Disappointments and Successes

User satisfaction seems to be highly dependent on why an eBook rather than a print book is selected. In-depth studies of user wants and needs for eBooks are yet to be done. Observations, assumptions, and occasional comments reflect a variety of views ranging from "I’d rather have a real book in hand" to "I could get the book right away and the library was closed" to "I didn’t think it was a library." Where user satisfaction becomes frustration and anger is reflected in the multitude of formats and designs. The plug-ins, readers, and system designs create dissonance for the user. A user in a library where OPACS are managed by the library may suddenly come across an eBook that won’t display. Western has experienced this situation when the vendor failed to notify the library that a particular publisher used a different plug-in for viewing its books. Disgruntled users are not likely to return to eBooks.

Another frustration for users and librarians is browser support. In an institution such as Western, where the library and many of its users have Macs, support for the iMac browser Safari is unavailable. More than one browser has now been installed on all OPACs enabling users to view eBooks; creating problems for management and user education as well. With the proliferation of browsers, eBook vendors need to address the issues that arise with eBook readers, plug-ins, operating systems, and other digital operations.

Screen designs for eBook use vary widely and can be confusing to user and librarian alike. Attention needs to be focused initially on where use directions such as page turns, tools for highlighting, and sign off are located. A problem in one of the designs is the location of “Close item” or “Logoff.” When an item is not closed and a user wants to go back to the book, the user is locked out of the one user book until the time limit is expended. While standardization of screen designs is not a serious problem, standardization of eBook elements could increase their value and use significantly.

The eBook, relatively new in the publishing field, requires further development to address the disappointments frustrating both libraries and end users. Libraries are looking at the variety of models offered for the acquisitions of eBooks. No perfect acquisition model is available. From subscriptions to the one book/user model, libraries are experimenting to determine which model works best for specific collections, end users, and budgets. Print book vendors need to offer eBooks in addition to print, giving selectors an either/or choice. At issue as well, is rights management and technology for interlibrary lending. The needs for quality cataloging, standardization, and better design stand out with all eBook products.

Many aspects of our work with eBooks have to be considered successful. Clearly, the addition of literally tens of thousands of quality titles to our collection is a major success. Purchasing electronic versions of books eliminates theft and mutilation problems. eBooks have ready application and acceptance as material for electronic reserves and are easily accessed by remote users. Will eBooks continue to be selected for WMU’s collections? The answer is a definite yes! eBooks meet the needs of many users, provide e-reserves and references updated long before new print editions become available. The work towards standardization and possibilities of new acquisitions models promises continuing development in the world of eBooks.

Endnotes
5.  http://promo.netpg

Assistant Dean for Resources, Western Michigan University
1903 W. Michigan Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5353
Phone: (269) 385-1513 <bettina.meyer@wmich.edu>

Bettina Meyer

BORN & LIVED: Archbold, Ohio; Columbus, Ohio; Chicago, Cincinnati, Yuma and Tucson, Arizona, and Kalamazoo, Michigan.

EDUCATION: B. Mus., Capital University and MLS University of Arizona.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Read and hike in nature preserves.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Mysteries.

PET PEEVES: Cell phones in restaurants and other wristwatch alarms sounding in inappropriate places (church, concerts, etc.).

WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I believe eBooks will continue to thrive, new and better readers will become available and more affordable, downloads of eBooks will become readily available, and the majority of standard reference books, encyclopedias and dictionaries will be online.