

Handheld e-book Reader Survey

Executive Summary

An identical survey was distributed with e-book readers in libraries in three Wisconsin Library Systems (Eastern Shores Library System, South Central Library System, and Waukesha County Federated Library System). A total of 207 completed surveys were received. The users of the handheld readers (mostly RCA REB 1100s) were given the opportunity to describe their experiences using the readers, to identify specific problems, features that they particularly liked and/or disliked, and to compare their preference for various book formats including the handheld e-book reader.

While nearly one-quarter of those reporting (24.15%) had some problems using the e-book readers, nevertheless, most found their experience using the readers satisfactory. In fact, over half of those trying the e-book reader ranked it either a 4 or a 5 on a five-point scale with 1 representing “least preferred format” and 5 representing “most preferred format.” While “hard-bound books” still received the highest weighted score (4.11), the e-book readers tied with “paperback books” with a rating of 3.56. Surprisingly, the e-book reader out-ranked audio books (books-on-tape or on CD); audio books received a rating of only 2.83. However, it must be remembered that the subjects of this survey were *not* general library users. Rather, they volunteered to participate in an effort that asked them to “read” in a more traditional sense. The results cannot and should not be construed to mean that e-book readers would be more popular than book-on-tape if they were offered widely. Nevertheless, the rating *does* indicate that a large percentage of individuals who tried the handheld readers felt that their experience was a largely a good one.

Approximately two-thirds of those participating in the survey thought that bestsellers and popular fiction were well suited for use with handheld e-book readers; this is perhaps not surprising since many of the readers contained these kinds of materials. However, there were also a number of thoughtful comments from individuals making the case for reference and textbook materials. Several also raised the value of the e-book reader in travel situations although not always in relation to having travel related items loaded in the e-book. Some simply thought that the reader (loaded with multiple books) was an efficient way to take reading materials along on a vacation.

Many of the problems faced by those who tried the e-book readers related to unfamiliarity with the controls such as inadvertently “jumping” ahead, back, or completely “out” of a book. A few experienced equipment failures. Several of these individuals reported that they did not continue to use the e-book and, not surprisingly, gave a low rating to the handheld e-book format.

Who Participated?

While both men and women ranging in age from under age 15 to over age 75 participated, those involved in the survey were mostly female and specifically women between the ages of 40 and 55. In fact very nearly half of survey respondents (48.30%) fit this profile. Only seven people over the age of 75 completed surveys. On the other hand, there were 13 respondents under the age of 18.

Where Did They Hear About the Project?

Of the 207 respondents, 127 (58.45%) heard about the availability of the handheld e-book readers directly from a library staff member. A much smaller, but yet significant number (39 people or 18.84%) saw a sign, poster, or flyer in the library. Just over eight percent (17 people or 8.21%) read a newspaper article about the e-book project and the same number (17) said they were made aware of the project through a television or radio report.

The Experience of Using the e-book Readers

Almost all of those completing the survey were using a handheld e-book reader for the first time during their participation. Two hundred of the 207 respondents said that this was the first time they had used such a device. Almost sixty percent (58.94% or 122 people) reported that they used the reader for more than 2 hours. Of the 29 individuals who used the e-book for less than 30 minutes, 22 reported that they had problems in using the device. This represents forty-four percent (44%) of the 50 individuals who said they encountered some difficulty. It would appear that potential e-book reader users have little patience for balky technology. They wanted it to work easily immediately. If it didn't, many simply gave up.

Over half of the participants said they completed the reading of at least one full book during their trial of the e-book readers. Ninety-seven said they did not. However, in their comments, several cited reasons for not finishing that had little to do with dissatisfaction with the reader. Reasons for not finishing a book included lack of time, discovering that they had already read the title that they expected to read and simply not liking the books that were loaded in the reader. While the percentage of print-on-paper books that are not read after being checked out from the participating libraries is not known, the consultants expect that the percentage may not be much different than the rate of completion witnessed for the e-book readers.

One hundred and seventy-eight people (85.99%) said that there was at least one thing that they liked about the e-book reader format. Most frequently mentioned positive characteristics were the backlit screen and the ability to alter the display (usually by changing font size). Eighty-seven people (42.03%) said that there was at least one characteristic that they disliked. The range of dislikes was actually as broad or broader than the range of positive attributes but fewer people expressed opinions

about a large number of negative characteristics. Many expressed dissatisfaction with the small size of the screen and the lack of “page numbers.”

Survey participants were asked to indicate the types of books that they thought would be well suited to reading on a handheld reader. Respondents could select multiple answers on this question. In other words, if they thought that cookbooks and “How-to” books were well suited for use with an e-book reader, they could choose both. In fact, over three quarters (76.81% or 159 people) of those completing the survey said they thought that bestsellers were well suited for e-book use. Almost as many (152 or 73.43%) said that mysteries and other popular fiction were good matches with the e-book reader.

