April 2008

Technology Left Behind -- Throwing Kindling on the eBook Fire

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Recommended Citation

Ferguson, Cris (2008) "Technology Left Behind -- Throwing Kindling on the eBook Fire," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 20: Iss. 2, Article 43.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2770>

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Technology Left Behind — Throwing Kindling on the eBook Fire

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In November of 2007, **Amazon** released **Kindle**, its own proprietary eBook reader, providing new and stiff competition for other eBook reader products, like the **Sony eBook Reader** and **iRex iLiad**.

Designed to be book-like in its dimensions, the **Kindle** weighs only 10.3 ounces and, at 7.5 inches tall, 5.3 inches wide, and less than one inch thick, is about the same size as a paperback. The **Kindle** even tapers along its width from left to right, making it comfortable to hold and emulating the bulge of a bound book. (Levy 2008) The bottom of the **Kindle** is a soft rubber for easy handling. The screen is six inches long and makes use of E Ink electronic-paper display technology, which is designed to eliminate the eye strain associated with computer monitors and PDAs.

Below the screen is a fully functional QWERTY keyboard, which facilitates searching of the **Kindle** store. The keyboard can also be used to search for words or phrases within books or to link out and search **Wikipedia**.

The **Kindle** is outfitted with 180 MB of built-in memory, which is reputed to hold about 200 eBooks, and will accommodate SD cards for additional storage space. The battery has a long life, and it can be recharged fully in just two hours. According to the **Kindle** product page on **Amazon**, the battery will need to be recharged every other day if wireless is left on, but if wireless is turned off users could read for a week or more without recharging.

Equipped with the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, **Kindle** makes it easy to look up the definition of any unknown words on the fly. It will also remember the last page you viewed and automatically open the book to that page. Other user-friendly features of the **Kindle** include adjustable font size, the ability to bookmark pages, and the annotate feature, which allows users to insert their own notes and comments.

The Kindle Store

Perhaps the most distinct advantage of **Kindle** over other eBook readers is in the robust library of content **Amazon** makes available to users. As of late March 2008, **Amazon** boasts that over 110,000 books are available for download from the **Kindle** store, including the majority of *New York Times* Best Sellers. Prices for the books vary widely, but most *NYT* Best Sellers and new releases are \$9.99. Some classics are available for much less. **Steven Levy**, author of the November

26, 2007 *Newsweek* cover story on **Kindles**, recounted downloading *Bleak House* for only \$1.99. **Amazon** offers the first chapter of most books as a free sample.

Kindle's wireless capability allows users to shop the **Kindle** store directly from the device. **Kindle** uses **Whispernet**, which runs over **Sprint's** high speed data network (similar to the technology cell phones use), to establish a wireless connection. As a result, it is not necessary to find a WiFi hotspot, or even use a computer for that matter, to connect to the **Kindle** store. Nor is it necessary to provide payment information at the time of the transaction, as **Amazon** will keep payment information on file and automatically charge you for any books that are purchased. (Nelson December 10, 2007)

If you prefer to listen to your books, rather than read them, **Kindle** can accommodate that as well. **Amazon** recently bought **Audible.com**, a provider of digital audiobooks, and **Kindle** users are now able to download audiobooks from **Audible**. Because of the large file size,

it is necessary to first download the audiobook to a PC, and then transfer it to the **Kindle** using a USB cable. **Kindle** has its own speaker and it can accommodate headphones.

The content available for the **Kindle** is not restricted to books alone. **Kindle** users can access magazines, newspapers, and Weblogs, as well. For a small fee, users can even email their own personal documents to their **Kindle** for easy viewing.

Kindles in the Library

Applications of and uses for **Kindles** within libraries are still being explored. As **Katrina** mentioned in *Rumors* in the February issue of *ATG*, the topic of **Kindles** has been brought up on the **AcqNet listserv** and written about in several library related publications.

Pioneering the use of **Kindles** in a library setting is **Sparta Public Library (SPL)** in **Sparta, New Jersey**. **SPL** purchased two **Kindles** just after they were made available, and began lending them to patrons aged 18 and over. **Diane Lapsley**, Assistant Director of **SPL**, explains that their 9,000 patrons are very tech-savvy and the library strives to stay on the bleeding edge of technology. In the past, the library has circulated another type of eBook reader and iPods loaded with audio books. (Oder January 1, 2008)

For those of you interested in possibly circulating your own library's **Kindle**, **SPL** has developed a lending policy that ensures

the **Kindle** is returned in good condition and their costs remain under control. The library makes a copy of the patron's driver's license, and the patron is required to sign "a contract stating that they are aware of the replacement costs for each and every component of the kit, right down to the instructions," says **Lapsley**. The **Kindle** is circulated in a tote bag, and the replacement costs are also printed on a tag in the tote bag.

The **Kindle** goes out for one week and is non-renewable. The barcode for lending the **Kindle** is placed on the inside of the **Kindle** box, which **Lapsley** says forces the circulation worker to open the unit and verify all of the pieces are returned in good condition.

