concludes. But asked when e-readers will reach that point, she predicts: “It’s going to be sooner than we think.”

Another coauthor saw multiple platforms—including print—playing an ongoing role in academic reading. That coauthor sees the situation as similar to music, “where MP3s, CDs and LPs all coexist in music-lovers’ listening habits.” In other words, this co-author (a doctoral student) is an *and* person.

E-textbooks flunk an early test

Ten days later ([May 12, 2011](#)), after the UW researchers presented their findings at the ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, Nicholas Carr wrote this longer, more detailed and more negative commentary based on the same study.

When it comes to buzzy new computer technologies, schools have long had a tendency to buy first and ask questions later. That seems to be the case once again with e-readers and other tablet-style computers, which many educators, all the way down to the [kindergarten level](#), are lusting after, not least because the gadgets promise to speed the replacement of old-style printed textbooks with newfangled digital ones. In theory, the benefits of e-textbooks seem clear and compelling. They can be updated quickly with new information. They promise cost savings, at least over the long haul. They reduce paper and photocopier use. They can incorporate all manner of digital tools. And they’re lightweight, freeing students from the torso-straining load of book-filled backpacks.

If you’re wondering, that hyperlink leads to an April 12, 2011 Associated Press report on plans for 300 kindergartners in Auburn, Maine to get iPads “to learn the basics about ABCs, 1-2-3s, drawing and even music.” The Superintendent says “It’s a revolution in education”; some parents aren’t so sure, especially for students so young.

Back to the UW study. Carr’s two-sentence summary: “Students find the devices cumbersome to use, ill-suited to their study routines, and generally underwhelming. Paper textbooks, it seems, may not be quite as obsolete as they appear.”

He provides additional details—for example, an assertion in the report that some of the 40% who kept using the Kindle DX “became less diligent about completing their reading tasks.” Carr offers a good summary of reading modalities:

One of the key themes emerging from the study, as well as from earlier research into reading behavior, is that people in general and students in particular read in a variety of ways. Sometimes they immerse themselves in a text, reading without interruption. Sometimes they skim a text to get a quick sense of the content or the argument. Some-

times they search a text for a particular piece of information or a particular topic. Sometimes they skip back and forth between two or more sections of a text, making comparisons. And sometimes they take notes, make marginal annotations, or highlight passages as they read. Reading is, moreover, a deeply personal, highly idiosyncratic activity, subject to all kinds of individual quirks. Every reader is unique.

He notes the flexibility of printed books (which we take for granted) and the comparative rigidity of existing ereaders and ebooks. He notes that some problems found at UW are easy to fix—and some aren't. Here's a paragraph Carr quotes from the study regarding cognitive mapping:

[One student] used kinesthetic cues such as folded page corners and the tangible weight of the printed book to help him locate content quickly. He told us that “after I've spent some time with the physical book, I know ... exactly how to open it to the right page. ... I kind of visually can see where I am in the book.” His physical experience with the text changed dramatically when he began using his Kindle DX: He lost these kinesthetic cues and spent much more time hunting for information than he had previously done. He stopped using the Kindle DX for his assigned academic readings because he wanted to remain as productive and efficient as he was before he received his Kindle DX.

Carr isn't slamming all use of ereaders and tablets, but he does suggest “It's naïve to assume that e-textbooks are a perfect substitute for printed textbooks.”

The baker's dozen comments are a mixed bag: worth reading, but read them all. Having a specifically self-identified librarian dismiss out of hand any possibility that print books are *really* superior is, by now, no surprise.

6 Companies Aiming to Digitize the Textbook Industry

OK, so it's *Mashable* and a listicle to boot (by Sarah Kessler [on May 10, 2011](#)), but it may still provide useful background. Kessler implies that regular readers are leaping to ebooks with great fervor by using one out-of-context sales number and the omnipresent Amazon “outselling paper books” quote (which, technically, the article linked to didn't actually say), but then says students haven't caught on: 74% of students surveyed in 2010 still preferred printed textbooks.

Where some see non-adopters, others see untapped markets, and thus large and small players alike have long been targeting the digital textbook niche. Here are some of the ways they're looking to get students to trade their print for pixels.

She profiles six operations: CourseSmart (a joint venture involving McGraw-Hill and Pearson, claiming to offer 90% of North American core

textbooks in ebook form), CafeScribe (a Follett operation with social features), VitalSource (portrayed as a mashup of the first two), entourage Systems (a custom \$500 dual-screen ereader, the Edge, along with etextbooks), Inkling (fancy iPad textbooks with *real-time popup notes from other readers*, just the thing to enhance concentration) and Nook Study (a free “desktop ereader” from B&N).

Mostly just descriptions; no sense of how well they’re doing, whether students like the results, etc. And, like most older *Mashable* articles, no way to know whether there ever were any comments.

Zero tolerance for print

Nicholas Carr was on a roll about etextbooks in 2011. Here’s one posted at *Rough Type* [on May 20, 2011](#), concerning some politicians’ and educators’ solution to students’ apparent mixed feelings about etextbooks: *force them down students’ throats*.

Case in point: Florida passing a budget measure that *bars* printed textbooks from schools starting in the 2015/16 school year. (The link in the story is now dead.)

One lawmaker said the bill was intended to “meet the students where they are in their learning styles,” which means nothing but sounds warm and fuzzy.

Actually, it *does* mean something: The lawmaker’s asserting that kids prefer e-everything—the “digital natives” meme—and to hell with evidence to the contrary.

[W]e’re still a long way from understanding exactly what’s gained and lost when you shift from printed books to digital ones. Yet, as the moronic Florida bill shows, perception often matters more than reason when it comes to injecting new technologies into schools. E-textbooks are so obviously superior to printed ones—they’re *digital*, for crying out loud - that waiting for a rigorous evaluation would seem like a pathetic act of Ludditism.

Somebody using the handle “KiltBear” was solidly pro-e-everything in an earlier set of comments on Carr’s blog, so it’s no surprise that they applaud Florida’s move as “amazingly forward-looking,” since, of course, any remaining problems will surely be solved by 2015. Other commenters disagree, but KiltBear comes back to educate everybody on why they’re wrong.

Another study points to advantages of printed textbooks

Carr again, this time [on June 27, 2011](#) at *Rough Type* and back to higher education—specifically, a University of California library system [report](#) on a Springer ebook pilot project (this link *does* work—it’s a 34-page

PDF). Before commenting on Carr's post, a few notes from the report itself:

- It was a *serious* study, not anecdotal: An initial survey received 2,589 responses and the core survey involved 1,591 people who indicated that they use ebooks in their academic work. (The 1,078 others were asked one open-ended question about their attitudes on ebooks). Most people who don't use ebooks at UC *do* use digital resources such as journals.
- Roughly two-thirds of grad students and postdocs used ebooks; just over half of undergrads and faculty did.
- Among *all* respondents (or, rather, the 2,410 who responded to this question), 49% preferred print books, 34% preferred ebooks and 17% were somewhere in the middle. Only postdocs came close to a majority preferring ebooks (49%); undergrads were lowest (27%), with about one-third of faculty and grads. Slightly over half of business and law students preferred ebooks; only 17% of arts and humanities students did.
- "Many undergraduate respondents commented on the difficulty they have learning, retaining, and concentrating while in front of a computer."
- Searching within and across ebooks was seen as the primary advantage of ebooks; annotating, downloading for later use and dedicated ereaders were also strong.
- This one's interesting: 41% of respondents rated the option of buying a print-on-demand version of an ebook as important.

Some issues are Springer-specific and it's worth noting that UC libraries have perpetual access to almost 20,000 Springer ebook titles (published from 2005 to 2009) in most disciplines—with full integration into catalogs and via OpenURL links by March 2009. This wasn't a "spring it on them and ask about them" case.

Back to Carr. He offers a fair précis of the major findings then looks at specific responses.

The most illuminating part of the survey came when respondents were asked to explain their preferences. The answers suggest that while students prefer e-books when they need to search through a book quickly to find a particular fact or passage, they prefer printed books for deep, attentive reading. "E-books divide my attention," said one undergraduate. "Paper ... keeps me focused and away from distractions that may arise from computer usage," said another. "I have some difficulty paying careful attention to long passages on my computer," said another. "Reading on the computer makes it harder for me to understand the information," said another. Commented a graduate student: "I am a better reader when I have the print copy in front of me."

A social sciences grad student who generally prefers print nailed it: “However, the better answer would be that print books are better in some situations, while e-books are better in others.”

Carr quotes a typical Governorator comment dismissing print textbooks as outdated and notes that it’s a little more complicated if you actually talk to students and look at how they work. Comments are interesting, including one who *dismisses* the study because it wasn’t focused on Kindle DX and similar ereaders—which means the commenter was deliberately ignoring most of the study and Carr’s post.

Not Sold (Yet) on Ebooks

Time to turn to a librarian and first-rate writer and thinker—Barbara Fister [on September 22, 2011](#) in her “Library Babel Fish” blog at *Inside Higher Ed*. She was getting ready to be a panelist in *Library Journal*’s second “virtual summit” on ebooks, with ten minutes to talk about *marketing* ebook collections in academic libraries. Other panelists included one from a library offering more than a million ebooks.

Fister predicted that the audience wouldn’t be happy with her comments:

It’s partly a function of the kind of library I work at—undergraduate, residential, small—and partly my skeptical nature, but I still am not convinced we should invest in vast collections of books we don’t choose and don’t really own. So before I market something, I need to be persuaded my community needs it. And so far, there’s no demand.

As she notes, there wasn’t much demand for ejournals 20 years ago, and they’re regarded as mandatory today—but she doesn’t want to repeat “some terrible mistakes along the way to a digital journal future” with ebooks.

Fister’s library has had some experience with ebooks, specifically netLibrary. The results: “Again and again, students would encounter these books in the catalog, utter a few choice words, and then ask if we could get them a *real* book.” She offers eight bullet-point questions she wants to think about before redirecting dollars from print books to ebooks—the first of which doesn’t seem to get asked very often: “Will our students like using ebooks—at least as much as print?” She also asks questions that are fundamental to the way most ebooks are sold—or, rather, leased—to libraries, e.g., she’d like to be able to select only books that fit her college’s curriculum and *choose* the ebooks, not just license huge quantities.

Fister sees the connection between proposed ebook systems and the Big Deals in journals, but also the differences:

These issues are probably fresh in my mind because we recently got word that the cost of our SAGE journal collection is jumping in price enormously as the publisher adds journals that we didn’t ask for and don’t want. The last time this happened, we asked what it would cost to

subscribe to just the handful of journals we really need, and the quote they gave us was higher than the whole bundle. Between this abrupt price increase and a huge jump in prices for the American Chemical Society journals—another offer we can't refuse—our budget has taken a big hit, and since we've been through three journal cancelations in the past decade and have little left to cut, our book budget will likely take the hit. It's not surprising that book publishers want in on this racket.

But books are not like journal articles. Book publishers (understandably) will resist giving people a print option, whereas printing out an entire journal article is a common and accepted practice. Skimming a fifteen page article online is a lot easier than skimming a 300 page book, and reading closely—I'm guessing our students will prefer print, hands down.

There's more here, and of course it's worth reading. As are the thoughtful comments. (OK, so maybe this belongs in "ebooks and libraries." Categories are *hard!*)

The Revolution Will Not Be Subscription-Based

Barbara Fister again, same location, this time [on October 13, 2011](#). She links to [a study](#) on how college students (undergrads) manage technology in the library during crunch time. This time, I admit to *not* reading the 72-page study, trusting Fister to provide fair comment.

I love what these researchers are doing—actually talking to undergraduates about how they do research (what a concept!) rather than making assumptions. Often, when I read their reports I think to myself "yes, that sounds exactly like our students; no surprises here." But then I realize how much their findings challenge the latest library craze and am grateful to have real data to back up my impressions.

Take ebooks. Librarians currently seem to think we should be investing in massive numbers of ebooks, and the rationale often given is "students live on the Internet. If it's not online, it doesn't exist to them. We need to meet them where they are." In a stronger form this is worded as "EVOLVE OR DIE!!" But if you point out that the students you talk to don't like to read anything on the screen, you'll probably hear "oh, we just need a better marketing campaign. They don't know what they're missing."

Sounds about right—and yes, this is to some extent a followup to the previous post, posted after the *LJ* virtual conference. The one-sentence version: "Our students aren't interested in ebooks, so we aren't buying lots of them and thus have nothing to market." She'd rather see libraries fund open access monographs.

She notes the economics of one academic-library offer: You have tens of thousands of ebooks *available*, but not really: you pay for the ones your pa-

trons actually use. At around \$75 per ebook. Oh, and there are also short-term loans: more than five minutes but no more than 24 hours, at an average of \$13.60 per use.

That's much cheaper than buying and shelving a book that might never be used, but this library spent \$50,000 on access to digital books that people used for less than a day. Is this really the best we can do with our funding?

I keep thinking we're creating a new system where books will be as scarce as ever for those who can't pay while, for those who have money, there will be an all-you-can-eat banquet that can't be shared with the starving. After a transition like this, will we be any better off?

She notes a general discovery that "students are not as excited about gadgetry and electronic sources as we tend to assume." By now, this should come as no surprise. Do read the comments—one of Fister's responses may be longer than the post.

Students Like E-Books, Right? Wrong!

To finish off 2011, here's one from an unusual source: a student—Shep McAllister, then a senior at Trinity University, posting [on November 22, 2011](#) at *HackCollege*. The lede, including a link to another story you may find worth reading:

When I first arrived at Trinity as a college freshman and bought my first set of textbooks at the campus bookstore (how naïve I was back then), I remember thinking that by the time I graduated, I'd be using e-books exclusively. Well, I'm a few weeks from graduation, and that never panned out. In fact, Audrey Watters over at MindShift [reported on some preliminary numbers](#) from a survey conducted by e-book provider eBrary, and the results are not what you might expect. While e-book purchasing in general is exploding (Amazon now sells more e-books than dead tree editions), sales of e-books to students have not significantly increased over the last three years. Why is this?

McAllister's three reasons: Availability is scattershot; textbook selection is putrid; the devices haven't penetrated campus. It's worth reading his expansions of those points.

The piece closes with a request to comment about peoples' own experiences with ebooks at school. Of the responses, a fair number say the readers prefer print books—and one ebook advocate tells McAllister he doesn't know what he's talking about.

2012

This year kicks off with Apple's bid to reinvent textbooks and goes on from there.

Apple announces iBooks 2, iBooks Author to “reinvent textbooks”

Jacqui Cheng [on January 19, 2012](#) at *ars technica*, reporting on an Apple media event. Apple apparently called iBooks 2 “a textbook software program that allows textbook-makers and instructors to create rich, interactive teaching media for the iPad.”

Books created for iBooks 2 can have all manner of media attached, complete with multitouch capabilities. The company listed numerous ways in which iBooks 2 authors can create engaging content for students, including multiple-choice questions with immediate feedback within the text, the ability to make notes and highlights that can be found in a single location as note cards or sprinkled throughout the text, ways to explore embedded graphics and 3D animations, full-motion movies, and more.

Apple added a “textbook” category to its iBookstore with some free samples. iBooks Author is a Mac-only application to create these advanced e-textbooks—and it’s interesting that book prices were capped at \$14.99. (Apparently Apple specifically said “high school books.”) Oh, and students can buy *full courses* from iTunes U, also being opened up to K12.

That’s it—pretty much a straight news story with little interpretation. Along with 254 comments. Reading just the first couple of dozen, I see a range of brief but thoughtful comments as well as the usual idiots who believe that this announcement *by itself* will massively reduce textbook costs. Not everybody, to be sure! Still, you get nonsense like “Most content (at least the fundamentals) within textbooks are not copyrighted.”

Apple Really Pushing iPads As The Future Of Textbooks

After the announcement come the commentaries, beginning with this one by Chris Morran [on January 19, 2012](#) at *Consumerist*. The lede (apparently Morran’s not much for ordinary text):

Textbooks suck. They’re pricey, heavy, often outdated and they don’t play videos or music. The folks at Apple have been pushing possible educational aspects of the iPad since its release, but today the company went hogwild on the topic, introducing both a new version of its iBooks e-reader app and an app to help anyone create truly interactive books on the fly.

Still mostly coverage with snark. But there’s this:

But while this software might be free and easy to use, what still remains is the cost of actually getting iPads and other tablets into the hands of students. Publishers may play along for now, but until schools and local governments begin subsidizing iPads, it will likely be a while until a students’ entire textbook library is on their wireless device.

No discussion of the possibility that etextbooks full of videos and the like aren't necessarily the optimal solution for everything—but *Consumerist* pieces are short and that wasn't the point here.

Apple, Why Does it Have to Be Like This? The Cold Cynicism of the iBook EULA

That longish title heads Marshall Kirkpatrick's commentary [on January 19, 2012](#) at *ReadWriteWeb*. The lede points up an important aspect of Apple's new offering: people creating etextbooks with iBooks Author *can't sell them anywhere except through Apple*.

It's hard to wrap my brain around the cold cynicism of Apple's [releasing a new tool to democratize the publishing of eBooks today](#), only to include in the tool's terms and conditions a prohibition against selling those books anywhere but through Apple's own bookstore. There's just something so achingly awful about it.

The link is to RWW's own discussion of the announcement, specifically saying it's targeted at high school students. The tone of the RWW discussion is, as one commenter says, "sycophantic." Not so this discussion.

Kirkpatrick quotes the relevant license section. It's interesting: "selling" is the key term. You can *give away* works created with iBooks Author on any platform, but you can only distribute *in any manner involving payment* through Apple. Oh, and by the way, Apple can refuse to allow your textbook to be distributed. Without offering reasons.

One developer of iOS apps calls this "unprecedented audacity"; another writer calls it "mind-bogglingly greedy and evil." Kirkpatrick just thinks it's very, very sad. (There are links to interesting commentaries on the move.)

As you might expect given the source, Kirkpatrick's all about the clear superiority of multimedia interactive multitouch etextbooks to boring old print. He's just sad that Apple wants to lock The Future up so tightly.

Is this what the world is to come to? To a clean, crisp, cold beauty of high-end consumer goods that promise to empower but only under the watchful eye of the world's most profitable corporation? Why does it have to be this way, Apple?

Reading the comments chronologically, I see a lot of Apple defenders—including those who say it was *proper* to attack Microsoft for attempting to exert control, but it's *great* for Apple to exert control because, you know, Apple's creative where Microsoft—well, I'm going to quote here: "Microsoft never empowered people to create media, tell stories and bring their craft to the public." That's a strong statement, and as one who's been telling stories and preparing finished books with MSWord for quite a few years, I'd take issue with it.