There was also notable support for reference books, textbooks, and travel books being available in this electronic form. Each received between 22% and 29% support. A number of individuals provided their rationale for selecting the types of books they chose in this question. Examples of their comments can be found in the “text comments” section following the narrative report.

Respondents were asked to rate their preferences on four different formats of “books.” They were presented with a five-point scale with 1 representing “least preferred” and 5 representing “most preferred.” They were asked to rate “hard-bound” books, paperbacks, audio books (books-on-tape or CD), and the handheld reader on this scale following their experience using the e-book. One hundred and three people (49.76%) gave the handheld reader either a 4 or a 5 rating.

When scores were weighted (one point for each least preferred, two for each rating of two and so on to 5 points for each rating of most preferred), the ratings were as follows:

?? “Hard-bound” books	4.11
?? Paperback books	3.56
?? Handheld e-book reader	3.56
?? Audio books	2.83

While it is not known how much the “novelty” of the handheld reader contributed to the high ranking for the e-book format and while it should be noted that respondents were self-selected and cannot be construed to be representative of all potential library customers, the strength of the rating for the e-book reader was nevertheless impressive. While many people did find specific characteristics about the format to criticize, they still seemed to believe that designers were on the right track in their design.

The last question (other than demographic profile questions) asked people where they had found out about the e-book project. By far, the most frequent response was that a library staff member informed them of the e-book program. Almost sixty percent (58.45%) said that a staff member told them about the opportunity to use e-

books. Thirty-nine individuals (18.84%) said they saw a sign or poster advertising the e-book project in the library. More than a handful of people (17 people or 8.21%) indicated that they heard about the program on the radio or television and a like number said that they read about the program in the newspaper.

One final note – participants in the survey seemed to be pleased to have been asked their opinion. A good number of individuals expressed appreciation for being given an opportunity to try this new technology.

A Sampling of Text Comments Received

Problems Encountered

First reader never left library due to problems so I came back another day to check one out.

I was taken back many chapters 3 different times. I don't remember touching the "back page" button but could have done so.

The battery died after only a brief period of use. It would help to include the charger to save trips to The library.

The battery ran down. I returned to library had it recharged with no problem.

The battery ran out before I finished a book - I brought it in for recharging.

Could not get to all the titles listed. The reader did not respond well to pointer – it took several times to change screen options.

I used the e-book for about 1.5 wks & read 1 book & it worked fine. However, during that time, I needed to recharge the batteries.

I found it difficult to move around the books.

I got a little confused w the whole thing but think a little time & practice will fix that.

I would fall asleep & would automatically turn page!

Instructions were inadequate. How do you get to the first page of book?

The e-book I had blanked out/froze up and had to be reset

It died!

I needed some "play time" to feel comfortable.

No obvious way to return to the beginning of a book.

There was a scratch on the reading surface - are there plastic screen protectors like for Palm?

Required some trial and error to figure out how to use.

Reasons for NOT Completing Entire Book

Browsed 3 different books

The check out period was not long enough

Did not have e-book reader long enough to read complete book – I'm a slower reader
And have lots to do.

Didn't have enough time.

Didn't have enough time and I prefer real books.

Didn't like using reader. Doesn't seem like reading book. Can't tell how much is left to read.
Guess that I just like paper.

Difficult to get out of book once in, continually reverted back to initial selection.

I didn't have time.

I read about half, not enough time to read whole book.

I read the book on trapping in Alaska, but lost interest in the story.

I was also reading three other books the same week.

I was reading a chapter a night to my daughter and we ran out of time before we finished.
Just plain ran out of time.
I was more interested in experimenting with a new device than in reading an entire book.
I didn't finish one but my high school daughter did.
My time was limited during the holidays.
Not enough time.
I read the beginning, skimmed the middle, and read the end.
The book I hadn't read was boring, and I had already read the books I liked.

Positive Features/Characteristics

Liked the number of books you could have on one device.
Enjoyed the "auto bookmark" and the lighted screen for night reading
Back lighting, bookmarks, liked ability to change font size.
Backlight, ability to change orientation, multiple books loaded in 1 unit.
Backlight, multiple books
Backlight, changing page orientation, book marking.
Backlight, search, bookmarks.
Backlight and the variety of titles.
Backlighting for reading in bed... did not disturb my husband
Backlighting for reading in bed. Large print was also nice. Compact, click to advance - no pg turning.
Being able to highlight and to insert notes. Dictionary, lighted screen.
Bookmark, ability to carry many books in small space.
Bookmarks and lighted page. Ability to read more than one book at a time. Ability to turn screen
orientation (portrait/landscape) long battery life
Complete one handed operation for simple reading.
Convenience, back lighting.
Could use in car.
Dictionary.
Dictionary, using underline, notes, e-book turning off after 5 min, large print, contrast
Ease of finding your place in book. Having multiple titles on one unit
Ease of use in bed at night.
Easy to use & read, backlight
I like technology.
I liked the ability to change the size of the print.
I liked the dictionary.
It lights up and you can read in the dark
It would be nice if it had a really long book. T e-book would be lighter and smaller compared to hardcover.
Its handy, backlight is great for late night reading. Easy to find your place. Only takes one hand.
Large print
Large print and light for night reading
Large print (old eyes) light, vertical/horizontal option (lie in bed)
Large type, backlighting
Light & being able to change font size
Lighted background
Lightweight, easy to see/read in bed, car & plane, fun
Liked the backlighting-it made the text easy to read. Also liked the larger type-face.

