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Cris Ferguson

Furman University, cferguson13@murraystate.edu

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Technology Left Behind — Barnes and Noble Carves a nook in the eReader Market

Column Editor: **Cris Ferguson** (Electronic Resources/Serials Librarian, James B. Duke Library, Furman University, 3300 Poinsett Highway, Greenville, SC 29613; Phone: 864-294-2713) <cris.ferguson@furman.edu>

On October 20, 2009, **Barnes & Noble** unveiled **nook**, its response to the **Kindle** and other eBook reading devices. **B&N's** foray into the eBook market, which includes the purchase of the eBookstore **Fictionwise** in March 2009, is part of the company's overall strategy to keep it competitive in the book selling industry, both print and electronic. While the device is often referred to as "the Nook," **Barnes & Noble** specifically uses a lowercase "n" when marketing the device and does not use the article "the" to refer to **nook**.

In terms of their basic functionalities, **nook** and the **Kindle** are quite similar. Both have a six-inch **E-Ink** display and weigh less than a pound. (**nook** weighs about an ounce more than the **Kindle**.) They each have 2GB of built-in memory, carrying up to 1500 eBooks. Both have built-in dictionaries and permit users to bookmark pages and make notes. Overall, **nook** is quite comparable in dimension and capabilities to the **Kindle**.

However, there are notable differences that make **nook** stand out from the crowd to some degree. Instead of a keyboard, **nook** features a small, full-color, back-lit touchscreen. Located just below the **E-Ink** display, the touchscreen, which was designed with navigation in mind, allows users to scroll through books and magazines by title or by cover art. Essentially occupying the same piece of real estate that the **Kindle's** keyboard does, **nook's** touchscreen can also be used as a virtual keyboard for searching purposes. One notable disadvantage to the touchscreen is its drain on **nook's** battery. Perhaps to help compensate for this, **nook** has a replaceable battery, which the **Kindle** does not.

According to the **Barnes & Noble** Website, in addition to the 2GB of internal memory, **nook** offers expandable storage, accommodating a 16-GB microSD card. The device can also be used as an MP3 player for music or audio books, holding up to 26 hours of audio.

There are certainly features that the **Kindle** offers that **nook** does not. For example, the **Kindle** accepts **Word** files and includes a rudimentary Web browser, neither of which is available on **nook**.

Like the **Kindle**, **nook** uses **AT&T** 3G wireless. **Barnes & Noble** also makes free Wi-Fi available within its stores. The Wi-Fi connection within **B&N** stores enables **nook** customers to "completely browse any eBook **B&N** is carrying while also offering exclusive content to **nook** users." (Milliot)

Rik Fairlie recently conducted a head-to-head comparison of the three major eBook readers on the market: **nook**, **Kindle** and **Sony Reader**. **Fairlie's** review, which can be found in the January / February 2010 issue of *Money*, names **nook** as its top pick. Reasons for this decision include the number of titles available, both paid and freely available, and the navigation that is facilitated by the LCD touchscreen.

As the review points out, **Barnes & Noble** has a much larger library of eBooks available for purchase and access, over one million titles compared to **Amazon's** almost 400,000. In addition, **nook** can display the EPUB format, enabling users to download titles from **Google** and from their public library. **Kindle** does not support the EPUB format at this time, meaning that far fewer free eBooks are accessible to **Kindle** users.

Another notable difference between the **Kindle** and **nook** is the capability to lend out eBook content. Through its LendMe program, **Barnes & Noble** allows **nook** owners to lend eBook content to anyone with a **nook**, PC, Mac, **iPhone**, or other smartphone. The recipient need only have the **B&N** reader installed on his or her device.

The **Barnes & Noble eReader**, which is freely available via the **B&N** Website, is a proprietary application that permits users to read **Barnes & Noble** eBooks on devices such as the ones mentioned above.

It must be noted that the LendMe feature has some pretty significant limitations. First, not all titles are available through the program. Publishers may choose to opt out of LendMe, making their content unavailable for lending. In addition, each eBook may only be lent out for 14 days, during which time it is not available to the lender. Lastly, an eBook may only be lent out only once. If the recipient isn't able to read the book completely during the 14 day loan period, the eBook cannot be lent to them, or anyone else, again.

nook and all its features can be yours for the price of \$259, which is, not coincidentally, the exact price of the **Kindle2**. Pricing for the eBooks themselves are also quite similar. Both **Amazon** and **Barnes & Noble** charge \$9.99 for most bestsellers.

nook officially began shipping at the beginning of December, and there were reports of some shipping delays before the holidays. Those problems appear to have been rectified at this point. A **nook** ordered

on February 3, 2010 was estimated to arrive on February 12, 2010 with free shipping.