The classic is probably a commenter who raises a phony “publisher exclusivity” analogy and then says you shouldn’t be complaining about this because kids are starving and women are being raped. Which is a sure-fire way to stop *almost any* discussion. As for that analogy, I would note that CreateSpace (a division of Amazon) not only *allows* you to distribute PoD books and ebooks created via CreateSpace elsewhere, it *does* the distribution—and, as with Lulu (which certainly has its own bookstore), is delighted to have you pay discounted production prices to have multiple copies produced and sell them *yourself* through physical bookstores or anywhere else.

Sell Your Book in the iBookstore and Apple Won’t Let You Sell It Anywhere Else

Another take on this issue, by Roberto Baldwin at *Gizmodo* [on January 19, 2012](#). If Baldwin’s right, it’s a little more insidious than you might think:

Ugh, the worst part is that you never agree to anything when you install the application. The EULA never appears when you install. Apparently, you implicitly agree to the EULA simply by using the software. If you’ve worked for weeks on a book only to discover you can’t sell it anywhere else once you publish it to the iBookstore, you’re gonna be pissed.

Baldwin *does* use a publishing analogy (concluding that Apple is becoming a publisher, not just a distributor) but notes that at least publishers tell you up front that you can’t publish the same book through more than one publisher.

Would you be surprised to see loads of Apple defenders in the comments? There are also others, including one thoughtful person who notes an even worse fallacy in the publisher analogy: If a publisher decides not to publish your book, you can take it elsewhere, but if Apple decides not to accept a book created with iBooks Author, *you can’t*.

One particularly interesting thread in a number of the comment streams: Many commenters seem to say “It’s OK because only iPads can handle iBook Author books, so only the Apple store should be able to sell them.” Do most iPad owners agree to only buy content and apps from Apple, never anybody else? Is that reasonable?

I didn’t go through all the comments. I was struck by one who, in defending Apple, said this: “If you’ve had something published by a commercial entity, it’s virtually certain that your contract explicitly transfers the copyright for that work to the publisher.” *Buzz*: WRONG! Take a look at the copyright page for almost all of my books, including those published by a Macmillan imprint: The copyright is in my name. That’s also true for many, if not most, commercial titles: Publishers contract for *certain rights* to a book, but certainly don’t uniformly demand

transfer of copyright itself. (I don't believe most competent agents would *allow* an author to sign a contract that transfers copyright.)

Apple's textbook plan feels like a blast from the past

We'll close out this Apple cluster with [this January 20, 2012 piece](#) by Glenn Fleishman at *Macworld*—and I'm going to suggest that *Macworld* is not written by Apple-haters. (I subscribed to the magazine for some years when I was trying to cover PCs more deeply. I don't think most of its writers are Apple fanboys but they're surely not anti-Apple.)

I had to check that my computer wasn't an old black-and-white television set showing blocky white text Thursday morning and that I wasn't clacking away on a 6502 computer over a 110-baud modem when I heard about [Apple's announcements relating to iBooks 2, iBooks Author, and its new multimedia textbooks](#). That's because I've heard it all before.

The link is to *Macworld's* coverage of the announcement—and its hands-on discussion of iBooks Author. Fleishman's adding some context. He remembers 1981, with educational software vendors “hawking textbook complements” for the Apple II, Commodore PET and TRS-80.

Today, the object is to replace textbooks altogether while enhancing them beyond what paper can manage. As a grizzled and cynical technology veteran, I ask: What's been learned in 30 years? Apparently, that you can make the same arguments and believe that they've never been made before.

From the dawn of the concept of multimedia, firms that cater to the education market have been pushing the notion that adding animation, audio, and video (as each form of media became more readily embeddable) would engage students further, and improve achievement. Printed books are boring. They just sit there! That's one of their advantages, too.

There's more, including a suggestion that there's no evidence that multimedia-enhanced instruction actually improves education in most areas. He also points out that interactive “books” have been around a *long* time, as interactive CD-ROMs. For that matter, there are enhanced etextbooks that *don't* lock in to the iPad: he mentions a 200-module Web-based college textbook *Principles of Biology from Nature* that sells for \$49 per student (for a lifetime subscription).

Apple's 1.0 approach on digital textbooks seems so much less ambitious. In the K-12 world, it requires schools to supply kids with iPads; in college, ostensibly students would need to buy one. Bulk educational sales at Apple are, as of today at least, still locked into the mode of making a single purchase and then transferring licenses to individual iTunes Store accounts. That might work for college students, but

can't fly in the K-12 world, where school districts wouldn't be allowed to give digital textbooks permanently to students.

He notes that \$14.99 isn't a great price point for high school textbooks—because schools would have to buy a new copy every year, which they don't do with print textbooks.

Apparently some commenters interpreted the piece as saying the whole effort was worthless. That wasn't how I read it; I thought Fleishman was mostly objecting to the apparent triumphalism of the announcement.

The (Not So) Inevitable Future of Digital Textbooks

OK, so Audrey Watters' [February 2, 2012](#) piece at "Hack [Higher] Education" in *Inside Higher Ed* does mention the Apple announcement—but it's about more than that. Watters sees a lot of "inevitability" being tossed around, including publication of a [Digital Textbook Playbook](#) by the FCC and Department of Education—a 67-page PDF "designed to help schools make the transition away from print." Watters isn't certain that the move to digital textbooks is a done deal—especially in higher ed, where students "remain incredibly resistant to digital textbooks." She includes links to a couple of campus stories.

Watters recognizes that it's an error to assume the "digital generation" will all be technophiliacs—and that this reverse ageism may be a failing of an older generation. She concludes:

Students aren't going to "suddenly" want digital textbooks because they grew up reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* on an iPad. There'll need to be more than a Digital Playbook for schools—both at the K-12 and higher ed level—in convincing students to "give up loyalty to the printed book." They're loyal for a reason, and it isn't necessarily luddism.

The first comment, from someone who I assume is an etextbook publisher, turns it around: "Long ago we found that moving to digital means managing change within the institution (faculty, students, staff). This is part of an educational process and part of the learning environment in higher education. It is not merely swapping one product type out for another. Our clients succeed when they embrace the change, implement training, and are inclusive in the process." *Not* the possibility that students might *reasonably* want print textbooks part or all of the time. Nope: *You must change*, and that means *embracing* the change.

Others don't think it's that simple. I like one direct response to his argument: "I can't think of very many (ie none) successful creations where industrial designers asked their customers to adapt to something they built. It works much better the other way around. Most higher education texts are available in print or as digital files. It's the 18-year-old students' choice. And they overwhelmingly seem to prefer print."

The Price Is Right?

This long article by Dian Schaffhauser appeared [on April 1, 2012](#) at *Campus Technology*, but I see nothing to suggest that the date is significant. Given the pain college students feel about high textbook prices, it's natural to hope that etextbooks would lower the price considerably:

Many educators—as well as the feds and plenty of state governments—believe that the solution to high textbook costs lies with a shift to digital content. After all, if you eliminate the printing, the trucking, the warehousing, and all the other hassles related to physical inventory, you're left with only the writing, production, development, and marketing. Surely that will bring down the prices students have to pay for curriculum?

But in the real world...a digital-content pilot at Daytona State College showed that students paid *\$1 less* to rent their etextbooks than other students did to *buy* the print textbooks. And, of course, the etextbook users couldn't sell them back to the bookstore.

CT set out to investigate, finding that *in general* renting etextbooks *might* be a little cheaper than the overall cost of buying and reselling print textbooks—but it might also be more expensive. And, you know...I'm sorry, but having to endure a full-screen ad before seeing each relatively brief page of this article does not encourage me to read the whole thing. Maybe you'll have more endurance. As far as I can see, *Campus Technology* is a bad example of offering just enough content to push endless ads at the poor reader, and I'm not playing.

You might find this interesting enough to slog through the many interruptions and ads. The lack of any comments suggests that others didn't.

Future U: The stubborn persistence of textbooks

Curt Hopkins' May 13, 2012 piece at *ars technica* has this odd tease: "E-readers are ascendant, but they'll have to fight to gain ubiquity." What does "ascendant" mean in this case? The lede doesn't help much:

Textbooks are a thing of the past, says the common wisdom. Well, the common wisdom of the Technorati maybe. The problem with that thinking is that the number one publisher in the world is Pearson, a textbook publisher, who brought in [\\$7.75 billion in 2009](#).

That link is to a *Publishers Weekly* table of 2009 global revenues for publishers—the top 50—and the table itself is pretty staggering, especially since it's *only* for sales of "books, journals and digital products." (So, for example, Disney/Hyperion isn't included because it doesn't break out publishing revenue.) Think publishing is becoming a small business? The *fiftieth largest* publisher had revenues of \$234 million, while the 20th

largest exceeded \$1 billion—and the top eight add up to more than \$35.6 billion dollars.

I like Hopkins' summary: "To say textbooks are big business is like saying bullets are ouchie." Still, he's a tech writer and assumes textbooks *are* changing—but he also recounts what he heard about tech in a visit to a college research methodology course. (A [different piece](#) by Jonathan Band estimates the current U.S. textbook marketplace alone as \$14 billion, roughly half K12 and half higher education.)

This is an interesting and complex article, not easy to summarize. For example, it seems clear that ereaders can be *very* beneficial in nations that don't have established school and textbook distribution systems, especially if you can get free etextbooks.

The last few paragraphs are odd. On one hand, Hopkins sees that etextbooks don't seem that wonderful *in developed nations*—but seems to think either that their success (where evident) in poorer nations is The Future or that textbooks "are being replaced...by curated collections of course-specific materials." In some cases, yes, and probably to the good. In general? Unproven. He says "someone, somehow, seems to have kicked the door off the hinges." That may be premature. Some college courses have *always* substituted "curated" readings for textbooks: That was true when I went to college; why would it be different now?

The first comment (as they're presented) is from an instructor for a university that tried to shift to ebook-only: "[T]he outcry was overwhelming. Students voiced a marked decrease in the perception of value of ebooks as compared to their paper equivalents. We have since backed off and let the instructor decide which makes sense for the course. We'd love to let the students make that determination, but the reality is that kind of freedom of choice would necessitate an infrastructure that neither we nor the textbook industry currently have." The commenter gets it: it's as much individual choice as anything. Perhaps unfortunate that the first two pro-ebook comments from students seem to suggest a major literacy problem.

Sidebar: Global revenues for publishers in 2012

As I was citing the item above, I noticed the table of 2009 global revenues for publishers, and thought that some readers might assume 2012 revenues would be sharply lower. Or not. As it turns out, *Publisher's Weekly* has published the 2012 figures—[on July 19, 2013](#). Except that now it's the 60 largest publishers, 54 of them with more than the \$234 million of the 50th largest in 2009. The biggest 10 represent the majority of the revenue (55%)—but that dominance is down slightly from 2011, when the top 10 had 57% of the revenue.

How big is Pearson now? Try \$9.16 billion for 2012! That will drop for 2013, to be sure, as Pearson merged its Penguin subsidiary into Random House. For 2012, the top eight had total publishing revenues of just

under \$36.3 billion dollars—not a huge gain from 2009, but not a loss either. (Adding the 9th and 10th largest brings it up to more than \$40.6 billion—even the 10th largest had more than \$2 billion in revenues, with the 11th—Cengage—just under \$2 billion.)

Extrapolating, book and journal publishing in 2012 was roughly a \$74 billion global business—but that’s only for the major players. There are thousands (or tens of thousands) of small and medium-sized book and journal publishers not included in that total. Note that these figures do *not* include magazines and newspapers, still both substantial markets (including advertising). (The nine largest *magazine* publishers in the U.S. accounted for more than \$11 billion in revenue—for magazine divisions alone—in 2010. There are, of course, hundreds or thousands of other magazine publishers, and vast numbers outside the U.S.)

Students Find E-Textbooks ‘Clumsy’ and Don’t Use Their Interactive Features

This time, it’s Angela Chen [on August 22, 2012](#) in *The Chronicle of Higher Education’s* “Wired Campus.” Chen links to [a January 18, 2012 article](#) on efforts by college leaders to “shake up the textbook industry” by, in essence, *forcing* students to use etextbooks. The universities—they’re all respectable institutions, including my alma mater—were going to bulk-purchase etextbook licenses and charge students a “course-materials fee.” That would presumably be cheaper than buying the books—but the earlier article says publishers are interested in the model “because it gives them a steadier and more predictable source of income.” Since the universities *guarantee* the income and etextbooks can’t be sold and reused. Of course, guaranteed-revenue streams like this *never* come back to bite the guarantors: As every academic librarian can tell you, Big Deals are 100% positive. Right?

For now, the universities aren’t charging the fees—which should make students *love* etextbooks, since \$0 is a substantial discount over normal textbook costs. I find it interesting that one of the *educators* pushing this model explicitly says “publishers would make more money on this model than they do right now.” I guess it’s important that public universities guarantee high profits for private publishers.

Back to Chen’s article. She links to a report on some of the pilot projects at the five universities—a report that now yields a 404 (really, Internet2?)—showing that “many students find the (free) e-textbooks ‘clumsy’ and prefer print.”

Students praised the e-books for helping them save money but didn’t like reading on electronic devices. Many of them complained that the e-book platform was hard to navigate. In addition, most professors who responded said that they didn’t use the e-books’ collaborative features, which include the ability to share notes or create links within the text.

As I've now come to expect, those pushing this model aren't bothered by the results. They offer a variety of reasons why they don't matter...and 24 more colleges signed up for a wider pilot program.

Glancing at some comments, I must admit I'm getting sick of self-proclaimed librarians who insist format doesn't matter and that e-textbooks are superior. We get "but the kids just *love* digital" (not in precisely those words)—and, remarkably, an admission from the librarian that they weren't really responding to the article, just to the (apparently horrendous) comment about books not being dead yet. And, sure enough, there's anecdotal evidence to *prove* ebooks will soon be preferred by students. I was also impressed that ebook advocates essentially dismiss any advantages of printed books and rely heavily on the assumption that any problems will be solved any day now. Which may be true, but if it is, wouldn't it be appropriate to give students the choice until the problems *are* solved to *the satisfaction of the students*?

Digital Deadline

The web-page title for this [August 3, 2012 piece](#) by Brian Kibby at *Inside Higher Ed* is "Essay predicting that campuses will be completely digital in 3 years." I would say it should have appeared on April 1 rather than August 3, but it's abundantly clear that Kibby is serious in this piece of digital absolutism. Take the first two paragraphs:

The time has come to ask the question: When will we see the complete digital transformation of higher education in the United States?

The need for the shift to digital are painfully clear: Grades are lagging, students aren't graduating, and those who do earn a degree often don't have the skills that employers want. While digital learning won't solve all these problems, we need to find ways to drive students' performance to help them recoup their college investment, and I believe that digital represents the fastest and best option.

Is there *any* evidence that "digital learning," and specifically *complete and total conversion* to digital everything would solve *any* of those problems? Not that I've seen—and if the rest of this roundup suggests anything, it's that college students aren't thrilled with the idea of print textbooks disappearing entirely. But, to Kibby at least, that's irrelevant.

What does he mean by his assertion that higher education should be "completely digital" within 36 months?

I'm talking about a total transition from a reliance on print textbooks to a full embrace of digital content and learning systems. Aside from the college library, you hopefully won't be able to find a printed textbook on a college campus in three years. And if you are, we should all be disappointed.

According to Kibby, around 3% of students today purchase ebooks rather than print when both are available. Now, one *might* think that's cause for a pause, but not Kibby. He sees three reasons why there isn't "greater uptake": Students want to stick with what they know when it comes to studying, most ebooks are little more than PDFs of printed pages—and "the value proposition of digital to students and institutions hasn't been made clear." Not that it *isn't* clear; it just hasn't been marketed right.

Kibby thinks 36 months is a long time. He says the iPad—36 months old at that point—has changed the way we consume, create and share information. Not "some of us," not "all of the owners of those 65 million iPads"—but *we*. (I don't say "65 million iPad owners" because I'm pretty certain that there are millions of people who have gone through more than one iPad.) Not content to universalize from one number, he quotes a Forrester prediction of 760 million tablets in use by 2016.

Kibby says studies show that "after using technology in an education setting for only a short time, students are realizing that they can't live without it." (That last phrase has a link to Marketwatch, but the link's defunct.) So much for the studies quoted earlier here: They're clearly trumped by—well, studies we can't see. In more of the post, he cites one self-published study by a company that does digital learning stuff. Mostly, though, he's just making a largely unsupported assertion that *all colleges must scrap all non-digital tools right away*. Because he says so.

Who is Kibby? President of McGraw-Hill Higher Education. Which, no doubt, would love to get rid of used textbook sales.

Reading the 44 comments, I see a fair number of obvious Luddites who make the mistake of *paying attention to their students* and who find that many students prefer print textbooks. More than one commenter suggests that the essay is in essence an advertisement. Several notice what I did: That there's very little evidence that Kibby's proposed solution actually solves anything.

Technology Enhancement Tools in an Undergraduate Biology Course

This piece by Aline Davis, Robin S. Robinson and Clair Waterbury [appeared December 10, 2012](#) at *EDUCAUSE review online*. It's a "single-class study" done at Framingham State University in which 64 students in a sophomore-level Biology class were invited to use e-text on iPads. Just so you understand the extent of this study: 16 students agreed to *only* read e-text; 17 agreed to *only* use hard copy text.

Maybe it's enough to quote the key takeaways that appear above an infographic (really?) that appears above the article itself (all emphasis in the original):

- This single-class study sought to evaluate technology-enhanced student engagement by comparing the experiences of students using only an e-textbook with the experiences of those using only a standard textbook.

- Students were surveyed throughout the course, and more than 80 percent of the iPad users reported they “loved” using it and wanted to use it in future courses.
- Contrary to students’ assumptions both before and after iPad use, however, students using the technology did not perform better than those using the standard textbook.

The middle bullet could be simplified to “13 students ‘loved’ using the iPad...”—and more than 60% of them thought the iPad would help them get a better grade. In fact, the final grade average for those using only the hardcopy was *slightly* better than for those using only the iPad. (The infographic not only makes BIG THINGS out of little numbers, it uses a pseudo-handwritten typeface along with a typical sans. There’s one bar chart that, given 64 students in the course, is hard to accept as having any meaning—as it breaks that 64 down into five groups by majors, then further by which pilot group they were in. With 16 and 17 students in the pilot groups, the average major cluster would be just over *three* people, so it’s not surprising that the graphs show big differences.)

