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The Future of the Book

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Considering the future of the book could not have been relevant to **Benjamin Henry Blackwell**, City Librarian of Oxford, when he opened his small bookshop on Broad Street to sell used books to students and faculty. To booksellers, librarians, and information specialists 125 years later, the topic is of great relevance. Such a topic could easily be a controversial one since any discussion concerning the future is always debatable. As **John Seely Brown**, former chief scientist at Xerox and co-author of *The Social Life of Information*¹ wrote when explaining why so many predictions remain predictions, "The way forward is paradoxically to look not ahead, but to look around. Only in this way can one glimpse the future."

As those familiar with **James Joyce** will recall, June 16 is "Bloomsday," that single day in which all events in *Joyce's Ulysses*, one of the most important books of modern time, take place. June 16, 2004 was the 100th anniversary of that day. (In actual fact, **James Joyce** met the love of his life **Nora Barnacle** on June 16, 1904. How's that for romantic?)

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So, the **U of A Libraries** are managing quite well for now, with the beneficence and protection of the **University** central administration, strong faculty support, and prudent fiscal management by the Library's Administration. Still, we recognize that we must adapt to changes in the academy while continuing to build our book collection strengths. Only by so doing can we maintain our place in Canadian academic rankings and attract the kind of scholars that define a world-class university.

Endnotes

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5. Ibid., p.16.
6. Johnston, Ann Dowsett, *Maclean's Guide to Canadian Universities*, (Toronto: Maclean, 2004).
7. Association of Research Libraries (2003).
8. Columbo, John Robert, *New Canadian Quotations*, (Edmonton, AB: Hurtig, 1987), p.37.

We were preparing this paper on what future there is for books just when this year's celebration for "Bloomsday" took place in Dublin. The timing seems ironic because **Joyce** would have been helped enormously by computers in the editing process (he wrote *Ulysses* by hand in school copy books, rewriting the entire text of a chapter whenever he revised). No doubt, the concept of reading *Ulysses* in digital form would have seemed to **Joyce** to be ludicrous, at best.

Returning to **Brown's** notion of seeing the future by looking around, we will focus much of our discussion on what we see happening around us — within **Blackwell's** and the market we serve. As many of you are aware, **Blackwell's Book Services** is an academic library bookseller. While we still sell a few "festschrifts" now and then, the dynamics of our business and the library market are changing. Like libraries, we've been making books our business for a long time and will continue that tenure regardless of whether the definition of a book changes to include not only a print edition but also an edition in electronic format.

When **Blackwell's** first started discussing eBooks at library conferences, the most common questions we were asked were "Where are your eBooks? Can I look at one?" People equated eBooks with an appliance, an eBook reader, and seemed confused when we pointed to the computer saying that we can show one online. There is now another generation of readers out there. They are entering institutions of higher learning able not only to play "Lord of the Rings" on their GameBoys, but willing, you can bet, to read it on their Pocket PC's.

So, what is an eBook? What better way in this world of the "worldwide Web" to get an answer to that question than to do an online search. One search resulted in this definition: "An eBook is a book published in electronic form, similar to a word document, which can be delivered to any computer that is connected to the Internet from anywhere in the world." Another Web search defined an eBook as an electronic book to be read digitally on a computer, laptop screen or on devices called eBook readers. Other searches came up with similar definitions.

The online search led to the conclusion that most of us, at this point, are now on the same page of the definition of an eBook; that most of us have moved away from the misperception of an eBook as the appliance itself. We are adding to our vocabulary eBook terms and products

such as electronic resources, digital reference, and online journals. These latter two terms have definitions similar to eBook: a digital reference or online journal incorporating already existing accredited, fact-filled print material, making it available online for easier access and researching ability. Print is no longer the only reliable vehicle for acquiring information. We need to embrace what lies around us and welcome the unfolding of the future. "Both books on paper and electronic books exhibit distinguishing characteristics. No matter how popular electronic books become, they will not replace books on paper. The two media will coexist — each settling into its own niche."²

