

Online & On-screen: Library Resources Come to the Desktop

Marsha L. Burmeister

The student searched the library catalog using the terms "instructional technology" and, from the list of books in the category, selected Educational Media and Technology Yearbook 2000 (Branch & Fitzgerald, 2000). After a quick glance at the table of contents, the student flipped to page 49 to an article titled "Tools for Automating Instructional Design" and began to read.



Marsha L. Burmeister, Director of Emerging Technologies, Fischler School of Education & Human Services, Nova Southeastern University, 1750 NE 167th St., North Miami Beach, FL 33162.
Telephone: (954) 262-8510.
E-mail: burmeist@nova.edu

INTRODUCTION

The above scenario appears to be quite common until placed in the context in which it happened: completely online. The search of the netLibrary® database yielded the list of e-books that brought the book (one of over 16,000 copyright-protected full-text e-books and 3,000 public-domain texts), to the screen. Library subscription to this database enables patrons' free access to the e-books from any computer, anytime, anywhere. Going to the library takes on a new dimension at a distance. Library resources online include e-books, reference materials, online libraries, instruction in bibliographic research, and virtual resources. This is the first article in a series that will discuss each of these resources, beginning with e-books.

It is increasingly common for libraries to include digital materials in their collections and the movement from paper books ("p-books") to e-books is an appealing idea (Press, 2000). These electronic items may include dissertations, journal articles, numeric data, digital maps, and e-books. Each of these items can be referred to as a "digital object" larger than 1.4 megabytes (Jantz, 2001). Additionally, many e-books are available via the Internet

without cost or subscription to a database. This article will define e-books, detail the process to obtain an electronic book, and summarize several Web sites that provide free and open access to e-books.

DEFINITION: E-BOOKS

The history of the e-book began with the development of the "Dyna-book" prototype by Allan Kay in 1972. More than 30 years later, digital objects can be found in today's libraries and online in several formats, including Portable Document Format (PDF), Microsoft Reader with Clear Type, and XML-based Open e-Book Publication Structure. The Open e-Book format is one standard based on HTML and SML and was developed by the Open Book Initiative of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) (Press, 2000). E-book formats have not been standardized. The Association of American Publishers defines e-books as "a literary work in the form of a digital object consisting of one or more standard Unique Identifiers, Metadata, and a Monographic body of content, intended to be published and accessed electronically" (Dowdy, Parente, & Vesper, 2001, p. 2).

USING AN E-BOOK

The distribution of e-books can take several formats and can be referred to as the development of "e-ink" (Crawford, 2003). Patrons may "check out" the digital book by downloading the book to a computer so it appears online. Earlier implementations of e-books included downloading the e-book to a reader device such as a PDA; this earlier implementation has gone by the wayside to the point that the primary means to access an e-book currently is to view books onscreen as a PDF or Web-based text-only document. Internet-based providers include netLibrary, Questia, and Ebrary; subscriptions to these databases of e-books can be purchased by libraries to form a digital collection. For example, netLibrary provides full-text books in all subject areas, including over 16,000 copyright-protected e-books as well as an additional 3,000 public-domain texts. Thus, patrons of subscribing libraries may "check out" the digital book by accessing the book via computer so it appears onscreen. Copyright is protected by limiting the amount of text that a user can download or copy or by limiting the use of the e-book to one user at a time (Dowdy, Parente, & Vesper, 2001). Text that is in the public domain is easily placed online without copyright constraints.

E-book technology offers some unique features not associated with traditional print that may be perceived as advantageous to the use of e-books. These include 24/7 access via the Internet, the ability to search the text electronically, the ability to change text size, to include hyperlinks to Web-based resources, to update the content, bookmark pages, and access a dictionary integrated into the book-reading experience (Hutley & Joseph, 2001). "Pages" are "turned" electronically by mouse or keyboard input. Distri-

bution is available without the constraints of time or location.

A major concern expressed by critics is that e-books are not comparable to print books in terms of display, print quality, the need to use a reader (computer or PDA), the size of the file for download, and reading speed (Sottong, 2001). Another concern is the linear nature of e-books, similar to a microfilm reader; it is difficult to skim an e-book or move around an e-book as one can with a physical book (Nesta, 2001). A study by Simon (2002) suggested that students who used an e-book were eager to adopt this new technology on a larger scale. Much depends on the preferences of the reader, who must determine a comfort level with text on-screen. Readers who seek "bestsellers" will be disappointed, as e-books in subscription databases tend to be older titles; digitization is not matching the pace of traditional paper publishing.