It’s an interesting article. I’m not sure that it’s fair to characterize 16, 17 and 31 as each being roughly one-third of the class, but that’s being picky, I suppose. (I find it interesting that what I take to be 31—that is, 64 minus 33—which is, by my calculation, 48% rather than one-third—*didn’t want to participate*.) The full article tells a slightly different story: the *intent* was to have the “final third” use e-text on their laptops—but only two students volunteered to do so.

The conclusion (in the article itself) is curious. It mostly seems to boil down to “students who are exposed to e-texts and use them in classes might be more willing to use an e-text in the future.” Did the study show any *advantages* to using e-texts? Not that I can see. Given that two of the three authors are educational technologists and the third is a bio professor with a “deep appreciation for the value of incorporating technological advancements into her science classes,” this may not be surprising. The study set out to show the effectiveness of e-texts; that it utterly failed to do so is presumably unimportant.

2013

Oddly enough, the items I tagged in 2013 are saying much the same thing—and it’s not a new story. I suppose what’s interesting is that it’s *still* the overwhelming story: Given a choice, students—the digital generation—mostly prefer print textbooks.

For Many Students, Print Is Still King

This Jennifer Howard article [appeared January 27, 2013](#) at the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. By now, the opening paragraphs shouldn't surprise you:

Despite the hype about e-books, the classic textbook hasn't gone away. In fact, the hold-it-in-your-hands book remains the first choice for many instructors and students.

Even as publishers scramble to produce new kinds of content for a digital learning environment, print is still king for many of the biggest-selling textbooks.

Howard offers a prime example: the 50-year-old *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, now in a ninth edition, which doesn't even *have* an e-version...and has sold more than 15 million copies. Norton doesn't ignore online access: when you buy the anthology you get an access code for online quizzes, audio, photo galleries and works that aren't in the current edition. (This shows good thinking on Norton's part: Students who buy used copies or rent the book can pay a "small fee" to get the access code.)

Howard quotes a Pearson exec saying "We still print everything" even as Pearson is investing in digital resources. Maybe Howard's "print-plus" is a sensible description of the (near?) future: a book *plus* usually-digital extras.

This is a substantial piece; I've only touched on portions of it. It's worth reading (if you haven't already)—and, as usual, Howard's a good writer and reporter.

This time I did scan all 46 comments. One commenter turns up frequently as The Defender Of Ebook Superiority and says *his* students just love ebooks. Everybody else—and I do mean *everybody* else? Not so much.

Students Still Not Taking to E-Textbooks, New Data Shows

This piece by Jeremy Greenfield appeared [on February 7, 2013](#) at *Digital-bookworld*—a source that can reasonably be assumed not to be wildly anti-ebook. It's partly based on a Book Industry Study Group "nationally representative sample" of college students during the fall 2012 academic period, the third in a series of annual surveys by BISG.

On one hand, only 6% of students surveyed were using a "core digital textbook" as their main course material, a figure that was unchanged from the previous year. On the other, "there are signs that students are migrating away from print textbooks." What are those signs? The percentage of students that used the core *physical* textbook for their coursework was down from 70% to 60%, and the percentage that brought, rented or borrowed a used physical textbook was down from 90% to "around four of five" (call it 80%).

“The college student today is in the early stages of a migration, but it’s a mystery because we really don’t know where this migration is going to end up,” said Len Vlahos, executive director of BISG, who delivered the data in a presentation at the Making Information Pay for Higher Education conference in New York today, adding, “it’s not going to be done in a two-or-three year period—this is a longer trend.”

I would suggest that it’s also a mystery because there’s no way of knowing whether it’s a true migration or merely a broadening of choices. More heartening, I guess, if it’s your preference: Students are “taking to” online platforms or “integrated learning systems” (14% of students) and say that such systems help improve their grades more than either physical or e-texts. There’s a little more in this study—including the note that while most students have desktop or notebook computers, while about a third own tablets, less than 5% use tablets as a primary study device.

Conclusion

That’s it for now—and the general message seems clear. Right now, with the course materials and the platforms available, most students aren’t ready to jump from print to etextbooks. For some administrators and educators, that may not matter: Shoving digital down their throats seems to be an accepted procedure.

Does this mean etextbooks are useless or won’t grow in usefulness? Certainly not, especially when or if “etextbooks” really take advantage of tablet/notebook capabilities—and especially if (or when) open source “textbooks” become more widely available.

Does it mean print textbooks are unlikely to disappear very soon in either K12 or higher education? Yes, I think it does, assuming that publishers and administrators don’t force the issue.

What’s the balance likely to be? In K12, it strikes me that consistent textbooks of some nature are likely to continue to be essential. In a growing number of college courses, textbooks may be obsolete—and, you know, even back in the mid-1960s, a fair number of courses didn’t use textbooks.

Libraries

Ebooks and Libraries

Part Five of this extended discussion, and this one probably does its topic even less justice than the others. Grossly oversimplifying, on one hand, some librarians appear to detest print books and are openly hopeful that ebooks will sweep them away; on the other hand, some patrons want ebooks from their libraries—and publishers have made it difficult for libraries to supply them in any reasonable manner.

Some of the items here explore some of the complexities. Some relate to alternative models—something better than leasing access. As always, I've omitted more than I've included—sometimes deliberately, sometimes ignorantly. Take as a given that, even where I note comments, I didn't usually read all of them if there were more than 15 or 20.

Philosophy

Maybe “grand and not-so-grand statements” would be better for this section.

Libraries and the Lectosystem

Wayne Bivens-Tatum posted this [on February 21, 2012](#) at *Academic Librarian*. “Lectosystem” is his term for “the system of reading that supports publishers, libraries, and general literacy.” He believes that turning “every bit of reading into a monetary transaction”—one apparent aim of publishers who refuse to sell ebooks to libraries—would undermine the lectosystem and be destructive to the country as a whole.

The more literate a population, the more books will be read, and the more books that are read the more books will be bought, even if not all the books read are bought directly by the individual reader. But mass literacy requires that some people get books for free, whether it's through public schools, school libraries, public libraries, college libraries, charity, or gifts. To make this impossible, which is the implied end of turning every reading transaction into a monetary exchange, would reduce the percentage of the population that can read, which will not only ultimately reduce the number of books sold, but even further decrease the educational average in the U.S., which never seems very high even in the best of times. This inevitably would lead to the long, slow decline of America as a leading country.

Well, maybe that's a bit extreme, to blame publishers refusing to sell ebooks to libraries for destroying the country. However, there's still a lectosystem upon which everyone involved with books depends, and that system includes not only publishers and their market relation to readers, but also libraries and the gift economy. To destroy that system would also damage the market for books. If publishers thought about the long term, they might realize this, but long term thinking is anathema to most corporations.

BT suspects one result would be an increase in ebook “piracy” (he uses scare quotes and I think he's right to do so). “People who read are going to read more than they could afford to read if every book read was a book individually purchased, and the more expensive the books the more that will be the case. If publishers try to make that impossible, so much the worse for the publishers.”

I'm going to quote another paragraph, then take issue with the first sentence (bolded):

The purpose of publishers, from Elsevier to Penguin, is to sell stuff to make a profit. The purpose of libraries, both academic and public, isn't to buy books and journals. The purpose is to connect interested readers with interesting reading, whether that's a scholarly article on philosophy for the philosopher or a mystery novel for the general library user, or for that matter, a mystery novel for the philosopher who might want to read something besides scholarly articles. Libraries of some sort are crucial to the lectosystem because they're the most popular places to read more widely than one can afford to read if every act of reading requires an individual purchase. Publishers used to be crucial, but are much less so now. They're easier and easier to bypass, whether it's through non-commercial open access journals or self-publishing at Amazon. I'm not that worried about the future of libraries, because I think libraries will be able to adapt and continue their contributions to the lectosystem. I would be more worried about the future of my industry if I worked for Elsevier or Simon and Schuster. [Emphasis added.]

I believe most of that paragraph is right on the money. The first sentence is, I believe, true for Big Media publishers, the Elseviers and the Penguins. I'd like to believe it's *not* true of *most* book publishers: I believe most smaller book publishers have as their primary purpose to publish books they consider worth publishing—in a manner that keeps them going as a business. Making a profit (or at least not taking continuing losses) is *necessary* for there to be a business, but the best businesses have a primary purpose other than profit. I'm on record as saying I think the Big Five are mostly Stuff Merchants, less interested in what's between the covers than in selling as much Stuff as possible. But I believe most small publishers are primarily *book publishers*, in it for the books. Which has, to be sure, little to do with the overall discussion.

Or maybe it does. The companies making it difficult for libraries to provide ebooks are primarily Big Publishers. Many smaller publishers are not only cooperative, they're also willing to take part in systems such as Douglas County's initiative (later), where libraries actually *buy* ebooks.

Should Libraries Get Out of the eBook Business?

Bobbi Newman asked that provocative question [on March 7, 2012](#) at *Librarian by Day*. It's essential to quote the first two paragraphs, since the first one (all ten words of it) immediately refines the question:

Or get out at least until there is a better system?

I know what you are going to say, I can hear it already—"We can't! Our patrons demand ebooks!" Except the truth is our patrons want a lot of things we can't give them—to always be first on the waiting list

for the new James Patterson, to not pay fines when their books are late, for the library to be open earlier or later, or to have a system besides Dewey because despite using it their entire lives they still cannot figure it out. When it comes to ebooks, we cannot give them what they want, not really, we cannot give them books from Simon and Schuster or MacMillian or new books from Penguin or Hatchet, and not more than 26 times from HarperCollins, and probably not many books from Random House. What we can do, what maybe we should do, is spend their tax money wisely, and I am no longer convinced that spending it on the current ebook system is a wise move.

She expands on that. For example, she notes that—as of March 2012—only about 19% of the population owned ereaders, so ebooks serve a minority of patrons (and, she does *not* add, a generally-privileged minority at that). She notes that the availability of ebooks is mediocre at best—and that the process of providing them is “a nightmare.” She quotes [Guy LeCharles Gonzalez](#), who looked at the situation at that point and suggested this action for public libraries:

Stop buying ebooks across the board, at any price, under any terms. Let publishers fight it out with Amazon, and when the dust finally settles (it will) and a viable business model appears (maybe), begin negotiating anew, on solid ground, with whomever’s left standing.

In the meantime, libraries can redirect those precious resources and finances being flagged for ebooks towards more tangible initiatives in their respective communities.

Surely every library has a service gap or three to fill that’s more valuable than overpaying for temporary licenses to files and platforms they don’t own, that may or may not work on their patrons’ devices of choice, and whose pricing can fluctuate more wildly than that of crude oil and Netflix stock.

Newman wasn’t suggesting that libraries stop looking for better ebook solutions—but “perhaps we should stop throwing good money at a bad solution.”

A *lot* of comments for a library blog—more than 150. Many worth reading, some sharply disagreeing, some offering other perspectives. One persistent commenter is a “death of libraries” person, *convinced* that all brick-and-mortar libraries will be gone “in our lifetimes,” replaced by municipal servers because, you know, print books are dead.

A New eBook Pricing Model

Anthony Molaro posted this one [on April 26, 2012](#) at *The Information Activist Librarian*—and I’m including it to offer as wide a range of thought-out options as possible. Molaro says this model “makes more

sense to me” and that he “considered forming a nonprofit to run with the model,” but instead suggests that OCLC or Library Renewal run with it.

In essence a library would purchase an eBook one time but would pay the publisher for each “downloaded” rental. The payment would be tiered. Libraries would maintain ownership over the title. They would not have restrictions other than self-imposed restrictions (I would imagine that libraries would impose checkout limits or they could see a very large and unexpected monthly payout). Libraries also don’t pay up front for a bunch of books that people don’t want to read. Publishers will make a killing and capture a revenue stream hereto for they have been unable to capture.

In other words, it’s *pay per read*—or, as Wayne Bivens-Tatum would put it, monetizing every bit of reading. It’s a novel use of the word “purchase,” since libraries would not *in any meaningful sense* own the ebooks. That last sentence might be true, but I doubt that the first goal of public libraries should be to make sure that publishers make a killing.

He thinks this would cost about \$1.5 million to start up and would become self-sufficient fairly quickly. He’s clearly *serious* about this as a sensible approach. He adds a whole bunch of figures. None of them nor anything in the primary text suggest why pay per use is a reasonable idea for public libraries, unless the goal is to make libraries distribution arms of publishers.

The biggest threat to publishing isn’t Amazon; it’s Angry Birds (why publishers should invest in libraries)

This discussion comes from Jane Litte [on June 10, 2012](#) at *Dear Author*. She begins by discussing certain “elite high school basketball clubs” sponsored by Nike—not because the players will go on to the pros (most won’t) but this:

They will, undoubtedly, buy Nike for many years beyond their high school experience. Nike is investing, not only in youth talent, but in hooking kids at a young age on the Nike brand. Moreover, these kids with their elevated social standing are spreading the Nike brand loyalty to others. Nike is spending some amount of money on its future with these kids.

She notes: “When you get a group of readers in a room, nearly every one of them will recount how their reading either started at a library or was fostered by a library.” And tablet buyers say that one thing tablet activities replace is reading. Thus the title: Angry Birds replaces reading.

Publishing, whether it is traditional publishers, self publishers, digital first publishers, needs to invest in early reading for two reasons. First, early readers become paying adult readers. Second, early readers become adept adult writers. Both readers and writers are needed for a

healthy publishing ecosystem and investment in fostering the love of reading and writing is vital. There is no better place to do this than by investing in libraries.

Conversely, by *not* allowing ebook lending, “publishers are failing to invest in the future of publishing.” Even if you believe that ebooks are likely to be *part* of the future of publishing, the point stands.

There’s more here (noting that Litte’s talking to writers, not librarians), including Bowker data suggesting that library patrons go on to *buy* books in many cases (and similar data from Amazon regarding its Kindle Lending Library). I like her slightly branded conclusion:

In order to defeat Angry Bird addictions, publishers must invest in the early reader and the early writer, in the nascent point of the publishing ecosystem. With digital library lending, publishers must follow the Nike directive. Just Do It.

Most comments agree that people *do* buy books that they first discover in libraries—and discover authors whose books they go on to buy. (In a portion of the post I didn’t quote, she talks about publisher fears of “frictionless” borrowing of library ebooks. More than one commenter goes to some length to describe just how “frictionless” typical library-ebook systems actually are.)

All Hat, No Cattle: A Call for Libraries to Transform Before It’s Too Late

Jamie LaRue posted this [on June 20, 2012](#) at LJ’s “The Digital Shift.” I have mixed feelings about portions of it, but it’s worth discussing. My main problem is that LaRue sees an “eBook revolution” and I see an additional, complementary medium that’s unlikely to wipe out print books or make print books a niche service for libraries.

For the history of publishing and libraries in the United States, we have had a culture of gatekeeping. The costs of production, distribution, and review have been high. That favored the big houses, and helps to explain why we’ve seen so many mergers in the industry.

I’m not the first one to notice this, but we really only need two people in the equation: author and reader. Right now, there are a lot of people in the middle, including libraries. If we can’t figure out a way to improve the experience, or offer greater convenience, then who needs us?

I believe LaRue undersells the continuing role of *good* publishers in selection, editing, copyediting and marketing—and the many roles of libraries beyond selective housing of materials. He uses an anecdote showing just how easy it is to self-publish an ebook on CreateSpace, with the author getting 70% of sales (if it’s priced under \$10), as opposed to 10% or so

from a traditional publisher. True enough—but I’m not sure that leads to what follows:

Which would you do? Take ten percent or seventy—when the more affordable price means the likelihood of a higher volume of sales? This fundamental shift in the economics of publishing is now rippling through the whole publishing ecosystem.

The rising tide of e-publishing platforms marks the transition from a market of relative scarcity to a market of abundance. Our old processes won’t work. We need new ones.

That “likelihood of a higher volume of sales” makes an awfully big assumption about what people buy. While there are some self-published ebook bestsellers (most priced more like \$0.99 to \$2.99, not \$9.99), the long tail for self-publishing is at *extremely* low volumes. Fact is, 10% of 5,000 sales is a whole lot better than 70% of 50 sales.

Then comes a discussion of the need for modern public libraries to deal with four streams of e-content: mainstream commercial publishing, independent or mid-list publishing, local history and self-publishing. I would change “mainstream commercial” to “Big Five,” since “small” companies like Chronicle Books and Tenspeed Press are certainly mainstream, but his point is well taken: Libraries tend to overbuy from the Big Five and underbuy from everybody else—and it’s the Big Five that are most troublesome where library ebook provision is involved. On the other hand, there’s a truly sad opposition of “trends” in LaRue’s discussion of mainstream publishing:

But consider two opposing trends. The first is the proliferation of formats. We buy hardback, paperback, large print, and multiple audio formats for a single title. And now comes the inflated price for the cheapest format of all: the relatively small digital file of an ebook. The second trend: declining library budgets. [Emphasis added.]

That second trend *must be reversed*, and that’s an action libraries must be involved with. For that matter, it’s a questionable “trend”: According to IMLS figure, 56% of public libraries spent *more* per capita in 2011 than in 2009. (For more details, see my book [*\\$4 to \\$1: Public Library Benefits and Budgets*](#).)

LaRue says self-publishing is “the biggest emerging market.” In terms of number of titles, I’m sure that’s true. In terms of sales revenue, I wonder. Would I like to see public libraries pay more attention to it? Yes, but that’s problematic.

There follows an excellent discussion of the problems libraries have with the Big Five (Big Six when LaRue wrote this) and the extent to which publishers are treating libraries unfairly—and in a manner that will harm publishers.

The “Action” section includes eleven bullets, and I think every single one of them is worth considering for all but the smallest public libraries (for the smallest 30%-40% of American public libraries, even the \$6,000 investment involved in one point would be a budget-buster).

LaRue’s premise for action is this: “It is our job to provide access to the intellectual content of our culture.” No disagreement here.

The Ebook Cargo Cult

Brett Bonfield wrote this article [on July 11, 2012](#) at *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, and right off the bat I take issue with him:

Libraries created the present crisis in scholarly publishing, and we are creating a similar crisis now with our approach to ebooks.