Barnes & Noble is taking great advantage of its retail locations to market **nook**, offering live in-store demonstrations of the device. **B&N** superstores are all supposed to have large **nook** displays, as well as 17 of **B&N's** college bookstores. Having a dedicated retail presence gives **Barnes & Noble** a distinct advantage over its competitors in the e-reader device market. Customers can explore the device and put it through its paces before purchasing, something that is difficult to do with the **Kindle** unless you know someone who owns one. Unfortunately, **nook** is not actually available for sale in **B&N** stores. A **B&N** bookseller will, if you ask, order the device for you through the **B&N** Website and have it shipped to your house, but you cannot leave the store with device in hand.

I visited my local **B&N** to check out **nook** for myself. At my **B&N**, the **nook** display featured prominently at the store's customer service desk. Two **nooks**, firmly anchored to the counter via secure cables, were available for testing, and big light-up signs proudly proclaimed **nook's** arrival. Overall, I found the device to be remarkably similar to the **Kindles** my library has purchased. However, I must express my preference for **nook**. I was completely won over by the touchscreen and the navigational capabilities it offered.

It should be noted that the battle for a share of the eBook reader market is far from over. While this column was in progress, a new player entered the arena with the release of **iPad**. Unveiled on January 27, 2010, **Apple's** much anticipated tablet device is set to start shipping in April 2010. The **iBook** application will enable users to browse the **iBook** store, which boasts content from five major publishers. Pricing will start at \$499 for a 16 GB model. More than just an eBook reader and MP3 player, the **iPad** could certainly give both the **Kindle** and **nook** a run for their money.

Resources

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A consortial-level project team (or teams) could ameliorate this. With a number of libraries in need of project work, a team of this nature could be kept busy full-time, rotating its services among members. No individual library would bear the cost of retaining such a staff full-time, but all would be able to draw upon its capacity as needed. A similar approach could be used to amortize curation, preservation, and digitization expertise and capacity across the entire shared collection.

Many libraries and consortia, of course, have already recognized and seized these opportunities:

- **The University of California's Shared Cataloging Program** and **California Digital Library** have distributed high-level skills across the entire UC system. Its **Next Generation Technical Services** initiative seeks to bring those operations to the UC network level.
- Shared offsite storage facilities like **Harvard/MIT's**, **Colorado PASCAL** and a host of others have reduced costs and collection redundancies.
- In Florida, both **FCLA** and **CCLA** provide centralized automation support for most of the academic libraries in the state.
- Programs such as **Orbis Cascade's Distributed Print Repository** have enabled libraries to extend their space while providing a secure archiving solution for valuable content.
- The **CIC's Hathi Trust** has pioneered secure digital archiving for millions of book titles.
- The **CONSORT** libraries in Ohio have drastically reduced the overlap in tangible Government Documents in their respective collections.
- The **Colorado Alliance** has implemented a large-scale digitization program for microforms.
- **Colby**, **Bates**, and **Bowdoin Colleges** have initiated a fully shared approval plan, in which weekly shipments alternate among all three campuses.
- **Columbia** and **Cornell** have begun to formally explore closer collaboration between their technical services operations, in a pilot program known as **2CUL**.

This list merely scratches the surface. There are hundreds of similar endeavors that demonstrate the actual and potential benefits of ground-based collaboration within a region. (We'll reserve the drawbacks for another, much more entertaining article.) But there is much more to be done, and well-managed consortia are the organizations best positioned to do it. No matter how fully the library in the cloud is realized, efficient exchange of material, equipment and staff will continue to require these libraries on the ground. And yea, verily, sharing shall sweep the regions...except for the region of my stuff. 🌸

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greg@scholarnext.com

www.scholarnext.com

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didn't spend more than one night in any single building for fear of assassination. We talked about the events of China during the preceding 30 plus years. I asked him if he thought China might return to the chaos of the past. He said thoughtfully, "I don't think so, I hope not."

It is this context that I think the whole episode of **Google** and its experience with China's government has to be viewed. China has experienced such sorrow and pain due to ideology, and so the current government, which lacks any ideology except a belief in the linkage between "peace" and "prosperity," refuses to allow any opposition to its own power — which situation they define as "chaos." So, in library land, as long as you don't want to buy and circulate books which challenge the Government, you are free to do what you want.

This is much better than during the Cultural Revolution when all books except those applauding **Mao** were forbidden, when all music and drama except for a relatively small selection of Communist hymns and plays

could be sung, listened to, or performed, when lady librarians couldn't wear nice clothes or use make-up, when opinions could not be expressed for fear of being exposed by your friends or family members when under pressure to give up some tidbit of counter revolutionary behavior. Yet, I hope that China will soon feel sufficiently confident of itself that the people will voluntarily choose to follow the policies of the Government and that opposing views can be tolerated without fear that they will be adopted by many other people. China is such a beautiful country, its people are so wonderfully resourceful, its culture is so remarkable, and the amount of prosperity that has been achieved in such a short period of time is so amazing that it deserves to be respected — but voluntarily. 🌸

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