On the Demands of Mobile Technology and Virtual Collection Development: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

New technologies pose new challenges when libraries build their virtual collections. With the growth and popularity of e-books and other portable devices, collections can no longer be evaluated purely on the basis of content. Only users can indicate how these platforms will be used as mobile tools for study or entertainment devices. A study was conducted in the Helsinki University of Technology Library (now a part of Aalto University) from the fall of 2009 to the summer of 2010. In collaboration with the Usability Research Group, various e-book readers were tested by both professionals and students. Feedback from the students was collected through discussion, study diaries, and questionnaires. E-book readers were also tested in the library in order to see how well these e-collections are usable on these devices. Results suggest there were incompatibilities with licensed materials. While on the other hand open access materials can be easily downloaded.

Keywords: Digital Rights Management, E-Books, E-Readers, Mobile Technology, Virtual Collection Development

INTRODUCTION

Electronic books have been around for decades. The Amazon kindle is leading the way in e reader technology. Some libraries are lending out E-book readers and some universities are providing their new students materials on these platforms. Today, not only must we consider which content is needed for the collections but also in which formats and on what platforms it is available. We must ask; how does this new technology contribute to the way e-books are selected by the library? Until recently we have accepted the deficiencies of different platforms as long as the books were usable in one way or another. Most services required the installation of reader programs or plug-ins, some of which did not work with e.g., Linux. As we start to use e-books as substitutes for print, we need to be more demanding. We should be able to provide the content the user needs on a platform he or she prefers.

How compatible are the current e-resources, which are originally meant to be used on a computer, with this new technology? Do the license agreements even allow the transfer...
of ebooks to these devices? If the customers asked which of the e-readers worked best with the library resources, would one know how to reply? In the first place, would the customers want to use these new devices for study or work, or will they be used purely for entertainment (Aaltonen, 2010)?

This paper examines a study that was conducted to answer the questions above and in general to increase the knowledge on e-readers in the library.

BACKGROUND

Aalto University, created from the merger of the Helsinki School of Economics, the University of Art and Design Helsinki and the Helsinki University of Technology. The libraries of the three former universities have also merged and strive to provide the best resources for strong multi-disciplinary education and research (Aaltonen, 2010). The University comprises three schools and campuses: the School of Art and Design, the School of Economics and the School of Science and Technology. The identical electronic collections are now available on all three campuses. The study began in the Helsinki University of Technology Library and continued in the Aalto University Library, Otaniemi, which is situated on the campus of the School of Science and Technology. The Aalto University Library acquires e-books through 13 services. About 50,000 of the e-books are subscribed to on annual bases, while continual access has been bought for 830 titles. In addition to these numbers, the Finnish consortium FinElib has provided access to the vast ECCO and EEBO collections of historic material. Some of the services, such as Ebrary, provide big package deals, while others, like DawsonEra and MyiLibrary are used to select individual titles. Acquisition of new e-books is done mostly to the platforms, which allow individual title purchases.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted to answer the following questions.

1. How compatible are the current e-resources which are originally meant to be used on a computer with this new technology?
2. Do license agreement even allow the transfer of e-books to these devices?
3. If customers asked which of the e-readers worked best with the library resources would one know how to reply?
4. Would the customers want to use these devices for study, work or for pure entertainment?

E-READERS

Five distinctive e-book readers were selected for the study and two copies of each were purchased to the library. The main basis for the devices were their availability and reasonable pricing; consumer products in the 200-300 Euro range were chosen. Devices designed for professional use were not selected. The five evaluated devices were Foxit eSlick, Bookeen CyBook Opus, BeBook, Amazon Kindle, and Sony Reader Touch Edition PRS-600.

All of the devices use the same E Ink Vizplex technology. They also all can hold over a thousand books, so the memory capacity was not an issue, especially when they all also had slots for memory cards.

COMPATIBILITY ISSUE

For the library e-books provide many improvements over print books. Usually many customers can use them simultaneously, each making their notes and highlights in their own virtual version, not in the only printed copy. They cause no physical storage problems nor do
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