We created the crisis in scholarly publishing by ceding control of an intrinsic library function, abstracting and indexing, a decision with inevitable consequences. Consequences like the present need to boycott Elsevier for its predatory practices. Consequences like libraries spending as much money as we can muster on only just minimally justifiable user experiences: bundled interfaces that are confusing individually and often unusable collectively, which is why many libraries spend even more on federating services like Summon in order to offer search to our users in a way that makes sense to them.

I’ll argue that it’s *not* the A&I that’s killing academic libraries—it’s the journals themselves, and libraries *never* had control of scholarly journals.

On the other hand, I’m sympathetic to Bonfield’s take on ebooks and libraries. Here are two key paragraphs (following a brief description of cargo cults):

This is how I characterize the cargo cult thinking I keep hearing around ebooks: “We’re librarians. It’s our job to pay for access to books and then share them with our community.” These are our apparent forms and precepts. For instance, at the 2012 Public Library Association conference in Philadelphia this past spring, I attended a discussion on ebooks that was so popular we ran out of chairs and had to turn people away to keep from violating the Convention Center’s fire codes. During a small group discussion that took place during the session, one of the presenters told me that by boycotting HarperCollins, and by making plans to leave Overdrive, the only vendor that supports Amazon Kindle, I am making the library irrelevant for my neighbors—that I was in danger of losing a whole generation of users. When we reconvened as a full group, another participant, to general agreement within the room, said that she was looking forward to being able to offer access to ebooks the way we offer access to journal articles. The presenters even suggested that HarperCollins may be “one of the good guys” because they are among the few big publishers currently willing to sell their ebooks to

libraries (despite the fact that they self-destruct after 26 uses). I have begun hearing this phrase in connection with HarperCollins more and more since that session, including a recent interview with a 2012 Library Journal Mover & Shaker on the Circulating Ideas podcast.

When we think this way, we are still “waiting for the airplanes to land,” going through the same motions as though nothing has changed while undermining the intent of those activities and compromising the core values of our profession. What we have done throughout the modern history of libraries is rely on and uphold fair use and first sale. We have fostered and protected intellectual freedom. We have helped to preserve our culture. If there is a science unique to library science, these are its tenets and its bulwarks.

There’s more, and I admire much of what he’s saying and the somewhat polemical tone in which he’s saying it. “Get ebooks no matter what it costs and how much we give up traditional library values to do so” is, I believe, a recipe for disaster and pretty much fruitless—and doesn’t bode well for long-term preservation.

That’s the first bit of the article. Bonfield offers eleven ebook options (alternatives to Overdrive and its ilk) he calls viable, describing each one. Are they all viable? I don’t know. Are they worth reading about and considering? I think so.

The Bookless Library

This long and unfortunate piece by David A. Bell appeared [July 12, 2012](#) at *New Republic*. Unfortunate? Right there in the title. He starts with proposed changes at NYPL—then posits the iPhone as the equivalent of NYPL: “And in a development that even just thirty years ago would have seemed like the most absurd science fiction, there are now far more books available, far more quickly, on the iPhone than in the New York Public Library.” Sigh.

Here’s the second paragraph:

It has been clear for some time now that this development would pose one of the greatest challenges that modern libraries—from institutions like the NYPL on down—have ever encountered. Put bluntly, one of their core functions now faces the prospect of obsolescence. What role will libraries have when patrons no longer need to go to them to consult or to borrow books? This question has already spurred massive commentary and discussion. But in the past year, as large-scale controversies have developed around several libraries, it has become pressing and unavoidable.

At this point, I shake my head and wonder whether it’s worth continuing. I did, with some trepidation. On one hand, Bell *does* recognize that libraries aren’t just book repositories—but he does a grand handwave

about *public domain* books. There's more handwaving about reading preferences, universal affordable access to smartphones (which are *surely* as good for reading as print books) and broadband, etc., etc. From there, it's one easy step to only specialized scholars having any interest in print books—and if readers prefer print, *too bad for them* because it's “harder to justify financially.”

Bell's remarkably good at handwaving. He waves away issues of digital permanence. He asserts that the constituency that likes print books will disappear “within two or three decades.” But, as I continue through the handwaving, it continues to be interesting that it's all about *public domain* books.

His answer for in-copyright books? He doesn't have one. Instead, he tells us that *scholars* don't use physical library collections as much as they used to and, in a breathtaking bit of Proof By Assertion, this: “anyone who has visited a local public library recently knows that more and more of its patrons are coming to use its computers, or just to sit and read in peace, and fewer of them are borrowing books.” Which is why circulation has fallen so much...oh, wait! Bell could have checked that easily, but that would involve facts and facing the possibility that he's talking nonsense.

There's a lot of “seems likely” and “seems probable” in this stuff, along with his apparent sense that the *only* excuse for public library buildings is print books. He seems confident that “some form of free access” to *all* books (as ebooks) will emerge just a little ways down the road.

Here's the odd thing: Bell claims to be a friend of libraries, but he wants them to “find new roles to play.” What new roles? Continuing education centers, I guess. And internet cafes. And...well, I give up. I can't say much for the comments, either, including one Seattle engineer's assertion that Seattle Public spends \$10 per circulation and that this is simply too much to justify, an assertion he returns to (along with basically saying circulation is the only thing that justifies spending money on public libraries). I checked the 2011 figures: Seattle Public spent just under \$50 million (the engineer got that one right)—and circulated 11.57 million items, which comes out to \$4.28 an item, *even if we assume that nothing else Seattle Public does deserves any money at all*. That, as it turns out, is right around the national average (\$4.40).

This only has to do with ebooks and libraries in the sense that Bell assumes, without a shred of evidence, that in the very near future *everybody* will have access to *all* the books, free, in ebook form, and will prefer to read them that way. And that this requires that public libraries become...well, you can read the article.

ebooks, libraries, and the discount rate

This short piece by Anna Creech appeared [July 25, 2012](#) at *eclectic librarian*. Creech is an academic librarian and this almost certainly applies only to academic libraries. She was in a training session from one of her library's ebook vendors who mentioned that the site-license version of their ebooks ("multiple simultaneous user access") was 150% of list price (of the print books?). She concluded that this was a really good deal.

Think about it—for the cost of half of a second copy, any number of our users can view, download, print, copy, and even read the same book at the same time. In the print world, at best you might get four people reading the same copy of a book at the same time if you could smooch together close enough and the font size wasn't too small. Or, you'd buy multiple copies for class reading assignments that would then end up being discarded when the curriculum changed.

Set aside her quote from a cartoonist asserting that ebooks in libraries would kill traditional publishers; it's irrelevant to what she's saying here and reflects an overly simplistic view of the world—although that assertion may help explain why big publishers are loath to provide ebooks to libraries at all.

Within her context, I think Creech is right. But if it's a multiple-user license, the library should *own* the book with that explicit license built in. I'm doing that for a couple of my self-published ebooks.

eBooks and bookshops

Technically, this Phil Bradley post ([on July 29, 2012](#) at his eponymous blog) is not primarily about ebooks and libraries, as the title suggests. The connection comes in the first paragraph, where the chief executive of the (British) Booksellers Association says "The BA has campaigned for several years to mitigate the potential damage that library e-book lending could have on our book retailing sector." In other words, *libraries are damaging* (or could damage) *bookshops*.

As Bradley points out, using facts rather than assertions (with links to the sources), that's nonsense: People who use books in libraries—and specifically people who use ebooks in libraries—are more likely to *buy* books than those who don't.

The rest of the post focuses on what Bradley sees as the likely villain in Britain's loss of quite a few bookstores: Bookstores, or rather their inability to change. "If I grabbed someone from 100, or even 200 years ago who frequented bookshops and put them in any bookshop you care to name today they probably wouldn't blink that much, and certainly wouldn't have any difficulty in working out what to do." The key:

Bookshops are failing—not because of libraries or eBooks—but because they have proved themselves totally incapable of adapting to the current market. They are trading (and trading badly) on past success,

and the emotional ties that people have to them, which overcome their inclination to get books more cheaply. That's where the issue is, Mr Godfray. You need to look no further than your inability to move with the times, and the unedifying spectacle of you expecting 'a seat at the table' of Ed Vaizey's review of eBook lending would be laughable if it wasn't so pathetic.

In the close, Bradley returns to libraries: "I'm sick of libraries being tied to the whipping post, and being seen as the enemy by publishers and booksellers alike. We're an easy target, and because of that it leads to sloppy and lazy thinking." (There's more, and it's specific to bookshops.) Well said.

Konrath and Crouch on Libraries

The post is by Joanna Cabot [on August 30, 2012](#) at *TeleRead*, but it's mostly Joe Konrath in an [August 29, 2012 post](#) about Harris County (Texas) Public Library's attempt to bypass Overdrive and set up its own ebook circulation system. The Konrath post incorporates the librarians' comments on the ebook issues and what they're trying to do—and the solution Konrath came up with for his books and Blake Crouch's books.

You'll want to read the Konrath post (the second link) directly. While his solution may not work for every author (or most publishers), it's the most library-friendly and user-friendly ebook solution I've seen, and can only come from authors who like and understand public libraries. To wit, here's what the two authors are offering to Harris County "and to any other libraries that are interested":

1. Ebooks are \$3.99
2. No DRM.
3. The library only needs to buy one ebook of a title, and then they can make as many copies as they need for all of their patrons and all of their branches.
4. The library owns the rights to use that ebook forever.
5. The library can use it in any format they need; mobi, epub, pdf, lit, etc. And when new formats arise, they're free to convert it to the new format.

Sounds pretty good, right? Even if the library *must* buy the whole set, that's currently 20 books (as far as I can see), which means the library's out \$80. For *unlimited simultaneous use* of titles that the library *owns*.

Konrath's post continues with an FAQ on presumed questions. The first question sets the tone:

Q: Joe, that's insane! You're only charging \$3.99 an ebook? That ebook can be read thousands of times!

A: Good. I hope it is.

Konrath says this would *not* cost him sales. The library bought a copy. He hopes the terms will mean the library continues to buy new books from him—and that other libraries do the same. “There are a lot of libraries in the US, and a lot more globally. If I sell every library one of my ebooks for \$3.99, that’s a nice amount of money.” He also knows that library availability of his print books doesn’t seem to hurt his print sales. And he understands that becoming better known among library users is likely to increase his sales.

As for new formats coming along and losing his chance to resell his books to the same libraries (since he’s explicitly allowing reformatting): “Personally, I find it reprehensible that publishers put restrictions on ebooks, especially for libraries.” He also says, “I like libraries. I like librarians. They deserve a break.”

Cabot does a nice summary of his post and some of the key points in his FAQ, says it’s an interesting angle and suggests that this model could yield a pretty nice living for Konrath and Crouch “even if a million library users get the book for free.”

Problems

A mix of pieces where the primary topic seems to be problems with ebooks in libraries *in general*, as opposed to publisher-specific or vendor-specific problems.

information wants to be expensive

So says Laura Crossett in [this January 27, 2011 post](#) at *lis.dom*. She leads with a more complete version of the Stewart Brand quote that’s been used so often out of context:

On the one hand information wants to be expensive, because it’s so valuable. The right information in the right place just changes your life. On the other hand, information wants to be free, because the cost of getting it out is getting lower and lower all the time. So you have these two fighting against each other.

The focus of this piece isn’t the overall expense of information; it’s barriers to content created by exclusive and incompatible ebook publishing deals. She begins with Kindle Singles—short pieces by big-name authors, available only from Amazon for fairly low prices. And a quickie ebook from the *New York Times*, *Open Secrets* (chronicling the big Wikileaks release) that’s also fairly cheap (and as of this writing is available on most big ebookstores).

The key graph:

At the moment, none of these ebooks are very expensive: they range in price from \$0.99 to \$5.99. But looked at another way, these titles are all very expensive, especially if you are a library.

How so? Well, the Kindle Singles aren't going to be on Overdrive or NetLibrary, so if a library wants to lend them it will also have to buy and lend the Kindles—and that ain't cheap.

Get over it, Crossett, I hear some of you saying. It's \$0.99 cents. People can afford to pay that themselves for something they want to read. Well, sure. If they can afford the device or computer to read it on, they probably can afford the \$0.99. But libraries—public libraries in particular—are about providing access to *everyone*, not just to those who can afford it.

Basically, I look at these ebooks and I think, *The newspaper of record has published a book on a hot topic that I cannot provide to library patrons.* This sucks.

It does. There's also the preservation issue, since one core function of at least larger libraries is (or should be) *preserving* civilization's records. As she notes, digital preservation is doable—but:

But we can't preserve something we can't access and—I'm speaking beyond my technical expertise here, but I'm going to go out on a limb—my guess is that the digital rights/restrictions management software installed on these ebooks would make it damn hard for the digital preservationists to do their thing without, like, breaking the law. Not good. It makes one think that the real censors will turn out not to be the government book burners of *Fahrenheit 451* but the corporations that make a profit by restricting access.

There's a little more discussion (Crossett notes that vendors and [some] publishers don't much care about libraries), closing with this:

The rise of emedia means that not only is information inconvenient for our patrons to gather—it's downright impossible. Can I interlibrary loan an ereader from some library that loans them? 'Cause I'd like to read that book about Wikileaks. Thanks.

I don't have anything to add here. It's a real problem; it's not going away. It's likely to get a lot worse.

Alice in Libraryland

This charming item by Iris Jastram [appeared July 13, 2011](#) on SLA's "Future Ready 365" blog. (If it seems as though I'm favoring library people—and specifically LSW members—who write and think well, I plead guilty.)

I'm not *quite* comfortable quoting the whole thing (brief as it is) because the Creative Commons license includes the "Same As" clause and the CC license for *C&I* does not. So I'll omit the first paragraph about the delights of walking through the stacks in your favorite library and selecting several books you want to use—and quote the rest:

Now imagine that each book you've selected comes with different usage rules. This one only allows you to see one chapter at a time. That one only lets you check it out for 24 hours, and no more than three times over the course of the year. This other one opens itself and all of its contents to you, while the fourth will only let you see its table of contents until a full 24 hours has elapsed since the last reader cracked its pages. Each book's publisher has decided just how much of the book you can see and for how long based on the publisher's idea of what's fair.

Imagine the work on the library's side to keep track of all these different usage and loan rules in the collection and to guide its readers through the various hoops each publisher requires. Imagine the librarians returning to antiquated roles as gatekeepers of information as they're forced to ensure compliance with all the various publisher rules lest the publishers swoop in and remove all of their books from the library's shelves.

Hard to imagine?

Now imagine walking through the digital stacks of an ebooks collection.

Once again, I can't think of *anything* to argue with or much of anything to add to this. Except that it's nice to have such smart (mostly virtual) friends who are also such good writers.

The trouble with eBooks: publishers defying the laws of physics

Hugh Rundle posted this [on July 25, 2011](#) at *It's not about the books*. Rundle's discussing problems in lending ebooks at libraries—and I'd like to like his post more than I do.

The basic problem is that lending ebooks is absurd. An ebook is simply an electronic file. It doesn't need to be loaned—it can simply be copied, perfectly, without damaging the original. The publishers' dirty little secret is that they are terrified of ebooks.

For libraries, ebooks are attractive because they don't wear out, can't be dropped in the bath or chewed by the dog, don't require people to physically visit the library building in order to borrow them, don't have to be checked in and out by hand, don't need to be stored on a shelf and can be made available to multiple people simultaneously. Unfortunately, publishers have focussed a great deal of their creativity on working out ways to ensure that most of these advantages are rendered impossible, ensuring that ebook lending defies physics and nature. [Emphasis added.]

Pointing to that bolded sentence, I have to say: True—if you decide copyright doesn't exist and creators should live on patronage or live appearances. It's true of MSOffice as well, so I guess it's "defying physics and nature" for Microsoft to be selling tens of millions of copies. Right?

I suspect that second paragraph says a lot about why some librarians seem eager to shift entirely to ebooks *regardless* of patron desires. (“Some” may really be a few noisy ones. At least I hope that’s the case.)

Rundle says this: “Journals, magazines and newspapers have long been available on a ‘unlimited concurrent users’ subscription model, and in the USA even movies are available on the same model straight to the home via Netflix.” As for journals, those “unlimited” licenses are undermining library finances and still carry stiff restrictions—and as for Netflix, well, it’s not the same model *at all*: Netflix is selling *home* streaming subscriptions.

Here’s another paragraph I have problems with:

This sort of stupidity has only one logical endpoint—mass piracy. We know this because the same tactics being tried by publishers have already been tried, and failed, in the music recording industry and the film industry. The problem for book publishers is even more profound than the example of the record companies, however. At least recording studios full of expensive equipment are still needed to produce high quality recordings. When it comes to ebooks, publishers are largely irrelevant. Why would any author hand over their lifetime copyrights to a publisher for a dollar a copy when they can make more money by paying an editor a couple of thousand to edit the manuscript and selling it for \$3 a copy on Amazon or the iBook store?

First, it’s not true any longer that you need studios full of expensive equipment to produce quality sound recordings; many artists now do it at home using modestly-priced equipment. Second, if an author’s only getting \$1 a copy *or* is actually handing over copyright in a book, the author’s doing something wrong—and the assumption that the only value added to a manuscript by a publisher is editing is at best questionable. (I will swear that at least one of my recent self-published books is as valuable and even as well edited as some of my professionally published books. With one exception, none of them has sold even one-tenth as well as the modestly successful professional ones: Marketing and cachet count for a *lot*.)

Later in the piece, we learn that authors get from 3% to *at best* 10% royalties (not true) and that agents take 50% of an author’s earnings (the sources I’ve seen say 10%-15% for domestic sales, 20% for international sales: 50% is an *outrageous* fee).

There’s some good commentary here, but it needs to be read with several grains of salt.

ebooks blah blah blah

Iris Jastram [on September 21, 2011](#) at *Pegasus Librarian* offering a fine example of why she’s “finding it harder and harder not to tune out on ebook topics.” She’s an academic librarian and had a faculty member ask

how to use a library-supplied ebook—a faculty member who owns and loves a Kindle.

“Well, you see,” I start explaining, “You have to use it on a browser because this particular kind of ebook comes from EBSCO, which doesn’t work with your Kindle, and which doesn’t actually work with YOUR browser because EBSCO uses its own PDF reader that doesn’t work with Firefox on a Mac unless you download this extra plugin that you haven’t downloaded yet because otherwise yes, you’ll have to download single page by single page and open them in Preview. So let’s go find that, and now we have to restart your browser, and shoot... it’s still not working. I wonder why. I’ll look into that for you. For now why don’t we try it in Safari. So yeah, now we know that if you go to Safari, and be sure to log in for off-campus access, and THEN go to the catalog and find your book... shoot... it checked that book out to your other browser that wouldn’t open the book. So you’ll have to wait until tomorrow and then use Safari and log in for off campus access and find the book in the catalog and click the link. Then it should work.”