In a 1994 symposium on the future of the book, **Umberto Eco**, author and historian, relating the fears of an ever changing world in which it is believed that new technology makes the "old ways" obsolete, stated "The idea that something will kill something else is a very ancient one."³ ("Ceci tuera cela!" "This will kill that!") **Eco** believes these fears are overblown, as we at **Blackwell's** do. We believe that the expansion of the definition of a book to include eBooks, digital reference, and online journals will not make the need for or the use of printed material obsolete. The print book still has a large role in providing access to the discourse of the field. A book is still the medium best suited to reading in long segments, if not actually read from front to back.

The first time one reads *Ulysses* (notice we said the *first* time), one reads it from start to finish. That, at least, was **Joyce's** intent — read from page one to the last page (circa 700). If you are a true **Joyce** devotee, you have, undoubtedly, read *Ulysses* at least once from start to finish to really get a sense of the changing narrative over a single day in time. **Joyce** wrote his novel for the medium of print, a book in print. It's safe to say, that very few people would be happy sitting down to read *Ulysses* from start to finish using a PDA.

One of the most studied novels of or time, *Ulysses* almost needs to be read with a concordance in hand. The value gained by a researcher — sophisticated searching to discover complex relationships and references — would make the study of *Ulysses*, not easy, but easier. Here is where reference materials in electronic format aid the scholar.

Reference materials, such as concordances, are designed to pick up pieces of information from larger texts, such as a print book. This is where the expansion of print into electronic for-

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mat is most important. The sophisticated searching mechanisms within digital references and online journals are far better suited to meet the demands of the researcher.

In a beautifully developed exhibit on **James Joyce** organized by the **National Library of Ireland**, Joyce's actual manuscript pages have been scanned into a computer. The viewing software allows one to magnify portions of the text, turn the hand written text into typescript, and even track evolution of the text through various revisions. One could move through the "pages" of the manuscripts by using one's fingers to "turn the page." A marvelous tool for the study of **Joyce's** text.

We could have an entire conversation on the effects of online research in relation to the print book itself, but our focus will be the future of the book in electronic format, not the effects of online resources in assisting the creation, analysis and study of a print book. We recommend reading *The Future of the Book*,⁴ twelve papers presented at the **University of San Marino 1994 Symposium**.

So what is the relationship between an eBook and its print counterpart? **Anne G. Lipow**, a research librarian and author, stated that "a growing number of libraries are noticing a decline in circulations and use of its reference service; many library administrators believe the hype that search engines are a handy substitute for librarians; and reference librarians are finding it a daunting task to keep abreast of the new resources that appear daily on the Internet."⁵ We think this is an interesting comment and recommend reading **Anne Lipow's** keynote address "Serving the Remote User: Reference Service in the Digital Environment."

The Internet is a wonderful tool for research and we need to embrace it. One way of accomplishing that is to bring the Internet into the library by making online resources available via online journals and digital references to library users. In this way libraries can continue to be a vital source for fact-finding research. The availability of online journals and digital reference with assistance from knowledgeable librarians will keep patrons coming back to the library rather than just going online at home or in coffee shops. It is the reference librarian who will assist patrons in obtaining the knowledge and experience to excel in the use of both print and electronic resources.

Just as fighting the cell phone craze was a lost cause, eBooks will inevitably become a vital component of education in the future. "According to a survey, 90% of Internet users are under 35. For them, reading a book on the computer is a perfectly natural act. As time passes, reading habits and perceptions of books will, without question, evolve. From this evolution, the social foundation for the acceptance of electronic books will expand greatly."⁶