E-BOOK WEB SITES

- *The Online Books Page*
<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/books/>

While at first glance this site is rather "plain vanilla," it is a treasure trove of digital books, listing more than 20,000 online books freely readable over the Internet. The site includes an index of thousands of online books, links to significant directories and archives of online texts, special exhibits of "particularly interesting classes of online books," and information about how readers can help support the growth of online books. The Online Books Page was founded in 1993 and is edited by John Ockerbloom, digital library planner and researcher at the University of Pennsylvania, where the site is housed. Books are listed by authors, titles, subjects, serials, and new list-

ings. A book search is available, and features of the site include "A Celebration of Women Writers, Banned Books Online, [and] Prize Winners Online." The sources of the books are identified; the Gutenberg Project is well-represented.

- *Project Gutenberg*
<http://www.gutenberg.net/>

As stated on the Web site, "Project Gutenberg is the Internet's oldest producer of free electronic books (eBooks or etexts). Our present collection of more than 10,000 eBooks was produced by hundreds of volunteers. Most of the Project Gutenberg eBooks are older literary works that are in the public domain in the United States. All may be freely downloaded and read, and redistributed for non-commercial use." The book database is searchable, and a link to "recent books" is included; more than 100 e-books are added weekly. Special areas of the Project Gutenberg site include CD and DVD images including a listing of selections titled "Best Of" in one large download, audio e-books, and digitized sheet music. A comprehensive FAQ section on the site is interesting reading.

- *The Harvard Shelf of Classics*
<http://www.bartleby.com/hc/>
Hosted by Bartleby.com, this site is identified as "The most comprehensive and well-researched anthology of all time comprises both the 50-volume '5-foot shelf of books' and the 20-volume Shelf of Fiction. Together they cover every major literary figure, philosopher, religion, folklore and historical subject through the twentieth century." The site is searchable; the site also includes introductions, guides to reading, and indexes, and is highly rated for its comprehensiveness and authority.

SUMMARY

There is a distance to go in terms of the universal acceptance of e-books as a viable library collection component. For distance students and educators, this is another means to deliver content beyond journal articles and textbooks. Digital objects can be placed on "electronic reserve" that can mirror the traditional paper practice. E-books have both advantages and disadvantages and the preferences of the reader will determine the extent to which e-books are on one's reading list, required or recommended.

In terms of moving forward with e-books, perhaps Crawford (2003) said it best: "The best libraries have more than one room. The best

libraries use more than one medium. Most real-world problems require more than one solution. That's life—messy but wonderful" (p. 88).

REFERENCES

- Branch, R. M., & Fitzgerald, M. A. (Eds.). (2000). *Educational media and technology yearbook*, Vol. 25. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.
- Crawford, W. (2003). Libraries, e-books, and monolithic solutions. *American Libraries*, 34(4), 88.
- Dowdy, J., Parente, S., & Vesper, V. (2001). E-books in the academic library. *Proceedings of the Annual Mid-South Instructional Technology Conference*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED463726).
- Hutey, S., Joseph, M., & Saunders, P. (2002). Follow the ebook road: Ebooks in Australian public libraries. *Aplis*, 15(1), 32-37.
- Jantz, R. (2001, June). E-books and new library service models: An analysis of the impact of e-book technology on academic libraries. *Information Technology and Libraries*, 20(2), 104-113.
- Nesta, F. (2001). Electronic texts. *Webnet Journal*, 3(1), 7-8.
- Press, L. (2000). From P-books to E-books. *Communications of the Association for Computing Machinery, Inc.*, 43(5), 17-21.
- Simon, E. J. (2002). An experiment using electronic books in the classroom. *Journal of Computers in Mathematics and Science Teaching*, 21(1), 53-66.
- Sottong, S. (2001). E-book technology: Waiting for the "false pretender." *Information Technology and Libraries*, 20(2), 72-80.

"THE BEST LIBRARIES HAVE MORE THAN ONE ROOM. THE BEST LIBRARIES USE MORE THAN ONE MEDIUM. MOST REAL-WORLD PROBLEMS REQUIRE MORE THAN ONE SOLUTION. THAT'S LIFE—MESSY BUT WONDERFUL." (CRAWFORD, 2003, P. 88)

—CRAWFORD (2003, P. 88)