I do not for one minute believe Jastram is making this up or making it sound worse than it is. (Jastram, as she makes clear in one of eight worth-reading comments, *loves* ebooks—but not “these things that we have in academic libraries.”)

OverDrive Has Different eBook Catalogs for Different Libraries

So says Sarah Houghton in [this December 9, 2011 post](#) at *Librarian in Black*. This isn’t a question of which ebooks libraries choose to license; it’s an issue of *different offerings* for different libraries.

Here’s the answer Ryan Claringbole (Chesapeake Public Library, Virginia) got when he found this situation and asked OverDrive:

I contacted our liaison at OverDrive to inquire why certain items were showing up on other library’s OverDrive sites, but not showing up in our Marketplace. OverDrive wasn’t sure at first, but then informed me it had to do with our non-resident cards. Since the Chesapeake Public Library System allows reciprocal cards and purchased full service cards for patrons outside of the City, certain publishers won’t allow access to their eBooks at all, according to OverDrive. And by “no access” it means that those items won’t show up in our Marketplace.

I asked a legal representative for OverDrive about the full service cards, as they are purchased by patrons for an annual non-refundable fee of \$35.00. The legal rep. said that, unfortunately, even the paid full service cards violate this restriction and they would be blocked as well.

Does OverDrive offer a discount (in its basic service fee) for libraries that offer reciprocal access and nonresident cards? No. The contract doesn’t

specifically mention this. Turns out the OverDrive contract doesn't really guarantee much of anything other than that you'll have the ebook platform.

It's certainly an issue for California libraries, as Sarah notes:

And I hate to call attention to this, but nearly every library in California allows any California resident to get a library card—which means that unless every single California customer is authenticating based on zip code or another location-specific field in the patron record (which I know they're not), then pretty much the whole state of California should be getting the limited catalog (according to what OverDrive's legal representative told Ryan).

Did librarians know about this? Probably not:

OverDrive has sold their "selection of digital titles" to libraries as though everyone is seeing the same thing, as though access is equitable across the board. Pieces started to fall together, though, as I remember some librarians complaining bitterly about how horrible the selection is in OverDrive and others looking at them incredulously and saying they thought it was fine. Now we know why different people had different impressions of the selection of materials—because the selection of materials was not the same from library to library.

Houghton contacted several OverDrive people before posting this—there's lots more to it, which you really should read—and didn't get timely responses, but a few days later OverDrive *did* post [a response of sorts](#), which Houghton linked to in an update. OverDrive asserts that "99.9% of US public libraries served by OverDrive have access to the exact same catalog of eBook, audiobook, music, and video titles"—but then offers "*a few* of the restrictions and rules that publishers and authors require for access to their materials." (*Authors* restrict access? I guess that could happen: some authors, especially some in a particular guild, appear to be tools and not much in favor of libraries.) Incidentally, "99.9%" would mean that, if every single library in the U.S. offered Overdrive (definitely not the case), no more than ten would see this situation. I find that nearly unbelievable. Here's the fourth example:

Connection to Library Service Area: As Steve Potash communicated in writing to every one of our library partners earlier this year, select publishers set restrictions on their catalogs where the library allows access to the library's digital collection by card holders that have no connection to the library's service area. We are constantly working with library IT teams to test and validate patrons' card status, before they can download copyrighted materials. In very few cases, where an institution does not restrict download access to only patrons with connections to their service area (such as residents, students, property

or business owners) there may be limits on access to select publishers' catalogs.

The comments are certainly worth reading—including one from Jeff Scott indicating that at least one California library has *stopped* providing the typical “if you live in California, you can get a card” *because* they didn't want to lose access to Overdrive ebooks. It is, of course, true that libraries *should* read contracts carefully (although the significance of that clause is easy to miss) and that it's the publishers, not Overdrive, forcing this. It also appears that Overdrive is using *its own* definition of a library's legal service area, which seems outrageous. (One comment says that their library *specifically* asked the question and got email saying the Marketplace was the same for all Overdrive users—and saved that email.)

An eBook is not a Book

So why is this Nate Hill post [on January 8, 2012](#) at *The PLA Blog* here rather than in the BOOKS, E AND P essay? In fact, I'd tagged it for that roundup—and when I looked at it, it was clear that it belongs here. Hill makes a strong statement:

I'd like to explain why I don't think eReader lending (Nook, Kindle, Sony, any reader at all) is a good plan for public libraries. It's not that lending eReaders is a *bad* thing at all: if someone gifts your library a garbage bag full of Nooks, what the heck, please use them! Instead I'd argue that libraries can have some foresight and spend their dollars on other programs, equipment, and skillset development for both staff and the people in their communities that will far transcend the fleeting, temporary lifespan of the next version of the Kindle, Nook, or whatever other piece of consumer electronic garbage is currently fashionable.

What he's saying is, to some extent, what Rundle says: “[S]uccessfully mapping the basic constraints of physical media onto digital media is no wiser an enterprise than making gold from graphite; it is futile and it impedes progress toward the evolution of a new, practical ecosystem for artists, publishers, and end users.” One big difference: Hill precedes that with a recognition that all the craft around ebooks (DRM, etc.) is at least in part “to preserve exiting business models and the complex ecosystems that artists, publishers, and consumers have depended on so that everyone can make a fair living.”

Hill's saying that an ebook has more in common with a website or a playlist or a set of digital images than it does with a book—that it has different “affordances and constraints.” He calls some of these constraints artificial and sees the *potential* to have unlimited numbers of copies of an ebook. And this: “That ‘eBook’ need not remain a static work, it could be concurrently edited by many authors or other computers.” True—but perhaps not always desirable. Then there's the ebook-as-web-entry idea. “I'd suggest that because the properties of digital media mean this *can*

happen then eventually it *will* happen. Everything eventually reaches its potential, in spite of artificial constraints.” Perhaps.

Hill calls ereaders “tools for lazy consumption that don’t take advantage of what ‘eBooks’ can and eventually will be.” You don’t usually see reading called “lazy consumption,” but there it is. Hill sees the future for public libraries as focused on community content production “rather than just the content consumption we support now.” So he wants libraries to skip the estuff and invest in makerspaces and the like.

If you read this, do read the comments. Once you get past the high-fives, there are some interesting notes. To me, there’s more than a touch of “public libraries will DIE if circulation is a core service” about this—Hill’s assertion that (if I’m reading it right) makerspace-like stuff should have *priority* over collection and circulation. I don’t buy that. But maybe I’m oversimplifying.

Libraries borked by ebook forks

Cute title for Peter Brantley’s [January 23, 2012 piece](#) at *Publishers Weekly*’s “PWxys” blog—and this also could have gone elsewhere, in a discussion of Apple’s iBooks Author, since that’s what it’s about. To wit:

But for libraries, at a time when they are increasingly struggling to provide access to ebooks as publishers pull back from lending support, Apple has provided a rib-crunching blow by delivering proprietary output tied to the iPad. And, in Apple’s license terms, any iBook created by Author can be distributed freely, but commercial sales must run through the iBookstore. This has generated a great deal of [disappointment](#) from those who wished to see Apple release a general purpose ebook creation tool.

The thing is, Apple was—at least according to Brantley—an “integral player in the development of the EPUB3 format.” Then, with EPUB3 becoming a multiplatform standard, Apple “extended” it in a way that makes it wholly proprietary to the iBooks store and iPads.

Any library fighting to preserve access to digital books faces a nearly impossible task when confronted with Author’s new iBooks. There’s no independent platform capable of hosting these books beyond the iBookstore, and no way to drive lending. Readers wishing to take advantage of iBooks must be Apple iPad users, and no library will be maintaining an inventory of iPad bling until iPad pricing drops far lower than it is now. Even then, the tying of the iBooks format to the iPad device interferes with the library’s mission to provide as broad access to published literature as possible. It also prevents libraries, whether public or national, from preserving iBooks files in a way that ensures continual access by future generations.

Not much more to say. Once upon a time, Apple was explicitly friendly to libraries. That was a long time ago.

In One Community, Residents Challenge Library Spending on Ebooks

This story by Michelle Lee [appeared January 26, 2012](#) in *Library Journal's* "The Digital Shift."

As libraries expand their digital collections, the issue of how much money should be spent requires a delicate balance. In Illinois, some residents have questioned the Rockford Public Library's decision to use \$303,332, or 25.5 percent of its \$1.19 million budget, for ebooks.

That *has* to be \$1.19 million in *acquisitions*; in 2011, Rockford Public had a \$6.8 million budget. That bit aside, the residents—members of Save Our Library (now ["Support Our Rockford Library"](#))—have a good point.

Rachel Leon, a library patron, writer, and SOL member, said she likes ebooks but her main concern was that the high focus on digital materials "does not make sense" for the community's economic situation because it could leave behind those who are low-income and might not be able to afford the technology needed to use it. About 22.7 percent of Rockford's 152,871 residents live in poverty, according to the 2010 Census.

Leon also said she was upset at the lack of public input on the issue. "(The library) moved 25 percent allocation without polling the public at all," she said. "The library has been asking 'do we want a coffee shop or weekend hours?' They never asked if people own ereaders and how much they want."

A home-schooled 12-year-old who's a "power user" (he uses the library every week) started a petition on the issue because he thinks the money could be better spent on physical materials. The library board president says "circulation trends shows that more ebooks are circulated and at the same time less printed books are circulated." The library *had* been spending 6.6% of its "total budget" (sigh—really its materials/acquisitions budget) on ebooks and bumped that to 34% for 2012.

If the rest of the story is right, Rockford's had a fairly shocking change in print circulation—from roughly 844,000 in 2009 to less than 546,000 in 2011. Meanwhile, ebook circulation went from just under 7,000 to more than 19,500—which, notably, is still 4% of print circulation. (The library "hopes to have a total of 1,000 ereaders by the end of the year.") I have to wonder what could cause print circulation to drop 35% in two years, but that's not part of this story.

One comment makes a charge that, if true, is even more shocking: That the library director originally presented (in a closed session) a proposal to "dismantle the library's print collections and facilities and staff in favor of a 95% to 5% ratio of e-materials to print."

Looking at the Save Our Library link, I see that the most recent item is July 19, 2012. There were a total of 42 posts in 2012, roughly half in January.

The end of the book as we know it, and I feel (mostly) fine.

That's the title for Laura Braunstein's [August 15, 2012 post](#) at ACRLLog—but it doesn't have much to do with the post, unless Braunstein's suggesting that print books are somehow going away (which isn't evident in the post).

She talks about packing for a vacation and “assembling my reading material”—unread magazines, Kindle ebooks borrowed from friends, Kindle and ePub ebooks borrowed from her library and one big fat print book. She's comfortable “navigating the library eBook universe (or is it a minefield? asteroid belt? black hole?) for personal reading.” She recognizes that patrons don't necessarily find it that easy. Then she offers a set of bullet points:

Pew says 12% of “Americans who read” have borrowed ebooks from libraries—and Braunstein adds the odd sidenote “(and what percentage of all Americans is that?).” I say “odd sidenote” because, assuming Braunstein read the Pew page she quotes, further down that page is this: “In our December 2011 survey, 78% of those ages 16 and older said they had read a book in the past year.” So, y'know, there's a good starting point.

She links to a columnist's troubles finding ebooks and a Fister column on ebooks and publishers—and to Sarah Houghton's suggestion that libraries break up with ebooks and Steven Harris' silly post about breaking up with print books.

Or maybe, given the two questions at the start of the final bullet, Braunstein is serious: “Is this the end of the book as we know it? Or do ebooks represent reading's future?” Or, you know, *neither one*.

By the way, if you go looking for this rather than using the link, be sure you get the “(mostly).” Do *not* accidentally wind up at a similarly titled 2010 essay at a site I consider disreputable. Consider yourself warned.

Ebooks in 2013

In this case, I'm mostly going to point you to Clifford Lynch's [June 2013 article](#) in an *American Libraries* “e-content supplement.” Note the tease for the four-page article (four magazine pages is quite a bit of text!): “Promises broken, promises kept, and Faustian bargains.”

After a paragraph noting how well printed books have served us and the hope that ebooks would *build* on that strong foundation, Lynch introduces the essay with this paragraph:

Sadly, ebooks have not only failed to deliver on much of their promise, they have become a vast lost opportunity. They are becoming a weapon capable of considerable social damage; a Faustian technology that seduces with convenience, particularly for those who consume a great many books, but offers little else while extracting a corrosive toll on our social institutions and norms. The failure here is not primarily one of technology but of the way that rights holders have chosen to apply the technology, and perhaps even of the legal and public policy frameworks that have allowed this to take place.

Beyond that, I can only say: *Go read this*. Lynch thinks and writes better than I do and can't plausibly be labeled a Luddite or technophobe—but he's also not blinded by the shiny.

Publishers and Vendors

More on problems with ebooks in libraries—this time dealing with publisher issues, which I'm finding can't be separated from vendor (e.g. Overdrive) issues.

Open Library offers libraries a third choice for eBooks

Sarah Houghton posted this [on July 5, 2011](#) at *Librarian In Black*. The lede is significant all by itself:

The library eBook scene, indeed the eBook scene for consumers too, is ever-changing and unpredictable. Any library trying to plan more than one year out for eBooks is playing a losing game. Don't sign contracts for more than a year and don't invest huge amounts of time in what might be dying models.

From my outsider's perspective, that sounds exactly right—as right in early 2014 as it was in mid-2011. She notes that there are basically two choices for (public) libraries: 1) paying big bucks to Overdrive or 3M, 2) pointing users to public domain ebooks from Project Gutenberg or elsewhere.

Her third choice, [Open Library](#), is in some ways an expansion of the second alternative, but it's a little more than that. As she explains, the Internet Archive project includes what's now listed as “3,430,900” ebooks in the public domain but also what's now currently just over 11,000 ebooks in the “lending library,” which effectively operate in a standard library-lending manner. The latter only works if your library is participating in the project (if I'm reading this right). You typically get a choice of formats, including a direct reading view but also PDF, EPUB and others.

Houghton calls this “the future of eBooks for libraries.” To date, as far as I can tell, there are very few recent mainstream books, where “recent” means “within the past decade” (and, of course, the big numbers

include huge numbers of editions of classic works)—so it's probably not the *only* future. Still, read the post (*and the comments*), visit Open Library, take a look.

We Need More Competition in the EBook/Library Vendor Market

So says Jeff Scott in this [July 14, 2011](#) post at *Gather No Dust*. In a [previous post](#), he attempted to gather a list of all the library vendors providing ebooks, including brief write-ups on six plus links to five more added in comments.

Of the ones on that list, how many offer downloadable materials from popular authors? It didn't seem like that many, Overdrive is probably the leader in this, getting materials from most of the publishers that are offering e-books at all. Ingram was doing this too, as will be Recorded Books, Baker and Taylor, and 3M. It doesn't feel like there is enough competition to go to another vendor if I don't like the one I have.

The rest of the post is about strengths and weaknesses of existing vendors—and issues with adding new vendors. One clear issue: Vendors will look for publisher exclusivity, such that a library might need multiple platforms to deliver decent results.

Overall, it's fascinating to see all the changes in the e-book market. What I ultimately hope for is a time where library materials can be received cheaply and easily. When I see a book I want to read, I can get that exact book from my local library instantly.

Scott sees ebooks as bringing about “a renaissance of reading.” Is that true? One can only hope...

How to Talk to Your Patrons About Penguin & Other Publishers Not Lending eBooks to Libraries

That's Bobbi Newman [on February 9, 2012](#) at *Librarian by Day*—and it's important to note that, as she noted in [a followup post](#), in this case it was Overdrive, not libraries, that Penguin didn't want to deal with.

The post offers suggestions for how librarians might talk to frustrated patrons who can't find ebooks they want. Of course, that *could* be because the library chose not to lease it in ebook form, but it could also be because so many publishers aren't great on selling (or leasing) ebooks to libraries or on the primary library ebook platforms.

If you want to read *lots more* about publishers, libraries and ebooks, the post ends with a set of links that should keep you busy for a while.

In this specific case, apparently the problem is that Overdrive was routing Kindle lending through Amazon—and Penguin pulled their ebooks because that violated their contract.

Newman suggests a specific “reasonable alternative” to Overdrive. You can read about it and link to it from [her second post](#) if you’re so inclined.

We will measure our loss

This one’s by Peter Brantley, on [February 13, 2012](#) at *Publisher Weekly’s* “PWxyz” blog,” and you have to deal with Brantley’s seeming assumption that all books will be ebooks in the near future. That’s not the primary point of this item, which begins with issues relating to the homeless (and the drug-crazed) in public libraries and somehow arrives at Penguin’s dispute with Overdrive. From there, he gets to sidewalk curb cuts (and the relative lack of them in Dallas) and to this:

Ebooks are curb cuts for libraries. For those of us struggling financially, or wiped out after an long day without the time or transportation to get to the local library, or physically disabled and unable to easily move around, being able to take advantage of the tremendous convenience of downloading a book onto a e-reader or mobile phone literally means the difference between reading and not reading. And I realized by the end of the week that this purposeful denial of equal access is what infuriates me most about the actions of publishers against libraries. At the moment when we have the opportunity to improve the lives of many of our neighbors, publishers concern themselves with competitive positioning and an appropriate amount of “friction” in library access.

This *does* assume that those of you struggling financially are doing well enough to have broadband and an ereader of some sort—a special form of “equal access”—but never mind. (In practice, of course, it only means the difference between reading recent books and being stuck with the classics, since the latter—at least pre-1924 ones that have been scanned and are in Project Gutenberg or Open Library—are available without a library’s intervention. And it wouldn’t be equal access unless *all* print books were available in ebook form.)

It’s an interesting post, but you are dealing with Brantley’s worldview, one that seems to assume that in the long run public libraries have to be “places that help citizens become full-fledged creative members of their communities, producing and archiving personal content.”

One Year Later, HarperCollins Sticking to 26-Loan Cap, and Some Librarians Rethink Opposition

Moving from one of the Big Six to another, this report is by Michael Kelley on [February 17, 2012](#) at *Library Journal’s* “The Digital Shift.” Remember HarperCollins’ outrageous policy that an ebook can only be circulated 26 times before you “buy” it again, and the many librarian thoughts of boycott?