The eBook industry is maturing as the format continues to gain acceptance. The **Open eBook Forum** is a trade and standards organization dedicated to the development and pro-

motion of electronic publishing. In early June the **OeBF** announced sales numbers for the 1st quarter of 2004. Sales of eBooks were up 46% and revenues from eBooks were up 28% over the same quarter in 2003. At the same time, the **OeBF's eBook Bestseller List** for May 2004 was also released. No surprise, **Dan Brown's** *The Da Vinci Code* topped the list for the third straight month. **Kevin Ryan's** *Van Helsing*, **Dan Brown's** *Angels & Demons*, *The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction* and **Ian Caldwell** and **Dustin Thomason's** *The Rule of Four* rounded out the top 5 eBooks on the list. The top 30 bestselling eBooks for May 2004 can be found on the **Open eBook Forum** Website at <http://www.openebook.org/pressroom/pressreleases/q104stats.htm>.

The **American Association of Publishers** now includes electronic book sales in its monthly reports. As of April 2004, eBook sales were up over 73% from the previous year. Clearly, something is happening with electronic content. Many publishers sense that libraries and their patrons will be among the early adopters of this format. The format promises to create cost-savings, increase access, and move library services beyond the physical collection.

So, maybe the future of the book is already "around" us. Print is still here and will always have a place, but there is also a place and a need for electronic materials, especially reference materials for the scholar.

Digital books and eBook reader appliances, however, raise some serious issues for libraries. It's surprisingly hard to disentangle those questions that are specific to digital books and book readers from those that are generic to network-based information resources. To the extent that digital books are important works of scholarship, libraries, particularly research libraries, have little alternative except to purchase access for their patrons and also to provide assistance in utilizing digital books. If budgets allow the purchase of both print and its equivalent eBook, it would be wise for libraries to acquire both formats to offer to patrons.

A sure sign of maturity in the growth of electronic collections is an article in the May/June issue of *Public Libraries*, the journal of the Public Library Division of the **American Library Association**. Author **Paula Wilson** from Maricopa County Library District in Phoenix outlines baseline criteria for **weeding** an eBook collection! Just because a title doesn't take up physical space on the shelves, the title still takes up a different kind of virtual space in the library's general collection. Considering this part of electronic content management struck us at **Blackwell's** as being very important when considering creating or adding to an eBook collection.

Licensing digital books raises the same questions that arise for general electronic content. Is it being licensed for in-library workstations or for access by library patrons wherever they may be? Are costs based on the number of concurrent users, on the size of the user community, or on some other factors? Are traditional interlibrary loan functions able to support these digital works, and if so how? Do the license terms recognize traditional library and educa-

tion values such as fair use, free speech, and inquiry? Are there provisions to ensure the preservation of the material if the library wishes to preserve it?" A full discussion of these and other questions can be found in "The Battle to Define the Future of the Book in the Digital World" by **Clifford Lynch**.⁷

These same questions are the ones that **Blackwell's Book Services** is also asking and addressing. **Blackwell's** is working hand in hand with the publishers of online journals and digital reference works to provide libraries with the most logical, organized, and cost efficient way for librarians to comfortably add electronic resources to collection. We are working with over 20 publishers to supply libraries with one contact and source for all digital reference and online needs. **Blackwell's** wants to help with answering questions and concerns about adding electronic resources to library collections. We believe that this cooperative effort is not only good for the future of learning, but is an important synergy that should be welcomed by both the academic and library worlds. And, with this belief, **Blackwell's** will continue to lead the way assisting and providing libraries with the best electronic resources and ways to manage those collections to match the ease of acquisition that libraries are accustomed to with print collections. This year **Blackwell's** will be launching a new digital management tool within the already familiar **Collection Manager**. This new management tool will support every step of selections, ordering, reporting as well as licensing and access support for electronic resources.

We would like to conclude with thoughts expressed by **Lynn Connaway** of **netLibrary** that eBooks provide new opportunities for users, librarians, publishers, and providers. Despite the challenges associated with eBooks, this is the opportune time to assess how and why people use monographs and reference materials in order to develop new methods to use more fully and effectively these same resources in electronic format. Working together in partnerships, librarians, publishers, book vendors and eBook providers can create a future for the digital library.

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