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People Profile: Bettina Meyer

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Disapppointments 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 “All I needed was a definition.” Where user satisfaction becomes frustration and anger is reflected in the multitude of formats and designs. The plug-ins, readers, and system designs create dissatisfaction 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 extended. 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 uses, 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.

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