

## DIKTUON: *Finding e-books*

by Andrew Keck

Individuals and libraries selecting e-books have a perplexing set of choices among the new e-book devices, distributors, and licensing schemes that have continued to flood the market. Following Beth Sheppard's excellent column on the Amazon Kindle in our last issue of *Theological Librarianship*, the Amazon Kindle has expanded beyond its own hardware to include software clients for PC and Mac computers, the new Apple iPad, and several phones, including the iPhone and Blackberry. However, we continue to live in a world where you can buy a book from the Amazon Kindle store to read on your Apple iPad but the book you buy on the Apple iBooks store can't be read on your Amazon Kindle. Similarly, libraries can license an e-book from ebrary or NetLibrary only to have patrons unable to download them to their own e-book device, read the e-book without a special plug-in, or have access while the book is "checked out" by another patron. Selecting e-books for individuals and libraries can be bewildering.

### WHAT IS AN E-BOOK?

Before we dive too deeply into selecting e-books, it may be useful to step back and define what is meant by an e-book. The most simple definition would include the idea of a "book" whose text is available in an "electronic" format. The ways of providing text in an electronic format include some of the standard e-book formats such as MOBI, EPUB, and AZW (Kindle). One could also include more generic formats such as HTML, PDF, and TXT; or the formats of word processors such as DOC, WPS, and ODT; or any number of proprietary formats imagined by vendors. Some might seek to add audiobooks as another e-book format. Even with all the possibilities for electronic format, determining a "book" can be equally problematic. Is it a certain number of pages? Must it have or be capable of having a print analog? Does it have to have page numbers, tables of contents, and other conventions? Can it contain multimedia and still be considered a book?

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be particularly the case with unusual or non-Roman scripts. In addition to searching, e-book vendors and devices have added features such as the ability to highlight or add notations to the text. These highlights and notes are usually limited to a particular device and/or maintained through a personal account.

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## CONCLUSION

The varied choices and limitations of e-books are bewildering for both libraries and individuals. There is no universal format, e-book device, or software that will handle every possible e-book and provide all the features of access and use one might desire. The selection of e-books will not only need to be weighed against the selection of physical volumes but also among the many difficult choices among e-books themselves. Unless (or until) standards emerge, libraries will likely select e-books in a variety of formats, with a variety of restrictions, and for a variety of devices.

