



There are a number of devices on which to read e-books. Just a few are shown here. From left, are the Nook Color and the Nook, both from Barnes & Noble, the Sony e-reader and the iPad, which is a tablet computer that, among other things, can hold e-books.

Reading Turns a Page

Scenic Regional Library Adds E-Books to Its Catalog

One of the hottest gifts people received for the holidays last year were “e-readers,” those handheld devices designed for reading digital books, magazines and newspapers.

At least, that’s the word from Scenic Regional librarians. They know because they’ve experienced a marked increase in the number of patrons asking to “check out” digital books for their e-readers.

“They started asking for them last year and then it intensified right before and around the holidays,” said Ken Rohrbach, director at Scenic Regional Library.

At the time, Scenic didn’t have anything to offer patrons, but that’s changing. The library has contracted with OverDrive, the company that provides Scenic’s downloadable audio books, to now offer e-books, as well.

People can download a digital book by accessing Scenic’s Web site, www.scenicregional.org, and clicking on the “Download Audio Books” icon on the left side of the screen. That connects you to the database of titles that Scenic has available.

“We have 1,000 titles to start, but that number is growing based on demand,” said Christy Schink, children’s librarian who is in charge of purchasing e-books for children and teens.

“It’s a mix of fiction, nonfiction, popular best-sellers, classics . . .,” she said.

Schink noted that she bought every available book that was included on awards lists like Mark Twain, Truman and Gateway.

Picture books for the youngest readers are not a prominent part of the digital collection though because the demand isn’t there, said Schink.

Not every book that is in print is available in digital format, the librarians noted.

When patrons search Scenic’s book catalog, it will list all of the versions of a book that are available — book, audio and e-book.

How It Works

People will need a valid library card — either from Scenic Regional or Washington Public Library — to download an e-book.

Scenic's digital books are available as Adobe EPUB e-books and Adobe PDF e-books, so the first time a patron checks out an e-book, he will need to follow a few step-by-step instructions to download the software their digital device needs to "read" the material. All of the details are spelled out on the Web page, and Scenic librarians also will offer one-on-one technical assistance to anyone who comes into the library with questions.

Later this spring, the librarians plan to offer workshops on how to download its e-books at the various Scenic branches around the county.

It generally takes only seconds to download an e-book, the librarians noted. Although the length of time depends on the speed of your connection, the e-books are faster than audio books, said Beckett.

Some of the books available for check-out do not have an expiration or return date, but most others can be checked out for seven or 14 days, said Beckett.

After that time period, the e-book may still show up on the e-reader device, but it won't be accessible. It also will need to be "returned," said Beckett, explaining that

is simply an option that can be clicked on the device.

E-Reader Choices

In setting up Scenic's e-book program, the librarians researched and compared all of the different kinds of e-readers out there. They have a spreadsheet that compares them all on everything from price to screen, navigation, connectivity, memory, weight and more.

They are happy to share what they learned with people in the market for an e-reader. Both Schink and Beckett own e-readers from Barnes & Noble.

Schink owns a Nook Color, and Beckett has a Nook original with an e-ink screen that makes reading "easy on the eyes, with no glare, just like a real book page."

Other e-reader choices include several from Borders — the Kobo, Sony Pocket, Sony Touch, Aluratek Libre and Velocity Micro Cruz.

There also is the Kindle, an e-reader that is manufactured and sold by Amazon.com, but Scenic's digital books are not compatible with the Kindle. They do work, however, on every other kind of e-reader.

"Our supplier, OverDrive, wasn't able to negotiate a contract with Amazon for the digital rights management," Beckett commented.

People who have tablet computers, like the iPad, can download an Adobe Digital Editions app that will enable them to read e-books from Scenic.

The benefit of an e-reader is that it can



Scenic Regional librarians Vivienne Beckett, standing, assistant director, and Christy Schink, children's librarian, both purchased e-readers within the last six months and enjoy reading books on them. Scenic Regional recently added e-books to its catalog of print and audio books.

Missourian Photo/Karen Cernich.

hold thousands of books in a lightweight and slim device.

Schink said she particularly likes reading with her e-reader at night in bed because she doesn't need to turn on a light. Her Nook Color is lighted enough.

Beckett noted that the batteries on the e-readers can go anywhere from two days to two weeks before needing to be charged again.

Wave of the Future?

When Scenic librarians began the process of adding e-books to their catalog, they believed they were behind the curve, that libraries in larger markets had long been offering this service.

They hadn't.

"We found that a lot of libraries only went online with this around Jan. 1," said Rohrbach.

One of the reasons Scenic decided now

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was the time to bring on e-books was because of requests from local schools, like Union Middle School and Meramec Valley School District in Pacific, where a handful of e-readers were purchased for student use. They wanted a source of free e-books for the students to read on them, said Schink.

That idea doesn’t scare her, as a children’s librarian.

People who fear that digital books could mean the death of print may have it backward, said Schink, who believes digital books could be just what some people need to read more.

“There was an article in a school librarian journal that said it was so exciting to see more kids coming into the library (for e-books),” she remarked. “Especially with the younger generation, anything we can do to get them excited about reading when they hadn’t been because of the format is good.”

“We’re trying to keep up with the changing technology to meet our patrons’ demands,” Beckett added.

Rohrbach agreed.

“This is just another option out there, like the audio book. It’s just another way to get a book to some people,” he said. “We’re not going out of the (print) book business.”