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Technology Left Behind — The Kindle Fire Still Burns

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In the April 2008 issue of *Against the Grain*, this column took a look at **Amazon's Kindle** and its applications within libraries. The **Kindle** was brand spanking new at the time, and there was some controversy over the Terms of Use, which prohibit the lending of **Kindles** loaded with eBooks. (See "Throwing Kindling on the eBook Fire," *ATG* v.20#2 for the full story). It is six months later, the **Kindle** is about to celebrate its first birthday, and I am taking a second look to see how both the **Kindles** and the libraries that are lending them have fared. I have also checked in with a publisher, **John Wiley and Sons Inc.**, to see where they stand on the issue of libraries lending **Kindles**.

Sparta Public Library

As far as I am aware, **Sparta Public Library (SPL)** was perhaps the first library to start lending **Kindles** loaded with eBook titles. While they were not aware of the limitations placed upon lending by the Terms of Use, they have not stopped lending since they became aware of the restrictions. **Diane Lapsley**, Assistant Director at **SPL**, continues to champion the use of **Kindles** in libraries.

International Dateline from page 87

and the research community of the effects of large-scale deposit of stage-two research outputs in open access repositories, in particular on the access, use, and economics of journals, but also on the broader ecology of research in Europe.

- Clear evidence-based guidance for the evolution of policy in this area.
- A model illustrating the effects of archiving on traditional publishing systems to stimulate discussion and debate on how to maximise the benefits of both approaches.
- Trust and mutual understanding between the publisher and research communities to assist in the achievement of the ambitious development goals for science in the European research area.

Further Information

For further information on **PEER** contact **Michael Mabe**, CEO, STM at <mabe@stm-assoc.org>. 🐼

Sparta Public Library uses the **Kindles** to supplement its print collection, as an alternative to traditional interlibrary loan. To date they have purchased about 70 titles, and the two **Kindles** that **SPL** owns are always in circulation. (**Lapsley** had a hard time getting her hands on one just to answer my questions). They have not changed their purchasing of print materials because of the acquisitions of the **Kindles**, nor have they purchased any additional **Kindles** since I last corresponded with **Lapsley**. Says **Lapsley**, "Although the demand is still high, we feel that we're meeting the demand with the units we have, so we're good for right now."

Thus far, **SPL's** lending policies for the **Kindles** have served them well. According to **Lapsley**, nothing has been lost, the **Kindles** are very rarely returned late, and they have had no recharging problems. She says, "It's been great all around, and the patrons are still enamored of the whole thing!" I asked **Lapsley** the \$64,000 question: Have you ever heard from **Amazon**? and her response was, "NOT WORD ONE... and I LIKE it that way!!!!!"

Lapsley may not have heard from **Amazon**, but she has been contacted by several libraries that are interested in setting up **Kindle** lending programs of their own. This includes libraries outside of the United States, two in Sweden and one in Norway.

North Carolina State University

SPL is not the only library lending out its **Kindles**. **North Carolina State University (NCSU) Libraries** ordered six **Kindles** in January 2008, and began lending them out sometime in late February. Just recently, because of the long waiting list for the devices, they acquired six more, bringing their current total to 12.

Greg Raschke, Associate Director for **Collections and Scholarly Communication Administration** at **NCSU Libraries**, recently discussed the **NCSU Libraries' Kindle program** with me. The **Kindles** are made available as part of **NCSU's** device lending program (<http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/learningcommons/devices.html>), which acts as a technology test bed, allowing **NCSU** students, faculty, and staff to check out and experiment with new and emerging technologies. Says **Raschke**, "The students really like the device lending program quite a bit. The idea is that they can experiment with these, figure out what they like, and then, typically, go buy them." In addition to **Kindles**, **NCSU Libraries** lends out laptops, digital cameras and camcorders, iPods and MP3 players, GPS units, graphing calculators, and digital voice recorders. The devices are lent from the **Learning Commons** service desk, which is separate from the Circulation Desk.

NCSU Libraries requires a current patron record to borrow a **Kindle**; no credit card or

other information is required. Patrons may check out the **Kindles** for seven days. **Raschke** says that **NCSU** is letting patrons build the collection as they go. A single **Amazon** account can have up to six **Kindles** affiliated with it, which is why the **NCSU Libraries** has bought its **Kindles** in groups of six. With its 12 **Kindles**, **NCSU Libraries** manages two **Kindle** accounts. At this point, they have over 70 titles between the two accounts, which, at an average price of \$9.15 per book, represents approximately a \$700 investment in titles for the **Kindles**. There is a price threshold of \$50 per book, and a limit of five titles per person per checkout.

All of the titles that are purchased for the **Kindles** are added to the online catalog. Unlike **SPL**, **NCSU Libraries** does not allow patrons to purchase titles on their own; if a patron wants a title that is not already on the **Kindle**, the patron may request that it be purchased and downloaded to the **Kindle** prior to checking the device out. The process of downloading a new book to the **Kindle** usually only takes five to ten minutes, and it can be done while the patron waits.

