# *From Novice to Expert…For the Motivated: an Exploratory Study of University Press Staff Adoption of E-readers*

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## Introduction

E-books, e-readers and digital publishing demand that publishers transform their publishing models and rethink their business practices. The move from "ink-on-paper" to digital magnifies the challenges small presses face. Inadequate resources and lack of hands-on experience limit staff knowledge and prevent skill development.

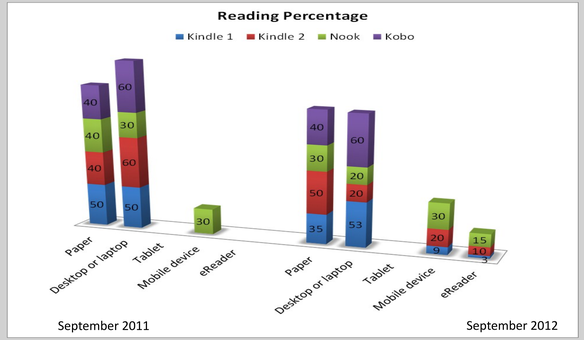
OSU Libraries & Press is one of a handful of university libraries with a traditional academic press embedded in their organization. This afforded a unique opportunity to look at adoption of dedicated e-readers among press staff as part of a larger study. Recognizing that OSU press staff and librarians lacked personal experience with e-reading technology, we secured an internal grant to fund the study and purchase of e-readers for each participant. Kindle, Kobo, Nook and Sony eReaders were randomly assigned. None of the press staff was assigned the Sony.

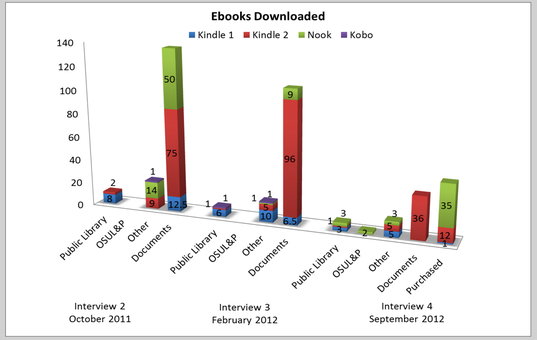
With the barrier of device ownership removed, do publishing staff feel better prepared to create new services, develop their skills, and transform their practices?

"But um, I'll continue to try PDFs."

1year
3 e-readers
4 press staff
4 interviews

"the type was just miniscule, so it was pretty useless"




"…making printed books available as Kindle editions is just as easy as using a Kindle. They made it very easy for publishers."

"My reasons include everything from nostalgia to eyestrain to all the sensory experiences of a physical book. The smell of the physical, turning the pages…"

"…how can we create a digital publishing strategy and plan for e-book editions if we're not familiar with the formats and the many ways in which customers buy and use e-books? "

## From Reading to E-reading

In *From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg*, Naughton's statement "one clear trend stands out: Each new technology increased the complexity of the ecosystem" holds true for three press staff. Their e-reading increased overall due to newly purchased mobile devices. They also prefer to read content of a temporal nature, like news, electronically.

Despite the predominance of e-reading over print, not all users adopted the e-reader. Loading books onto the reader was a significant barrier.

## For the Motivated

Download behavior and comments about use show limited adoption. Adoption occurred when staff integrated the e-reader into their workflow, not necessarily leisure.

***E-readers were primarily used to read manuscripts and to test a future OSU press e-book's formatting.***

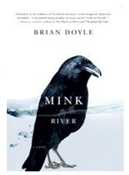
Motivation was needed to persevere over hurdles such as incompatible formats, too few copies or books only available in print. PDFs and Adobe Digital Editions also presented usability issues for each device.

## Love of the Book

Participants spoke repeatedly about their love for the physical book and when asked whether they preferred print books, all four staff stated a preference for print. Reasons included:

- the tactile experience
- nostalgia
- identity as a reader and a creator of books
- screen fatigue

## *Mink River*




During the study, Press staff released their first e-book, *Mink River*, for the Kindle. "Having the opportunity to use and become familiar with e-readers definitely helped to propel us into the digital realm…sales of Mink were beyond any expectations…" The study shaped their understanding of customers experience and their approach to working with authors. As their skills and knowledge about creating and delivering e-books developed, they realized the unsustainability of doing this work in-house. Now, they plan to outsource it.

## The Future of the Book

Press staff believe:

- print books still have a future
- the future is a blending of print and e-books
- for some reading an e-reading device will be best and, for others, paper

## Conclusion

With the barrier of device ownership removed and despite limited adoption of dedicated e-readers, OSU press staff are better able to develop their skills, publish e-books and are more prepared to shift their business practices.

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