

A Two Year Journey with E-Books: The University of Texas Experience

The University of Texas has access to over 20,000 e-books and participates in multiple overlapping e-book consortia. The e-books have received steady usage, they are included in the library's online catalog, and they have been well received by faculty and students. Nevertheless, it has been a challenge to incorporate e-books into existing routines, and librarians continue to believe that their format and functionality make e-books inherently a new breed of information species.

These experiences have led to the formulation of a set of guiding principles for the acquisition of e-books. While early e-book experiences have been positive and benign, the gold rush mentality in the e-book marketplace raises questions of potential pitfalls which libraries and academics need to keep in mind. An important part of this mix is the set of emerging international specifications and standards which will affect e-book e-commerce.

UT-Austin usage examples: E-Books vs Print Books (lifetime circulations)

Title	E-Book	Print Book
Naturalistic Environments in Captivity for Animal Behavior Research	47	15
How to Write a Successful Marketing Plan	37	45
Play and Early Literacy Development	33	77
Learning Perl	220	156
Adaptation in Natural and Artificial Systems	50	47
Utopia and History in Mexico	42	4
Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema	24	80
Women's Health: Missing from U.S. Medicine	19	31
American Rodeo: From Buffalo Bill to Big Business	14	8
The AMA Style Guide for Business Writing	16	33
Chemical and Biological Terrorism	11	7
Undue Process: the NCAA's Injustice for All	21	39
Restoration of Aquatic Ecosystems	18	17
Privatizing Russia	17	65

7 Principles for acquiring scholarly e-books:

1. No proprietary hardware or software should be required to read or access the book.
2. Academic e-books should be an integral part of the scholar's workstation; a networked environment in which e-journals, aggregated full-text, indexes, and other relevant scholarly material is accessible through a single window opening into a world of permanent, integrated, cross-linked scholarly resources.
3. E-books should be persistent in terms of both content and network accessibility.
4. E-books should be user friendly and not require special knowledge or skills to use or access.
5. E-books should be library-friendly and not require unusual local authorization procedures, configurations, clients, or disruptions to existing technological infrastructures.
6. E-books should be able to be read online or offline.
7. E-books are byte bundles inherently different in form and function from the printed book from which they originated.

A librarian's e-book concerns:

1. We may live in digital times, but it's still an analog world. In other words, the jury is still out on how e-book users will respond and how the e-book market will develop.
 2. Fragmentation. Competing technologies and formats, fragmentation of the market, lack of standardization, balkanization of what had been a worldwide standard of communication (printed words on paper).
 3. Excessive Control. Excessive and intrusive digital rights management of e-books could decrease their value to libraries as a means of permanently communicating the knowledge and values of humankind.
 4. Premature Hype. The excessive hype and the gold rush mentality among corporations hoping to be come key players in an emerging market, may combine to sour early adopter consumers on the very real potential of e-books. Most early e-book models are designed to first to preserve copyrights, and secondly to insure a revenue stream, rather than to solve any existing problems of consumers. Unless e-books address the needs of your library and clients, librarians should be cautious.
 5. Ubiquitous e-books and libraries. The value of information lies in its collection into standardized formats where it can then be easily retrieved (libraries, bookstores, world wide web). If e-books are to be of value, they need to achieve this type of ubiquity, utility, distribution, and stability. And if they do and remain forever available and for sale, the role libraries have traditionally played in society could change significantly.
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Relevant emerging specifications and standards:

Open E-Book Specification (Open ebook Forum) - <http://www.openbook.org/specification.htm>
ONIX (EDItEUR, Association of American Publishers, Book Industry Communication and the Book Industry Study Group) - <http://www.editeur.org/onix.html>
Book Item and Content Identifier (NISO) - <http://niso.org/standard.html#Drafts>
International Standard Text Code (ISO) - <http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/iso/tc46sc9/istc.htm>
Digital Object Identifier - E-books working Group - <http://www.doi.org>
Electronic Book Exchange Working Group - <http://ebxwg.org>

--Dennis Dillon, Assistant Director for Collections and Information Resources,
General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.