Raschke does not feel that **NCSU** patrons are using the **Kindles** as an alternative to interlibrary loan. "Sometimes they will use it when a book is checked out, and they want an access copy," says **Raschke**, but surveys indicate that the driving motivation for 90% of people checking out the **Kindles** is that they want to see how the device works. While the majority of users of this program have been students, a couple of professors have used the **Kindles** for classes. For example, a professor teaching a communications class has juxtaposed the **Kindle** with caveman drawings as a form of written communication.

Raschke says that initial set up of the accounts and managing multiple sets of **Kindles** has been the most challenging part of this program. Figuring out which books are loaded to which **Kindles** is a bit of a hassle for people working the **Learning Commons** service desk. He indicated that **NCSU Libraries** may acquire six more **Kindles**, but that they would most likely cap the number of **Kindles** it owns at 18. They don't want more than three or four accounts to manage. **Raschke** is hopeful that **Amazon** will come up with a more institutionally friendly model; one that would allow books to be shared across more than six **Kindles** at a time. Overall, **Raschke** says, "The program has been successful, and students have really enjoyed it. The use per dollar spent has been pretty good already."

A Publisher's Perspective

John Wiley & Sons, Inc. has offered titles via the **Kindle** since **Amazon** first launched the eBook reader. According to **Peter Balis**, Online Sales Director, **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**,

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Wiley currently has over 5,000 titles available for download to the **Kindle**. Content is available from all of the **Wiley** imprints with the exception of its Higher Education imprint.

When considering what titles to make available via the **Kindle**, “we are less restricted by subject matter,” says **Balis**, “than we are by our ability to convert certain types of content into a reflowable ‘**Kindle**’ eBook.” **Wiley** defines reflowable content as any content that is not “fixed” as an image. **Balis** explains, “PDF eBooks are in essence, a picture of a page...it is immutable and cannot be adjusted outside of zoom in and zoom out. Reflowable text does not have fixed margins...thus it can realign itself to different size viewing windows (or devices).” **Balis** indicated that **Wiley** is continuing to work on conversion techniques that will allow them to expand their offerings in a variety of eBook formats (not just the **Kindle**), including **ePub**, **MobiPocket**, **Sony**, and **Palm**.

The availability of **Wiley** titles via the **Kindle** does not necessarily allow **Wiley** to reach a new market, but **Amazon** does present **Wiley** with an opportunity to sell eBooks to a large customer base. Says **Balis**, “For those of us publishing eBooks, any opportunity to increase eBook adoption/readership translates to greater sales.” Thus far, **Wiley** has not experienced a loss of revenue because of the **Kindles** and other eBook devices says **Balis**. “Although we are in the early stages, we are not seeing any cannibalization of sales.”

When asked about libraries lending **Kindles** loaded with eBook titles, **Balis** responded, “In all honesty, **Wiley** does not have a position on this. We are in the business of selling content, not devices and we do not involve ourselves in these discussions.” **Balis** went on to say that he thinks “that libraries would best serve their patrons by lending books (agnostic of format, electronic, print, audio, etc...) and not devices.” **Balis** explained that in his interactions with librarians he is “acutely aware of the difficulties in managing the ‘customer support’ of digital offerings to patrons.” He thinks that putting librarians in the position of providing device-specific customer support would only exacerbate the problem. **Balis** feels that “a better solution would be to follow the **Sony** example via **OverDrive**. Leave the devices in the hands of the consumers. Instead, allow DRM protected files (**ePub**) to be distributed to libraries which can in turn, lend them to patrons who can access them on their device.”

Wrap Up

Last April, **Amazon** was sold out of **Kindles** and there was a strong secondary market for the devices on **eBay**. The good news is that **Kindles** are more readily available at this time. They are in stock on **Amazon's** Website, and the price has dropped to \$359, 10% off the original \$399. The bad news is that the Terms of Use have not changed, and there is still a certain element of the unknown in lending **Kindles** loaded with eBook titles. Thus far,

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Amazon has not contacted any library that I am aware of to challenge the lending of **Kindles**, but the possibility that **Amazon** may come knocking on the library door still exists.

Further Reading

Andrew Wylie, president of the **Wylie Agency Inc.**, had an interesting opinion piece, “E-Book Economics,” in the July 28, 2008 issue of *Publisher's Weekly*. **Wylie** compares the economics of electronic book titles to the economics of their print counterparts. He focuses on the production costs of print versus electronic books and the need to level the play-

ing field between the printed and digital editions. **Wylie** strongly feels, “The two formats must bear an equivalent retail price.”

Joe Wikert, Vice President and Executive Publisher in the Professional/Trade division of **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, has two blogs, **Publisher 2020** (http://jwikert.typepad.com/the_average_joe/) and **Kindleville** (<http://kindleville.blogspot.com/>), which **Wikert** bills as *All Kindle, All the Time*. Both blogs highlight the latest developments in the publishing industry and include some interesting commentary on the **Kindle**. 📖