[O]ver the past year, as the library market has been further roiled, as other companies, such as Penguin Group, essentially stepped back from the market altogether, HarperCollins has remained not only committed to its model but also to the market. And for this, it is receiving from some librarians, if not praise, at least a sober reappraisal—even from some of those who are holding firm to their boycott.

This is a report rather than a post. Kelley quotes some librarians who seem entirely happy with the policy—and others who note that, bad as it may be, at least HarperCollins *does* make ebooks available. One interesting tidbit: NYPL has more than 5,000 HarperCollins ebooks—and as of the news story, not one of them had exceeded the 26-circ cap. (That 5,000 figure may include multiple copies, since the ebooks circulate on a one-copy/one-borrower basis.)

Necessary Evil? Random House Triples Price Of Library E-Books

Yet another one of the Big Six—but this time to a non-library site, namely Devin Coldewey on [March 2, 2012](#) at *TechCrunch*. The primary story's right there in the title (and the piece itself links to [another Michael Kelley report](#) at *LJ*). The latter report includes examples: One current non-fiction book that libraries buy in print form for around \$20 now costs \$120 for the ebook version on Overdrive. Random House makes a big point of “simultaneity”—the fact that it makes ebooks available to libraries the same day retail books go on sale. (Lots of interesting comments at the Kelley piece.)

What's interesting about Coldewey's piece is that he seems to be more sympathetic to publishers than libraries.

And despite the obvious ugliness of charging obscene amounts for the purpose of making books available to the public, one can see that the publishers' backs are against the wall. Any concession at all is to be, if not admired, at least understood as a difficult and possibly disastrous course of action.

These companies are faced, after all, with the prospect of selling one book and having it lent to a hundred people at once (though that is not the case here), never get stolen or damaged, be easily duplicated, and so on. In a way, the idea of having e-books “expire” or selling them at a significant markup is easily understood. They have to do something to make the new market at least partially reflect the old one. Should libraries and readers reap all the benefits of the digital revolution in publishing? They certainly don't think so, but that doesn't make them right.

That parenthetical is peculiar because *most* (nearly all) library ebook arrangements (for in-copyright books) are one-copy/one-reader arrangements.

A bit later we get:

The libraries are the victims today, but let us not forget that the publishers are the victims every day. The difference is the libraries are the victims of the publishers, but the publishers are the victims of progress. Which is going to give up first?

Followed by an odd comment on public libraries: “They are underfunded and often underutilized...” Underfunded, yes. Underutilized? You mean all those empty public libraries?

Retail DRM Is an Apple, Library DRM Is an Orange

This story probably should have appeared in an earlier installment, but here it is. Michael Kelley, writing [on April 26, 2012](#) at *Library Journal*’s “The Digital Shift,” is looking at the decision by Tor and Forge to eliminate DRM on its ebooks. As Kelley notes, the decision isn’t particularly relevant for libraries for two reasons:

- At that point, at least, Macmillan (of which Tor is part) wasn’t selling/leasing ebooks to libraries *at all*.
- Even if it did, it’s nearly certain that library copies *would* have DRM, just as O’Reilly books do (that is: no DRM on retail ebooks, but DRM on library copies).

And there’s this:

“I hate to say it but one could argue that in a way if DRM goes away it’s bad news for libraries, at least as long as ebook downloads are still expected,” said Bill McCoy, the executive director of IDPF, the trade and standards organization that develops and maintains the EPUB standard. “After all even putatively anti-DRM folks, like O’Reilly, don’t want libraries to loan books to patrons who will never have to delete them, and so they are using DRM with library loans.”

“If all DRM infrastructure gets abandoned then that’s one more reason for publishers to resist enabling libraries,” McCoy continued. “Cloud-based reading will be an alternative but at the moment readers want and expect to have content downloaded for offline consumption.”

There’s more including a few pithy comments.

AAP Responds to ALA Criticism of Big Six Ebook Policies

Matt Enis this time, [on September 25, 2012](#), another news report at *Library Journal*’s “The Digital Shift.” He links to ALA President (at the time) [Maureen Sullivan’s open letter](#) to publishers. It’s probably worth quoting that entire letter as context:

It’s a rare thing in a free market when a customer is refused the ability to buy a company’s product and is told its money is “no good here.” Surprisingly, after centuries of enthusiastically supporting publishers’

products, libraries find themselves in just that position with purchasing e-books from three of the largest publishers in the world. Simon & Schuster, Macmillan, and Penguin have been denying access to their e-books for our nation's 112,000 libraries and roughly 169 million public library users.

Let's be clear on what this means: If our libraries' digital bookshelves mirrored the New York Times fiction best-seller list, we would be missing half of our collection any given week due to these publishers' policies. The popular "Bared to You" and "The Glass Castle" are not available in libraries because libraries cannot purchase them at any price. Today's teens also will not find the digital copy of Judy Blume's seminal "Forever," nor today's blockbuster "Hunger Games" series.

Not all publishers are following the path of these three publishers. In fact, hundreds of publishers of e-books have embraced the opportunity to create new sales and reach readers through our nation's libraries. One recent innovation allows library patrons to immediately purchase an e-book if the library doesn't have a copy or if there is a wait list they would like to avoid. This offers a win-win relationship for both publishers and library users since recent research from the Pew Internet Project tells us that library users are more than twice as likely to have bought their most recent book as to have borrowed it from a library.

Libraries around the country are developing mobile applications and online discovery systems that make it easier to explore books and authors on the go. Seventy-six percent of public libraries now offer e-books—double the number from only five years ago—and 39 percent of libraries have purchased and circulate e-readers. Public libraries alone spend more than \$1.3 billion annually on their collections of print, audio, video, and electronic materials. They are investing not only in access to content and devices, but also in teaching the skills needed to navigate and utilize digital content successfully.

Librarians understand that publishing is not just another industry. It has special and important significance to society. Libraries complement and, in fact, actively support this industry by supporting literacy and seeking to spread an infectious and lifelong love of reading and learning. Library lending encourages patrons to experiment by sampling new authors, topics and genres. This experimentation stimulates the market for books, with the library serving as a de facto discovery, promotion and awareness service for authors and publishers.

Publishers, libraries and other entities have worked together for centuries to sustain a healthy reading ecosystem—celebrating our society's access to the complete marketplace of ideas. Given the obvious value of libraries to publishers, it simply does not add up that any publisher would continue to lock out libraries. It doesn't add up for

me, it doesn't add up for ALA's 60,000 members, and it definitely doesn't add up for the millions of people who use our libraries every month.

America's libraries have always served as the "people's university" by providing access to reading materials and educational opportunity for the millions who want to read and learn but cannot afford to buy the books they need. Librarians have a particular concern for vulnerable populations that may not have any other access to books and electronic content, including individuals and families who are homebound or low-income. To deny these library users access to e-books that are available to others—and which libraries are eager to purchase on their behalf—is discriminatory.

We have met and talked sincerely with many of these publishers. We have sought common ground by exploring new business models and library lending practices. But these conversations only matter if they are followed by action: Simon & Schuster must sell to libraries. Macmillan must implement its proposed pilot. Penguin must accelerate and expand its pilots beyond two urban New York libraries.

We librarians cannot stand by and do nothing while some publishers deepen the digital divide. We cannot wait passively while some publishers deny access to our cultural record. We must speak out on behalf of today's—and tomorrow's—readers. The library community demands meaningful change and creative solutions that serve libraries and our readers who rightfully expect the same access to e-books as they have to printed books.

So, which side will you be on? Will you join us in a future of liberating literature for all? Libraries stand with readers, thinkers, writers, dreamers and inventors. Books and knowledge—in all their forms—are essential. Access to them must not be denied.

In the interests of fairness—and since it's certainly still interesting even at a 16-month remove—here's the AAP's response:

Publishers and local libraries have had a lifelong partnership dedicated to increasing literacy and nurturing the love of reading. The publisher members of AAP provide libraries with innumerable free resources, programs and services – all designed to serve their cardholders, inform their librarians and sustain the vitality of their institutions.

Publishers recognize libraries' interest in serving their customers and we want books to have the widest distribution possible. The issues surrounding e-lending, however, are not as simple as Ms. Sullivan claims. Publishers support the concept of e-lending but must solve a breadth of complex technological, operational, financial and other challenges to make it a reality. Each publishing company is grappling individually

with how to best serve the interests of its authors and readers, protect digital intellectual property rights and create this new business model that is fair to all stakeholders. And while the 9000-plus library systems' non-profit status permits them to convene, debate and reach consensus on these issues, commercial publishers cannot likewise come together due to antitrust restrictions.

Within the narrow scope of our authority as a trade association, AAP has tried to help advance the dialogue on e-lending between libraries and publishers. The session we organized for former ALA leadership at our Annual Meeting remains our most-watched online video. In that spirit, AAP is set to host an event to be held in a few days welcoming Ms. Sullivan and providing her with a platform to speak to more than 100 members of the publishing community.

At a time when individual publishing houses are more actively engaged than ever in exploring viable solutions to e-lending, we are disappointed that the new leadership at ALA chose this path, with this particular timing, to criticize those efforts.

I'm inclined *not* to add my own comments, but I would suggest reading the first comment on this report. It is ludicrous to suggest that America's 9,000+ public library systems did *or could* "convene, debate and reach consensus on" *any* issue, ebook or otherwise.

I will quote one librarian's comment about that suggestion, as recounted within [a post on Joe Konrath's blog](#) (the quote's not from Konrath himself):

Do these people even know a damn thing about what they're writing about? It is a minor miracle within a single department in a library building to get consensus on anything and, yet, we seem to have this magical ability to organize and become a mythical threat like the homosexual agenda. No, I'm afraid the real reason is that your policies against us have become the proverbial straw.

Librarian Patience Has Run out on E-Book Lending Issues, Library Association Says

This item, by Jeremy Greenfield [on September 27, 2012](#) at *Digitalbook-world*, takes the discussion one step further, reporting on that private meeting following Sullivan's letter and AAP's response. Greenfield says "the ALA and AAP played nicely" at the meeting—but that publishers weren't so "conciliatory." A couple of interesting quotes—the first from some unidentified person at Perseus Book Group, the second from Peter Balis of Wiley:

An executive from Perseus Book Group who did not identify herself said, "our executives are confused as to what is a library?" She cited

concerns that the free and wide availability of e-books to library patrons could undercut publisher business...

“When will the ALA start proposing to us some best practices on what models you think will work from your digital solutions working group? You put a lot on us and it’s created a lot of chaos and clearly it’s [e-book library lending] broken. We have twelve different models,” he said. “You have to come back to us with more than just ‘equitable access at a fair price.’”

Not only is Balis saying that *it’s up to libraries to say how they’ll protect publishers*, Balis is just plain nasty about public libraries:

Balis again confronted the ALA delegation on the mission of libraries, questioning whether e-book access was for the “less fortunate” that libraries are, in part, there to serve or for “wealthy residents of Greenwich [Conn.] who just want to have a lot of nice, free access to a lot of books?”

I wasn’t aware public libraries should have means testing for circulation, but then I’m not a publisher.

The Demise of the Patient Librarian

Tasha Saecker posted this [on September 28, 2012](#) at *Sites and Soundbytes*, directly following up on the Greenfield story above. Saecker comments on the Perseus Book Group note first:

OK, I can see if the question is about the future of libraries and the changes that we are undergoing. But truly, libraries have remained much the same as they have been. We are working on new services and embracing change, but we continue to lend the books that publishers publish without penalty pricing and with ownership of the items. To my jaded ears, I heard “what are libraries willing to become to play ball with publishers on e-books.” But that’s probably just me.

As to the second, she notes that there’s already a proposed ebook business model for public libraries—and before that gets a lot more detailed some of the underlying issues need to be resolved.

Publishers ask for business models and don’t know what a library is

Jamie LaRue had a bit of fun with the Greenfield story in [this October 2, 2012 post](#) at *mylibrary*—or, rather, commented on a long, angry and articulate post [at another blog](#). While highlighting the absurdity of the Perseus person’s comment, LaRue’s more interested in the “show us a model!” nonsense—especially since ALA has already offered several business models (sigh: another 404).

Which ones will prevail? Here are two that *won’t*:

* don’t sell ebooks to libraries at all.

* charge three to five times the cost of print, which has higher production and distribution costs than electronic files.

And here's just a wild idea that it appears no one in publishing has considered:

* ask the authors what seems right and fair to them.

When LaRue did that (in the context of an innovative local-author proposal), they mostly wanted to work with libraries.

Random House Says Libraries Own Their Ebooks

Now *there's* a headline, on [an October 18, 2012 story](#) by Michael Kelley at *Library Journal*. Kelley's impressed enough that he repeats the headline. He asked Skip Dye of Random House to confirm:

“We spend a lot of time discussing this with librarians, at conferences and elsewhere, and it's clear that there is still some confusion out there around whether libraries own their ebooks,” Dye said. “Random House's often repeated, and always consistent position is this: when libraries buy their RH, Inc. ebooks from authorized library wholesalers, it is our position that they own them.”

He went on to make clear the distinction with licensing:

“This is our business model: we sell copies of our ebooks to an approved list of library wholesalers, and those wholesalers are supposed to resell them to libraries. In our view, this purchase constitutes ownership of the book by the library. It is not a license.”

That last sentence needs to be underlined and italicized.

There's more to the story, best read in the original. Do read the comments as well. But then...

Random House Did Not Mean Own, Exactly

Peter Brantley starts this [October 23, 2012](#) “PWxyz” post with “Words have to be put in context.” Brantley wrote to Skip Dye, noting that the Internet Archive (which is somehow registered as a California library) could cut a check to purchase ebooks to be used on Open Library.

Mr. Dye returned my message, and yesterday we had a long conversation, running almost an hour. At the end of our discussion, I better understand how much ownership libraries have of Random House titles: Nada. Libraries don't own *anything*.

According to Brantley, Random House will *not* sell directly to libraries or consortia; “own” in this case apparently means that a library can migrate its RH ebooks from one commercial platform to another, as long as both platforms are authorized RH resellers.

That's very nice. It's just not ownership. It's licensing, with benefits. Library customers of RH titles do not have the ability to transfer their titles to an unapproved platform, such as Califa or Open Library; they cannot resell or donate their ebooks; and there is no mechanism for libraries to receive ebook donations directly from consumers. All that libraries "purchase" from Random House is a verbal commitment to assist libraries in moving their Random House ebooks from one approved commercial platform to another.

As Brantley notes, a number of libraries and consortia are building their own full-fledged ebook platforms (we'll get to at least one of those later):

We want to keep ebooks in our communities, run our own services, safeguard the privacy of our users, and be free from overreaching licensing regimes that threaten our services. And increasingly, we are finding publishers who are willing to sell to us directly, seeing the benefits of handing management of digital titles to libraries.

There's more, but the key here is that Dye was, well, call it casual in his use of "own."

Macmillan Announces Details of Library Lending Pilot

From Gary Page [on January 24, 2013](#) at LJ's *InfoDocket*. The good news: Macmillan was (finally) trying out "selling" ebooks to public libraries.

The not-so-good news:

- It's only one imprint (Minotaur, mostly mysteries and crime)
- It's only *backlist* titles (more than 1,200 of them), not the frontlist—the books you'd want most.
- These ebooks, which would sell for \$8 to \$12 for Kindle and Nook versions, cost \$25 each for libraries.
- The "purchase" gets you two years or 52 circulations, whichever comes first.
- Oh, and it's probably only through the usual suspects—Overdrive, 3M, etc.

Of course it's one-book/one-user. I don't even count that as "not-so-good news." If all goes well, Macmillan could add other (presumably backlist) imprints.

Macmillan to Offer Entire E-book Backlist to Libraries

Jumping ahead nine months, Andrew Albanese writes this [on October 17, 2013](#) at *Publisher's Weekly*. Macmillan's added "its entire e-book backlist," which comes out to "more than 11,000 titles." Same model, same restrictions, no frontlist titles.

As the first commenter notes, after pointing out that these are rentals, not purchases:

Don't forget that these books aren't contemporary bestsellers. They're on the backlist, meaning they are barely selling in print editions that libraries can own forever for perhaps \$12. Over the two years, that \$25 for the ebook is likely to only mean a handful of rentals even in major city libraries. In small town libraries, it means one or two checkouts at most...

on fairness: authors, libraries, and our future

Time to hear from a librarian again: Barbara Fister on January 27, 2013 at *Barbara Fister's Place*. Worth noting: Fister is both an academic librarian and a published mystery writer—and she talks to other writers as well as other librarians. She hears from fellow authors that “librarians have to be patient. This is just a bump in the road until the industry figures out what's a fair business model.” Fister isn't wild about that notion. So she offers a little commentary under the heading “on fairness”—and, well, Barbara's also a friend, and I'm confident that the lack of “SA” in *Cites & Insights'* CC license is not going to generate a lawsuit because I quote pretty much the whole rest of the post:

Full disclosure, I am a librarian, though I work at an academic library, where we don't generally get to buy fun books. This issues we have with digital books are different than those public librarians have (which is itself a bit worrying, the gap between trade publishing and scholarly books growing even wider, but that's another issue for another time). My beef here is more as a reader and writer than as a librarian.

Here's my question: Is it *unfair* that libraries can loan print books until they fall apart and don't have to throw them out when publishers say so? Is it unfair that libraries don't have to pay three or four times the cover price for a book? Is it unfair that libraries are allowed to loan out frontlist and popular titles? All libraries want to do is what they've done in the past – pay a reasonable price for a book and let one person at a time read it. Publishers say that's not fair. Not enough friction (a fancy word for artificially-induced inconvenience), not enough profit. Could bring the business to its knees.

Really? Then the survival of publishing is a freaking miracle. People have been reading books borrowed from libraries for quite some time. Going to a library is not so full of friction that hardly anyone does it. A majority of Americans have library cards and have checked out at least one book in the past 12 months. That hasn't ruined the book business, it's helped it. Being able to check out digital books from home—or, more commonly, fill out a form to get in line to borrow a book as soon as the 47 people ahead of you have had their turn—isn't going to suddenly mean borrowing a book is so insanely easy that nobody will buy books in future, anymore than being able to check books out of a library before the Internet was invented led to the sudden collapse of all

bookstores. Also, bear in mind there wasn't a button on the library shelf where a checked-out book had been saying "if you want to avoid waiting in line, push this button and you can buy it instantly." There is a button like that on many digital library shelves. And it's *still not fair enough for publishers*.