The titles loaded onto the **Kindle** are a completely patron-driven collection. Patrons download books to the **Kindle** on their own, and the library foots the bill. **Sparta** will pay for one book per patron per check out. If the patron downloads more than one book while they have the **Kindle**, the additional purchase is charged to the patron's record. As new titles are downloaded to a **Kindle**, they are added to the **Kindle's** record in the **OPAC**. Each **Kindle** will have its own unique catalog of titles, and each patron will benefit from what the patrons before him have downloaded. The response from **SPL** patrons has been enthusiastic, and **Lapsley** indicated that, if they could get their hands on another **Kindle**, they would put it into circulation as well.

Terms of Use

One significant kink in **Sparta Public Library's** use of the **Kindle** are **Amazon's** Terms of Use, which state that users may not "sell, rent, lease, distribute, broadcast, sublicense or otherwise assign any rights to the Digital Content or any portion of it to any third party." (<http://www.amazon.com/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=200144530>) **Drew Herdener**, **Amazon** spokesperson, told *Library Journal* "that a loan of a **Kindle** without content is OK, but sharing a device loaded with content 'with a wide group of people would not be in line with the terms of use.'" (Oder March 1, 2008)

SPL was unaware of these restrictions when they purchased and began circulating their **Kindles**. Says **Lapsley**, "We are a fire breathing library here. We tend to leap before we look and deal with the consequences afterward." She only found out about the Terms of Use after a phone call from **Norman Oder** with *LJ*. Undaunted, **Lapsley** is quick to say that they have learned a lot from their experience and would do it again in a heartbeat. She is also hopeful that **Amazon** will come around and realize the market it has been shunning.

continued on page 85

I Hear the Train A Comin'
from page 86

60 percent admitting to copying the work of other scholars (see **Paul Mooney's** "Plagued by Plagiarism" in *The Chronicle for Higher Education* for more on this topic). Whether the changes vowed by **Peking University** administrators and other Chinese academic officials — including threats of firing and the creation of a master database of plagiarism charges — adequately address the international audience's wariness of Chinese scholarship will take some time to assess.

How will the scholarly communication adapt to the Chinese influence? What will the composition of academic content creators and consumers look like in a decade's time? How will standards and expectations change in the face of a more diverse author base? These are fascinating questions I hope to revisit in these pages frequently. I am certain I am not the only one with a vested interest in how this all plays out. 🌸

Technology Left Behind
from page 84

Sparta Public Library is certainly in the spotlight as a result of this innovative (and potentially legally inflammatory) move. **Lapsley** says she has been interviewed by both *American Libraries* and the *New York Times* in the last month, not to mention the two already published write-ups in *Library Journal*. I checked back with **Lapsley** at the end of March; despite all of the press, she says she has not heard a thing from **Amazon** to date, and she prefers it that way. As **Francine Fialkoff**, Editor-in-Chief of *LJ*, recently pointed out in an editorial in the March 1, 2008 issue, "If **Amazon** is smart, **Sparta** won't [hear from them]." **Fialkoff** goes on to explain, "As lenders of hardware and software, including downloadable audiobooks and eBooks and their various players, libraries help promote the very companies that would prevent these same libraries from disseminating their products."

If you are not prepared to flout **Amazon** and their attorneys, there may be applications for the **Kindle** within a library setting without actually circulating the device or the content. In the Winter 2008 issue of *netConnect*, **Christopher Harris** floats the idea of a librarian offering roaming reference services equipped with a **Kindle**, which already includes a dictionary and access to **Wikipedia** and could be loaded with additional reference resources from the **Kindle** store.

Want your own Kindle? Good luck!

Kindles have been sold out since almost the moment they went on sale. If you want a **Kindle**, **Amazon** recommends ordering now to reserve your place in line. I tried to get my hands on a **Kindle** for the purposes of this column. Unfortunately, I am as deep on the waiting list for a **Kindle** as anyone else is, and I could not find a library willing to interlibrary

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loan a **Kindle** to me. (The next time I have a baby I am putting a **Kindle** on the registry.) There are **Kindles** to be had on **eBay**, but there is a price to pay. While **Amazon** retails them for \$399, at the end of March **Kindles** were selling on **eBay** for upwards of \$500. 🌸

Note from the Author: My thanks to Diane Lapsley of Sparta Public Library. I would be interested in hearing a publisher's perspective on Kindle and their applications in libraries. If you are a publisher whose content is available for download to the Kindle, and you would be willing to be interviewed for a future issue of Against the Grain, please contact me, <cris.ferguson@furman.edu>.

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Rumors
from page 36

BIG ANNOUNCEMENT! We have been having trouble for some reason with our **Conference electronic mailing list**. Some of you may have received messages that you were deleted from the list. Be assured that we are working on this problem and **you will NOT be deleted from the list**. If you have questions please write me <kstrauch@comcast.net>; or David Lyle <david@katina.info>. We are sorry for this, but, hey, you know computers!

And, finally, that's it for now! **Have you gotten your username and password for the ATG News Channel?** Many **Rumors** were already posted there and some are there that are not in the print edition. Check it out or contact me or David (above) if you have issues or problems. www.against-the-grain.com

Much love and see you all in print in June or virtually anytime! Yr. Ed. 🌸