Lit background for bed time reading
Lookup feature
Lookup
Markup features, illuminated screen
More than one font size and the ability to rotate page
Note section, backlight.
Orientation and automatic shutoff
Orientation, bookmarks, amount of materials on e-reader shortcut (once found out how to use)
Rotating screen
Several books in small format
Small size, lightweight, backlight, selection of titles
The different settings
The large print & light in it to read at night
The larger print feature
The size is good. The large print & light made it easy to read.
Underlining... that was great - also page orientation. I also enjoyed backlighting - great at night
Very easy to use and to bring places, and read at night
When you turn it off/on it stays at same page.

Negative Features/Characteristics

1st time use for me - found it difficult to use. Still like feel and read of "real" hardbound book
It's too easy to accidentally press an icon or button that you do not want
Although I was afraid I'd drop it - I took it to a variety of places, appointments etc.
Dictionary was cumbersome to use
Expensive unit, wouldn't want to be liable for this unit
Glare from screen, cannot recharge battery, like to try the dictionary feature
Hard to read in sunlight, no page numbers
I didn't like the size of the screen. I wished the screen could be bigger.
I had to have battery recharged after 3 days
It does get heavy after a while
It is fairly heavy, small print quality is poor and large print requires constant page indexing.
It is not as interesting as a book with a color picture of the author and a biography.
It was rather heavy. I was nervous about dropping it
Just that you couldn't see how many pages a story is.
Machine could be "finicky" at times
No page numbers
No page numbers
No page numbers - % bar is not the same
Short checkout time! (necessary though it is)
Some of features in bookshelf icon seemed like should be in book icon
Would be nice to have larger font than the large. Case is also way too large.
Uneven weight distribution of the reader
When using large type, words are completely lost and can only be viewed by returning to small print
I wondered what page I was on.
I would like even larger font, want to touch screen w/out stylus.

Good Candidates for e-book Format

All books!

Any!

Books that are very thick and heavy.

Comic books

Cookbooks are prone to spills, children's books too expensive at this time to risk.

Dictionary and encyclopedia would be useful.

Don't think you'd want it even close to kitchen and it doesn't have colored pictures

Humor

Kids love gadgets - would encourage reading longer

Magazines

Magazines

Newspapers

Searchable materials of any kind

Short stories

Teen books

Would use this for travel because of compact device versus carrying several books.

How Did You Learn About e-books (Other)

From school

From the Internet

From my mom.

Open house at school.

Saw it in the library.

Heard about it at the school library.

A school teacher mentioned it to me.

I heard about e-books in general through a TV Guide ad

Other Comments

Titles on ebook could have been little more organized, i.e., mystery books on one, best sellers on another. Thank you for providing to the public!

The lens cloth keeps falling out of the pocket

Thanks for keeping an open mind and trying new ideas. Technology evolves if we participate.

Put a paper copy of Titles/Authors of books on the reader, possibly with a description.

Nice piece of technology, but doesn't compare to curling up w/book.

Liked it's compact size for travel and the screen is easy to read.

One drawback was limited view of print, made for almost constant paging.

Would be nice tool for reading multiple magazines.

Need longer loan time, ability to checkout individual titles for own e-book.

My daughter aged 14 also read a book and very much enjoyed using the reader.

It was great being able to read in the dark!

My 5th grader really enjoyed this format.

I like the idea of getting all books of a series in one spot

It would be great if you could customize your own e-book from a list of titles...

Say pick 10 from a list of 100s and then you could make a more varied book for us with eclectic tastes.

It was fun to try but for me it was more of a problem.

It was a neat experience, but I still prefer to read a hard bound book.

Instructions should be elaborated. Considering the cost of replacement I was somewhat reluctant to carry this around with me and was even afraid to leave it in the car. If lost, broken or stolen it would be considerably more expensive than book to replace.

I'm glad I tried the e-book but I prefer using regular books.

I would really like to have it out longer than one wk - I only managed to read 1 book and part of a 2nd.

I was not able to enjoy it as much as I could. My daughter loved being able to read at night and not disturb her sister. Next time it's all mine!

I really appreciate that library staff brought the e-book to my attention - it worked great on the trip I took.

Especially handy for reading in bed or in dark car while traveling.

Appreciated the opportunity to try out a new format.

Current novels or best sellers on e-books would be great.