The only threat libraries pose to the book industry is if they are prohibited from fulfilling their role of introducing new authors to readers and developing an appetite for reading among young people, which is what will happen if publishers get to define "fair."

Library users are book buyers. This isn't anecdote, there's hard data to show this is true. Publishers are unwilling to consider existing evidence that libraries are a keystone species in the book ecosystem. That's an inconvenient distraction from the new power they wield to control how and what communities can read, and from their understandable obsession with Amazon's power. Libraries are the dog they can kick when the Department of Justice tells them to stop bullying Amazon.

But forget that data, let's just do some simple numbers. If libraries are required to pay three or four times as much for an ebook so that publishers get their "fair" price, that means libraries will buy one ebook and will not buy three other books. Three sales gone, three discovery opportunities lost. Those books not bought are likely to be the ones library patrons aren't already begging for. The ones ripe for discovery.

Some publishers want to "window" library use by selling access only to backlist titles. If libraries can't stock a variety of frontlist books, readers won't have the opportunity they've had in the past to discover authors who are not already well-established or have published a blockbuster best seller. If you are a traditionally published author who hasn't spent a few weeks on the bestseller list, the public library is your best customer, because it will introduce your work to a lot of people who won't hear about it otherwise. And if they like it, they will become your customers, too.

You can't pay for this kind of word of mouth. But you can price it too high or make it wait too long to matter, long after you tried to get a contract for your next book but couldn't because your sales record wasn't strong enough.

As citizens and taxpayers, ask yourself if it's fair to let publishers redefine who gets to read these days, and under what conditions. As business people ... well, I hate to break it to you, but book publishers are not really that clever at figuring out what's best for the book industry. So it's not just whether it's fair, it's whether it's good for the business they claim to represent. If you care about the future of the industry, don't let publishers cut libraries out of it. We'll all be sorry.

I am not so foolish as to try to improve Fister's comments by glossing them, especially since I can find nothing I disagree with. You might also read the comments, especially the last one (by Fister).

Ending a HarperCollins Boycott (February 27, 2011-August 7, 2013)

This article by Brett Bonfield appeared [August 7, 2013](#) at *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*—and as with most pieces at that site, it's an *article*, not simply a post. It may also be pretty much all you need to know (if you hadn't been following the story) about the boycott.

Here's Bonfield's list of reasons for starting the boycott:

1. We believed the policy would further weaken First Sale and Fair Use.
2. We believed the policy would undermine libraries' core values, such as access and preservation.
3. We believed the policy would force libraries to allocate their financial resources less efficiently.
4. We believed the policy would establish a precedent, and that other publishers would adopt similar policies.
5. We believed a boycott was our best chance to get HarperCollins to change the policy it had announced through OverDrive. We didn't think we would get all that much attention, and even if we did get a fair amount of attention we didn't think we were likely to persuade HarperCollins to alter its plans, but the boycott seemed better than any of the other options available to those of us who thought self-destructing ebooks would be a net loss for readers, libraries, and publishers.

But the boycott didn't work—HC kept its policies and didn't seem to acknowledge significant lost sales. This is a long piece that explains the situation and ineffectiveness in considerable detail. I hadn't realized that the proposed boycott was of *all HarperCollins imprints books (including e and audio)*, not just ebooks. On the other hand, it only covered adult books; the head of youth services chose not to participate.

Bonfield's library kept track of HarperCollins books that would have been purchased if not for the boycott; in 29 months (February 27, 2011 to July 27, 2013), that amounted to 75 books, estimated to cost around \$1,140 total (with library discounts).

Oddly enough, because Bonfield's library is part of a consortium that provides OverDrive, his patrons *did* have access to HarperCollins ebooks. (The library also accepted donations of HarperCollins books.) There's an interesting data point about the huge surge in ebook circulation here: "Even now, ebooks only represent about 3% of our circulation...and that percentage was smaller for most of the boycott." In fact, 28 checkouts (of 3,812 total OverDrive checkouts) during the period were for HarperCollins ebooks—and four "boycotted" print titles that were donated to the

library circulated 39 times. (The library's leaving OverDrive, for reasons stated in the article.) The library also requested 73 HarperCollins items via ILL, 54 of them fulfilled. (There's a *lot* more detail about ILL in the article.)

Lots more about how boycotts work, what might change next time around and other related topics. A footnote offers some basic information about Bonfield's library, Collingswood Public: it serves 16,900 people and circulates about 85,000 items per year with a budget of about \$550,000.

The Big 5 and Sales to Libraries: an Update

This piece was posted by Dan H. Lawrence [on October 23, 2013](#) at *E-voke*. (If you haven't been following Big Media lately, Penguin merged with Random House to create ~~Random Penguins~~ Penguin Random House.)

Summarizing, Hachette "sells" all titles on primary platforms, charging 3 times cover price for frontlist, 1.5 times "the price of the highest edition currently in print" for stuff more than a year old. HC is sticking with 26 circulations at prices slightly higher than retail. Macmillan (psst: the second "m" is *not* a capital) charges \$25 per title, backlist only, for 26 circs or 2 years. The Penguin side of PRH licenses books for a year (at the price of buying a book); the RH side charges "multiple times" consumer price but allows perpetual license. Simon & Schuster's testing a pilot.

unCrowned ebooks

We'll close this section with a piece posted [October 25, 2013](#) by Dennis G. Van Arsdale at *The OverAutomated Librarian*—and we're back to academic libraries, which have their own set of vendors and problems.

The core:

I just had to remove over 1300 ebooks from access, as of August 22.

Ouch.

They were part of our "bulk" Academic collection from ebrary. And they are pretty much all part of the Random House/Crown group of publishers and imprints. Knopf, Random House, Doubleday, Bantam, etc.

He notes that the library has *some* of the titles as print books and "They can't take those back." But with ebooks, they can: he's seen individual titles disappear, and this time a whole swath of titles. He suspects that exclusivity or whatever causes this to happen isn't a good thing for publishers long-term.

I realize that a lot of decisions are being made by people who look only at the bottom line for each year, period. Bottom lines are important; they keep the publishers operating. Loyalty has never been part of that

equation. Authors might be loyal to a publisher (or more often, to an editor, and jump ships with the editor to another publisher). But not readers, in my experience. Readers tend to be more loyal to an author, or a series, and usually have little or no idea who publishes them. Oddly enough, some publishers still seem to think readers should be loyal to a publisher's offerings, but loyalty to making materials accessible to readers through a consistent avenue is not necessarily a factor in making their decisions.

There's more, and it's worth reading. For example:

[N]owadays, when an ebook vendor—ebrary, Ebsco, Ingram or whoever—comes to libraries and says, these publishers are part of what we're offering you, does it occur to anyone that we're going to respond “but probably not offering for long, given the way that particular publishing group deals with their ebook titles.”

He concludes that publishers making such decisions “don't really seem to like libraries much anyway.” It's hard to disagree with that. *Do* read the rest of the piece: it's worth thinking about.

Kindles and Libraries

Tell me: Would your public library buy a fleet of portable Sony DVD Players—that only play DVDs from Sony's SonyDVDStore—to circulate with Sony DVDs that the library purchases? Probably not? Especially not if Sony was reluctant to say whether libraries could legitimately do this?

Well, then, isn't it odd that some libraries *have* purchased fleets of Kindles, which can only (realistically) be filled with purchases from Amazon—and that more libraries have at least considered it? I assume it's an entirely different question; I'm just not sure why. (More about this in the last portion of this roundup.) Meanwhile, here are a few 2011 notes regarding Kindles and libraries—later than the earlier issues surrounding library-owned Kindles, although at least one item refers back to that issue.

Kindle Lending Library comes with strict terms, preserved notes

This report by Jacqui Cheng appeared [April 20, 2011](#) at *ars technica*. It reports on an “unexpected announcement” that Amazon, working with OverDrive, would make Kindle books available “from more than 11,000 US libraries” for use on *any* “Kindle-enabled device,” including Kindles and the Kindle apps available almost everywhere.

They call it the Kindle Lending Library. According to the release, if you borrowed a Kindle ebook through the service, you could annotate and bookmark them. The annotations won't show up for other borrowers, but if you borrow the book again or buy it, the markings will be there. (Note that this long memory says something about borrower con-

fidentiality, but you already knew that about Kindles and Amazon in general, right?)

Cheng quotes an Amazon person as saying borrowing terms for the Kindle Lending Library would vary by library, “generally 7-14 days”—probably the library’s standard OverDrive term. Cheng seems to find this unusually restrictive.

Among the 83 comments are this, um, interesting one from “Xavin”:

This convoluted lending system is a sad attempt to move a physical system into a digital one where it makes no sense. If it’s morally ok to read a book for free when it comes from the library, then it should be morally ok to read a book for free when it comes from piracy. Either we think it’s important for people who can’t afford or don’t want to pay for books to have access to them, or we don’t. I don’t know any authors who think librarians are destroying their livelihood. The fact that libraries and more recently easy piracy have been around forever, yet books still get bought in paper and electronic form, says that there are a lot of people who can and will pay for books they like, even if they have ways to get them for free. Publishers and authors shouldn’t be afraid of piracy, which is just the natural digital extension of libraries.

I must admit, that may be the first time I’ve seen public libraries equated with “piracy.” A number of other commenters took issue with the equation. (There’s also some confusion about licenses—some people *wrongly* believing that libraries circulate print books because they have special licenses while others *correctly* say that most ebook circulation currently requires licenses of a sort, while print books do not thanks to the First Sale doctrine.)

Questions we should be asking about Kindle Library Lending

From Sarah Houghton on [April 20, 2011](#) at *Librarian In Black*, based on the same Kindle press release and a related Overdrive press release.

My initial reaction is that this is potentially awesome, and potentially scary. Libraries have done nearly nothing with Kindles to date because Amazon won’t license eBooks to libraries. And Amazon won’t let libraries lend eBooks out on Kindles they’ve purchased. Both actions are against the “single user” terms and conditions clause Amazon has. Even so, some libraries have purchased Kindles, loaded them with eBooks, and lent out the devices anyway. Kindle publicly stated this was not cool, but never went after them legally. So this is really the first Kindle-Library service ever that wouldn’t potentially result in somebody getting sued.

Houghton notes that “tons” of her patrons have Kindles; that if she interprets Overdrive’s PR correctly, the eBooks “purchased” through Overdrive will become “magically available” in a Kindle-compatible format;

that it's reasonable to assume Amazon is pushing their proprietary ebook format even further; and that "we'll be dealing with two monopolies...Overdrive and Amazon."

She wonders how much it will all cost, why Amazon won't "just deal directly with libraries," whether delivery will use Whispernet, whether libraries will get MARC records, how library users' privacy rights will be protected and whether the interface has to include the "buy it from Amazon" link. And although Houghton earlier uses the term "purchase" she does point out that you don't actually *own* any ebooks acquired through Overdrive.

More thoughts on Kindle in the library

Phil Bradley waited a day before commenting (on [April 21, 2011](#) at his eponymous blog). Bradley thinks it's a good thing overall but he raises some questions about it—one of them being how Amazon makes money on the deal if a library's existing Overdrive purchases suddenly become Kindle-compatible.

If that is the case, how will Amazon make money on this deal? I suspect that they're hoping this will deal a knock out blow to other eReaders. Other readers can't do the annotate and keep function, and so it's going to be a huge reason for students to just go down the Kindle route. They might also be able to get readers to purchase titles more easily, as in 'you're 75% through but the book will expire tomorrow - do you want to buy a copy now at a slightly cheaper rate?' or 'This book is available to you at 10% cheaper as you've already borrowed it previously from your library' or 'Why wait for 4 months to borrow this, when you can buy it now?'

However, there may be greater pressure on library budgets to buy more books in an electronic format as Kindle users request them. In turn this is going to affect buying the physical item (unless Amazon is thinking along those lines as well), so libraries are going to have some even harder choices in front of them when it comes to the ever dwindled pot of money. However, since Kindle readers are obviously enthusiastic readers, this may well encourage more of them to use the library services than would have done otherwise.

Possibly worth noting: Bradley's in the UK, which has a considerably different set of public library issues than the U.S.

Douglas County and Friends

Jamie LaRue, then of the Douglas County (Colorado) Libraries, wasn't happy with the way ebooks were being offered to public libraries. He decided to do something about it. Some items on that story and related proposals.

Statement of Common Understanding for Purchasing Electronic Content

Jamie LaRue posted this [on January 17, 2012](#) at *myliblog* and revised it on July 22, 2012. It's a draft document prepared with the assistance of Mary Minow. "We propose to start using it—and to encourage other libraries to start using it, too." It only makes sense to quote the whole statement:

The Purchase Order

The nature and extent of the content is detailed at the outset in a purchase order with such specifics as: title(s), format(s) (including details of multimedia files), price, discount, any agreements to promote and/or link to Provider's site to bring readers to information on buying copies. Future purchases may be made through the Library's acquisitions dashboard. The Library may purchase additional copies of any title with a holds ratio of 4 to 1 or greater.

Rights

The Provider affirms that it has secured the rights necessary to distribute the e-content to the Library in the manner specified below. The purchase order does not transfer any copyright interest in the e-content. It transfers only the ownership of authorized copies of e-content files.

The Library affirms that it will comply with U.S. Copyright Law. The Library uses Adobe Content Server and/or standard digital rights management best practices to inhibit unauthorized copying of files.

The Library and the Provider interpret U.S. Copyright Law in the following manner: The Library may not make multiple unauthorized copies to sell or lend. The Library may lend one copy to one user at a time. For example, if the Library buys four copies of a work, it may lend four copies simultaneously. It may not make derivative works, such as translations or movies. These are exclusive rights granted to the copyright owner 17 U.S.C. Sect. 106

The Library may lend a copy to a library user under First Sale 17 U.S.C. Sect. 109. The Library may make incidental copies as necessary to perform the lending function. The lending copy is an "evanescent" copy that disappears after a set period such as two weeks. During that time, the copy is not available to any other party. Incidental exercises of other lawful rights constitute non-infringing "fair use." See *Perfect 10, Inc. v. Amazon.com*, 508 F. 3d 1146 (9th Cir. 2007). Consideration of four Fair Use factors (see 17 U.S.C. Sect. 107): (1) The purpose for the digital copying is for nonprofit lending through a library, a favored purpose. (2) The nature of the work is published and may range from the highly technical to the highly creative. (3) The

amount copied is an entire work, but it is “evanescent” in that it is not viewable after the loan period has ended. (4) The market effect is negligible in that the content owner is compensated for an authorized copy. Although a digital file is not susceptible to wear and tear in the same manner as a physical book, it is susceptible to digital decay.

Archiving and Perpetual Access

The Library may make a replacement copy for a damaged, deteriorating, lost or stolen file or if the existing format in which the e-content is stored becomes obsolete and if the Library, after a reasonable effort, determines that an unused replacement cannot be obtained at a fair price and that any such copy reproduced in digital format is not made available to the public in that format outside the premises of the library. 17 U.S.C. Sect. 108(c).

Accessible Copies

If a published nondramatic literary work is not accessible to library users with disabilities, the library may reproduce and distribute a copy in a specialized format exclusively for use by blind and other persons with disabilities. The copy shall bear a notice that any further reproduction or distribution in a format other than a specialized format, and will include a copyright notice identifying the copyright owner and the date of the original publication. 17 U.S.C. Sect. 121.

Additional Uses

This purchase order may be accompanied by a separate license agreement that allows concurrent or other additional uses that go beyond the uses permitted under U.S. Copyright Law.

Authorized Users

The Library’s current staff and registered patrons are authorized users and may access the e-content remotely with appropriate log-in credentials.

Inappropriate Use

The Library recognizes that the material provided as part of the acquisition is a valuable business asset of the Provider and that misuse of this material, such as unauthorized resale or systematic redistribution, negatively affect the Provider’s business. The Library will make reasonable efforts to prevent the misuse of the content and limit access to authorized users, and will not knowingly allow unauthorized users to gain access.

While the Library cannot control user behavior, an obligation to inform users of appropriate uses of the content is acknowledged, and the Library will cooperate with the Provider to resolve problems of inappropriate use.

When questionable activity such as systematic downloading is detected, the Provider should notify the Library as soon as possible. If the Library detects inappropriate use, the Provider should be notified as soon as possible. Both the Provider and the Library should strive to resolve the incident quickly.

Consider what's being proposed here: actual library *purchases* of e-content—with the library or consortium responsible for seeing to it that it's used on a one-copy/one-patron basis.

Dear Publishing Partner

Same day ([January 17, 2012](#)), same place, the other shoe—and again, it's designed to be “broadly adopted by the library community” (with appropriate substitutions) and I'm quoting it in full because I think it's important:

Dear Publisher Partner:

Thank you for your bold willingness to invest in the future of publishing and readership. Libraries and publishers have a lot in common: we connect writers with their audience, we promote literacy, and in the process, we grow the whole market for literacy. Our goal is to replicate the current print-purchase model libraries have had with publishers like you for centuries with e-content. We invite you to participate with us.

We want to buy e-content from you. In the past year alone, my library redirected 10% of our \$3.5 million collection purchasing budget for e-content. We suspect that our e-content purchasing will reach 20% next year. We are encouraging and supporting other libraries to join us in supporting our new publisher/partners.

We need to own the files. Douglas County Libraries has built an industry standard platform (using Adobe Content Server) that enables us to smoothly integrate e-content with our catalog, providing a seamless experience for our patrons that replicates our print check-out model. But that requires us to have possession of the content. We are not asking for the copyright, or the right of exclusive distribution. We only want possession of the file on our own servers, just as we traditionally had possession of a copy of a book within our facilities. The Library may index the eBooks to better enable patrons to locate materials of interest. However, this index will only be used for that purpose, and will not be provided to any other organization.

We have already teamed up with a few other publishing pioneers, among them the Colorado Independent Publishers Association, Gale/Cengage, Lerner, Marshall Cavendish and IPG. For some of those publishers, we wrestled through a contract-writing process that wound up being both expensive and time-consuming for both parties.

In the interests of getting more content sooner, I'd like to streamline things while still letting publishers know what they need to know.

Douglas County Libraries represents the following to you:

- We will buy a copy for each simultaneous user. That is, if we buy one copy, one person can check it out from us at a time. That loan period will be for 3 weeks, although our system allows people to return a book early, making it available for another patron. Note that this is precisely what we do with print titles. For virtually all e-content, we intend to purchase an additional copy for every four "holds" (people waiting for the title to be available) in most cases. Our users will be able to read the ebooks either through a browser on a private cloud (hosted by the library), or through a device capable of reading Digital Rights Management (DRM)-protected ePub files.
- We will attach DRM when you want it. Again, the Adobe Content Server requires us to receive the file in the ePub format. If the file is "Creative Commons" and you do not require DRM, then we can offer it as a free download to as many people as want it. DRM is the default.
- We will promote the title. Over 80% of our adult checkouts (and we checked out over 8.2 million items last year) are driven by displays. We will present e-content data (covers and descriptions) on large touch screens, computer catalogs, and a mobile application. These displays may be "built" by staff for special promotions (Westerns, Romances, Travel, etc.), automatically on the basis of use (highlighting popular titles), and automatically through a recommendation engine based on customer use and community reviews.
- We will promote your company. See a sample press release, attached. [Note: not attached to this blog post.]
- If you provide a link to enable this, we will enable our patrons to directly purchase the title. Some of our patrons don't want to wait!
- We may remove your content from our catalog if it is not used. But we will not resell or transfer ownership of the file to any other person or entity. But see Concerns below.

What we need from you: a discount. Libraries are volume buyers. For print, we typically get a discount of 45 percent. Our goal is to buy as much content as possible, and to demonstrate to our community the value of the cooperative purchasing agreement that is the public library. We also understand that the pricing for e-content is in flux. This discount can be negotiated annually.

Concerns for the future: many book buyers got their start by picking up used books. The library contributes to that market significantly: we give books to schools, churches, thrift stores, and active veterans.

Used books are a significant part of the larger reading ecosystem, and they promote both library use and new book purchasing.

But there are no used ebooks at this time. At some point—not now—I hope that publishers and libraries can come back to this issue. Again, we assure you that anything we buy from you will NOT be resold or transferred to any other person or entity. But we'll want to talk with you about this further down the line for new materials.

I hope that this letter clearly delineates the terms of engagement between the Douglas County Libraries and you. Again, this understanding closely mirrors the terms between libraries and publishers for over a hundred years. We think it greatly benefits both of us.

Would you be willing to accept this letter instead of a more formal contract?

Sincerely,

I don't think I need to annotate this. It's clearly written. It's somewhat revolutionary, but it probably shouldn't be. "This understanding closely mirrors the terms between libraries and publishers for over a hundred years. We think it greatly benefits both of us." The comments are worth reading, including LaRue's response to one of those pushing for a "let's just pay for each use" model.

Library authors petition

Jamie LaRue again, this time [on March 11, 2012](#) at *myliblog*, suggesting that librarian authors (and other authors who write for library professionals) petition professional library publishing houses.

The petition states our strong desire to donate an e-book copy of works we have written to a library of our choice. I'm not asking to "lease a copy to a library through a third party." I'm petitioning, perhaps in violation of contracts that were framed a long time ago, to give ownership of a copy to a library that can check it out to one person at a time, with DRM-management. Or without, if you have strong feelings about that.

We assert, as authors and librarians, our belief that books should be owned and managed by libraries. We protest the disappearance of ownership.

We assert, as authors and librarians, that it's absurd that a book that costs nothing to print, bind, and distribute should cost MORE than print. It should cost less. Yet, again, the idea is not to demand that publishers charge less. It's that we believe we should have the right to donate a copy of our works to a library.

We assert, as authors and librarians, that having our works in libraries helps people find us, and that matters to us.

We assert, as authors and librarians, that we want our works to endure. Libraries preserve the memory of our culture.

We assert, as authors and librarians, our intent to adopt an addendum to any contract with a publisher, our desire to sell copies of our works to libraries. Not lease. Sell, under the doctrine of first use.

He got two responses—one from Michael Sauers and one from me. I noted that creating an e-version of a book isn't always that simple but that I'd probably sign the petition. Looking back, I'm not so sure, specifically if it's about *books for library professionals*.

On one hand, yes, I'd like to be able to give a copy of an ebook version of each of my professionally published books to my library (if they wanted them). On the other hand, "having our works in libraries helps people find us" is perhaps less useful when your market is librarians—and if you're giving your ebook free to libraries *in general*, it may be a little suicidal. The last two clauses? I certainly agree with those, and I've made that clear in my self-published ebooks. [Followup: I contributed an extra paperback copy I had of two recent professionally-published books I thought were relevant to public libraries, to my public library, with no assurance they'd be added to the collection. They were. The library already held one of my books—*First Have Something to Say*.]

I suppose it's interesting that, after Jamie responded to Michael and me by saying "Let me see who else responds to this over the next few days, and we'll see how much farther we can take it," there were no other comments. Is that a comment of its own?

Large California Consortium Joins Movement Toward Library Ebook Ownership

This news report by Michael Kelley appeared [March 12, 2012](#) at *Library Journal's* "The Digital Shift." It's about Califa, California's largest library network (220 library systems, 1,000 buildings) adopting the Douglas County model and putting some money behind it.

As with Douglas County, early publishing partners seemed likely to be independent publishers (that is, *not* the Big 5) such as Dzanc Books. The story quotes a number of parties; it's worth a read.

Douglas County Libraries' DIY E-Book Hosting

This brief piece by Patrick Hogan [on March 13, 2012](#) at *ALA TechSource* mostly adds some technical details on Douglas County's system and links to [an article in the January/February 2012 *Public Libraries*](#) on the project.

Mostly another source of information on this project.

Doing It for Themselves: Libraries and E-books

Peter Brantley offers this commentary [on March 26, 2012](#) at *Publisher Weekly's* "PWxyz" and it's a prime example of why I have mixed feelings

about Brantley. Not only does he seem committed to e-everything, he comes perilously close to writing off local public libraries in this commentary, as in the closing paragraph:

[W]hether any of these solutions will bear continued investment as ebook prices continue to fall, and customer acquisition of ebook titles become increasingly trivial, is an open question. Libraries may be creatively trying to figure out ways of patching the hole in the side of the Titanic, without realizing that too many of the ship's watertight compartments have already been breached.

Before that comes discussion of why this would be better if DPLA was doing it (aggregated book recommendations) and, frankly, a whole bunch of nicely worded sniping. (The same publication—different author—engages in a different form of sniping at Douglas County's efforts a little later. Read on.)

Colorado eBook manifesto

Another piece by Jamie LaRue at *myliblog*, this one [posted July 6, 2012](#)—but I think this time, rather than quoting the whole thing, I'll just point you to it. I *will* suggest that the note about ebook circulation “increasing upwards of 500% annually” may not be as meaningful as I suspect LaRue thinks it is. I'm 99% certain it's not sustainable. Otherwise, well, go read it.

Douglas Count, Smashwords Refine Selection Tools for Bulk Ebook Purchases

Matt Enis posted this [on January 18, 2013](#) at *Library Journal's* “The Digital Shift.” It discusses one aspect of Douglas County's concept—“bulk purchases” of ebooks at relatively low prices—and how it's being refined.

Specifically, DCL purchased some 10,000 self-published ebooks from Smashwords, beginning with the “top 10,000 bestsellers” and narrowing that through a number of filters. Smashwords has a “Library Direct” plan for working directly with libraries—but the minimum by-in is around \$20,000 so far. There's more detail and discussion in the story.

Giving Them What They Should Want

This discussion is from Brian Kenney, [posted May 2, 2013](#) at *Publisher's Weekly*—and it's the “different form of sniping” I referred to above. It's a meaty discussion, well worth reading, but—as a public library patron myself—I wonder whether providing *more* in your collection than just “giving them what they want” is somehow “pushing library collections backward.”

Today, DCL spends over \$700,000 a year on e-books, a considerable portion of which goes to publishers other than the big six. Under associate director Rochelle Logan, the library is acquiring e-books from

over 800 publishers, including some midsized but mostly small and regional presses. And, to me, therein lies a problem. To support its idealistic e-book strategy, is DCL reduced to acquiring books that, frankly, will interest few readers—digital versions of what librarians kindly call shelf-sitters?

This is not meant to disparage small presses or the value of their publications. But it is unusual for a public library to fill its catalogue with material that the public hasn't requested and that will likely provide limited return on investment. For the more popular titles that are available, DCL is still a customer of Overdrive and 3M. But LaRue says he won't buy an e-book that costs more than \$50, although he admits he gets plenty of pressure from staff to do so.

As LaRue points out, people can still check the hot books out in print. DCL's buying them, it's just not willing to pay multiples of print prices to lease ebooks. While Kenney poses this as a question, it strikes me as including his answer:

That strategy seems to represent a new chapter in a debate public librarians in America have had for 150 years: should we be providing our readers with the material they want, or should we be providing books we think they should read? Because, however noble DCL's motivation is for its model, when it comes to e-books, the system is pushing its patrons to read something other than what they want to read. It's back to the 19th century, Kindle in hand.

Can't it be both? I'd surely like my library to have books I might not otherwise encounter, and I frankly find it sad to find 30 copies of one book on the shelf, no matter how popular that book might be. If failing to provide *ebook* copies of that best-seller is "back to the 19th century"—well, I'm not a librarian, but maybe the 19th century had a point. Kenney later seems to *disparage* the fact that DCL's model means ebooks are purchased rather than leased. He seems to be saying that only research libraries should worry about anything other than this year's hot item. If that's true, I find it sad.

There's considerably more here, including a penultimate paragraph with some universalisms that leave me cold. But you may find Kenney wholly convincing.

Declaring Independence

I'll close this section with one more item in the ongoing saga of alternative, *purchase-oriented*, models for public library provision of ebooks: this one a news item by Matt Enis [on July 26, 2013](#) at *Library Journal's* "The Digital Shift." It's about Enki, the propriety platform from Califa that builds on the DCL concept, as well as the adoption of Enki by the State Library of Kansas and the start of similar projects in Massachusetts

and Arizona. In all cases, Douglas County serves as an inspiration—and it appears that in all cases the focus will be more on publishers *other than* the Big 5. Worth reading.

Other Items

Some of these *could* go elsewhere; some just don't cluster well.

May a library lend e-book readers?

Peter Hirtle addressed this question [on June 20, 2010](#) at *LibraryLaw Blog*. It's a discussion that happened earlier (and, I believe, was never really resolved) with regard to Kindles in public libraries—but this time, the instances are iPads in academic libraries. As Hirtle notes, library circulation in general relies on first sale rights—while most ebooks are licensed rather than actually sold (although “buyers” may not realize that). The rest of the post:

While a library can buy an iPad device, it is not much use without software, and that software comes with a license. According to the iPad Software Agreement [posted](#) at ScribD, Apple owns the software on the iPad you purchased. You are allowed to install that software on a single Apple-branded iPad. You cannot, however, “rent, lease, *lend*, sell, redistribute, or sublicense the iPad Software.” (emphasis mine)

An argument can be made that lending the physical device is also the loan of the software, which is prohibited by the license. This interpretation is supported by the only explicit exemption to the prohibition against redistribution: namely, your ability to transfer the software to someone else when you transfer ownership of the iPad.

It is not just the iPad that has a license, however. Every app on the platform and any purchased e-book is also likely to come with a license that would prevent lending of the content. The Kindle [license agreement](#), for example, stipulates that you may “keep a permanent copy of the applicable Digital Content and to view, use, and display such Digital Content an unlimited number of times, solely on the Device or as authorized by Amazon as part of the Service and *solely for your personal, non-commercial use*.” (emphasis mine) A library purchasing a Kindle book for lending purposes is not making personal use of that title, even if the use is non-commercial.

Under the standard terms of the agreement, it would seem to this non-lawyer that a library could no more lend an iPad with a Kindle book on it than it could [lend Netflix movies to patrons](#). Maybe one could argue that all the library is doing is lending computer programs, which is permitted under [Section 102\(2\)](#), provided that the proper warning notices are included on the device itself. But while this might apply to the iPad software, I am not sure that I would want to argue

that an iBook or Kindle book is also a [computer program](#): “a set of statements or instructions to be used directly or indirectly in a computer in order to bring about a certain result.” Furthermore, licenses usually take precedence over any rights available in the law.

I hope, therefore, that libraries that are experimenting with lending e-book readers have thoroughly vetted their program with an attorney. Mostly, I hope they are working with Apple, Amazon, etc. to create new library-friendly licenses. We need licenses that will allow libraries to purchase e-books that can then either be copied directly onto patron-owned devices or copied onto library devices that are then lent to patrons. If e-books become as important as people predict and libraries do not have the legal right to lend those e-books, the traditional role of the library as a free source of reading matter will fade away.

As suggested within the quoted material, emphases here are in Hirtle’s post. I like the “if” in his last sentence, and it’s certainly true as it stands. Fortunately, it is an “if” rather than a “when.”

A comment from Gregory K. Laughlin cites his law review article, which argues that the ereaders *should* be legal to circulate. Another comment says Hirtle “let fear rule you” and pointed to a post about faculty calling out librarians as fearful—but [the post](#) does not, as far as I can tell, relate to this situation at all or provide any counter to Hirtle’s argument other than an implicit (and, apparently, all too common with faculty) “we’re academics and we can do whatever we please, copyright be damned—unless, of course, it’s *my* copyright” attitude. Some other interesting stuff in the comment stream.

Libraries and eBook Readers: An Illegal Match?

Sarah Houghton followed up on Hirtle’s post in [this June 28, 2010 post](#) at *Librarian In Black*. It’s a short item; she’s basically spreading the word. Her final paragraph:

Please be careful, libraries. And please take this as a lesson why we need organized lobbying to eMedia companies and publishers to create library-friendly licenses, use policies, digital rights management, and formats so that libraries can continue to act as the great sharers and equalizers in their communities.

Libraries’ Digital Direction

This article, by Steve Kolowich [on April 4, 2011](#) at *Inside Higher Ed*, bothers me a lot—not because of how Kolowich writes but because of what he’s saying (interpreting an Ithaka study). To wit, here’s the lede:

Most college library directors would order print books removed from the library if there was a robust and trustworthy way to provide access

to electronic versions, according to a new study released today by the nonprofit Ithaka S+R.

“Holy crap!” is my immediate response, especially if “college” means “college and university.” Or, for that matter, if it means *all* print books. To entirely abdicate any responsibility for the printed record of civilization’s progress, turning entirely to digital equivalents, strikes me as...well, you already know.

When the story later says that most respondents had near-absolute confidence that electronic content such as online journals and e-books “will dominate library collections in the not-so-distant future,” I’m *slightly* less concerned; for journals, that’s true (in most academic libraries) already. (That it’s undermining academic libraries as anything other than licensing agencies is another story...)

The survey included 239 library directors at four-year colleges, which isn’t everybody but a significant fraction. “Only 7 percent” (that is, 16 or 17 directors) said that “within five years, hard copies of books would be gone from their libraries.” Really? Within five years? *All* hard copy books? And 74% said withdrawing print books would be an “important strategy” in the future if there was a robust system for access to historical monograph collections. (Apparently, faculty *preference* for print monographs is irrelevant.)

The first comment, from Gina, says what I’m inclined to think:

It’s ironic, isn’t it, the directors’ enthusiasm to go electronic, despite the desires of faculty “consumers”. What is the library for, if not the consumers? Seems possible the directors have little love for the library as a place of research. The impression is that they long for some perfect, streamlined, sterile, state-of-the-art facility, without any messy professors inside.

Barbara Fister comments with the useful point that faculty are rarely *in* the library, and that’s also a useful point.

What libraries can do when they buy an ebook

Mary Minow posted this [on June 29, 2011](#) at *LibraryLaw Blog*—and as you should know, Minow is both a lawyer and a librarian. I’m mostly pointing to a useful and still-valid (as far as I know) list of library rights for *purchased* ebooks (not licensed ones). To wit, the same restrictions and allowances apply as for a print copy. A library “has no more right to make 10 copies of [an ebook] to lend out to 10 patrons simultaneously, than if it had bought the hardback.”

There’s more, and it’s both concise and useful.

A Future of Reading: The Barnes and Noble Nook Check-out Project

Jeff Scott posted this [on May 22, 2012](#) at *Gather No Dust*.

We recently launched an e-reader project at our library with great success. Barnes and Noble currently has a program that offers support for libraries thinking about circulating Nooks. I wasn't aware of this project until last Fall during the California Library Association Conference, at which time I was approached by a Barnes and Noble representative about the program.

As Scott notes, what's new about the B&N idea is that it has the organization's blessing, rather than "the 'wink, wink' approach from other vendors." And this time (at the CLA conference) a B&N rep was looking for Scott—because his library has the most e-books per capita in California.

How did this pilot work? Scott's library (Tulare County) purchased 30 Simple Nook Touches at around \$100 each, plus satchels—and since the rules allowed six devices per book, wound up loading six books on each Nook, with the Nooks divided among five genres. The project cost around \$4,000.

The program was a big success, and the library planned to expand it.

The general idea for this kind of program is to introduce our community to the future of reading. They have the opportunity to look at the device and see how it works. It also helps us promote our Overdrive e-book service. In utilizing a relatively cheap and easy to use device, a patron can have access to their reading material 24/7, all provided by their local library!

Change that second "the" in the first sentence to "a" (as Scott does in the post's title), and it's all good, I think. (According to Scott's [single 2013 post](#), Tulare County checked out 20,000 ebooks during the fiscal year ending June 30, 2013—which is a lot, but still only 3.5% of total library transactions. I wonder about the fact that 20% of the collection development money goes to ebooks, but never mind.)

Myth-busting: libraries and ebooks

We'll end not only this section but also the roundup (and the set of ebook-related essays) with this [August 19, 2012 post](#) by Jamie LaRue at *myliblog*. It contains portions of an article LaRue submitted to the Independent Book Publishers Association—and as you presumably know if you've read this far, LaRue believes "librarians need to pay more attention to independent publishing."

The three myths addressed in these excerpts, without LaRue's clear responses: Libraries just want to buy one copy, then give your book away to the world; Libraries steal sales from publishers; It's too easy to borrow books from the library.

Finis

By now, it's obvious that I'm one of those head-in-the-sand Luddites who doesn't believe ebooks will *wipe out print books* in the next X years, especially if X is less than (say) 60.

I'm also one of those unforgivable romantics who believes that one function of all libraries—and an important function of large public and medium-to-large academic libraries—is to preserve the record of civilization's stories, with print books being one good way to do so.

I'm all for reading in any format. I'm also all for honoring the preferences of readers. I've already offered my own grumps and thoughts about books and ebooks more than once. I hope you find this extended set of notes and comments about some developments over the past 3-4 years interesting and worthwhile.

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Masthead

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