Diktuon: *The Kindle 2: Risk and Promise*

by Beth M. Sheppard

Printed books are dead. And Amazon killed them. Or so opines a burgeoning group amongst library supporters and education industry leaders who are convinced that Kindle e-book readers and a growing stable of Kindle titles provide the miracle remedy for the perennial problem of crowded library shelves and the cure-all for acquisitions budget dyspepsia.

Certainly there are some experimental programs at colleges and universities that may pave the way for widespread application—someday. For instance, Ken Frazier, Library Director at the University of Wisconsin, purchased 20 Kindles for use in a history seminar class.[1] Both Brigham Young University and the University of Nebraska have been investigating the use of the devices for general lending to patrons and Interlibrary Loan, though in a recent *Library Journal* note, BYU was withdrawing its program due to concerns that Amazon regarded lending of Kindles a breach of its terms of service.[2] These experiments, while laudable, do not necessarily mean that theological libraries should rush out to purchase Kindles. There is still a very wide divide between the potential of Kindle e-book technology as an elixir for space and monetary woes in the library context and the reality that the device and its software were developed for the general reading populace, not the academic library. Two library procedural arenas in particular, acquisitions and circulation, require improvements of both product and services before the Kindle will cease to be a risky investment and live up to its promise for successful deployment in theological libraries.

The Acquisitions Gamble

Naturally, early adopters of technology take part in a game of chance. Purchase of the Kindle device itself requires a strong constitution as one must face fluctuating prices, a constantly modified and upgraded e-book reader, peculiar payment arrangements, and the hazards of stumbling upon the occasional incompletely formatted Kindle book.

In an era of tight budgets when acquisitions funds must be invested carefully, constant modification of the device itself sends red flags to library purchasing departments. First released on 11/19/07, the Kindle was replaced by the Kindle 2 on 2/24/09, supplemented by the Kindle DX on 6/10/09 (the sole version that can read PDFs), and then both the original Kindle and the domestic-wireless Kindle 2 were completely supplanted by a modified Kindle 2 with global wireless by late October 2009. In short, the technology is changing so rapidly that institutions may purchase today's latest version only to have buyer's remorse as an enhanced edition is offered mere months later. Plummeting prices also give the early adopter pangs. The United Library, which serves Garrett-Evangelical and Seabury-Western Theological Seminaries, purchased two Kindle 2s in June for $359 each, a bargain after an initial

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[1] Jeremy Wodagjo, "Kindle Use Underway in UW Class," *The Badger Herald.* October 13, 2009. http://badgerherald.com/news/2009/10/13kindle_use_underway_.php.

[2] Norman Oder, Lynn Blumenstine, Francine Fialkoff, Josh Hadro, Debra Lau-Whelan, "At Two Libraries, Kindle Programs Diverge," *Library Journal* July 2009. Indeed, each Kindle purchased comes with a "License Agreement and Terms of Use" brochure which states, "Upon your payment of the applicable fees . . . Amazon grants you the non-exclusive right to keep a permanent copy of the applicable Digital Content and to view, use, and display such Digital Content an unlimited number of times, solely on the Device or as authorized by Amazon as part of the Service and solely for your personal, and non-commercial use . . . you may not sell, rent, lease, distribute, broadcast, sublicense or otherwise assign any rights to the Digital Content or any portion of it to any third party." *Amazon Kindle: Getting Started* P/N 220-1005-00 rev C.

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$399 offering, but the price kept tumbling. By mid-July it was down to $299 and as of October 2009 to $259.00 (with the global wireless version initially offered at $279 and subsequently reduced itself to $259 by November 2009 when the domestic-only wireless version disappeared from the site). As more and more e-book readers reach the market from various vendors, rest assured that more features will be added to the Kindle. Indeed, expect to see changes with the launch of the forthcoming Plastic Logic QUE ProReader (January 2010), which will be compatible with over 700,000 titles through Barnes & Noble[3] and include the ability to read and edit PDFs and Word documents,[4] and even possibly even before the holidays when Barnes and Noble's own "Nook," which was unveiled on October 20, 2009,[5] commences shipping. Also, prices will continue to ebb and flow in accordance with market demands and competitors' pricing for rival e-book gadgets.

To make headway in the library market, in addition to stabilizing product and pricing for its reader, Amazon must also devise a payment option that is easy for library purchasing departments to manage, yet impossible for general library patrons to trigger. This need was amply demonstrated when the United Library was able to use its Amazon corporate account to purchase its two Kindle 2 devices, but discovered that the Kindle texts may only be purchased via credit card. Several calls and e-mails to Amazon in July regarding this limitation to the corporate credit account left the United Library to infer that this oversight would not be resolved quickly.

So, reluctantly entering a library credit card number into the Amazon.com website, the United Library decided to proceed. It was soon discovered that Kindle book orders could be executed not only through the Amazon.com site by which paper books, CDs, and DVDs had been ordered via an Acquisitions unit PC, but also by patrons pressing a few buttons on the Kindle device, which has direct access to the "Kindle store" portion of the larger Amazon site. A fleeting message on the Kindle screen warning that a purchase is going to be made had little impact on Kindle-wielding patrons since a simple slip of the finger on the five-way navigation button and a fair dose of curiosity to see "what the machine will do" confirmed the inadvertent purchases. And, by the time acquisition staff was notified by Amazon e-mail that a purchase had been made, the e-book had already been delivered to the Kindle.

Short of moving one's campus to a remote part of the county where 3G wireless coverage does not exist, the only way to circumvent this problem at the current time is to pull the credit card info from the *My Account* site on Amazon.com immediately after every order is placed by Acquisitions personnel, an antidote which successfully renders all the Kindle devices owned by the library with no means of payment for spurious orders. One imagines that Amazon might be able to resolve this issue by inserting a username/password script into the purchasing software that is resident on the Kindle, which would prevent those who do not know the login from buying content through the device. This is a clear instance where a bit of consultation with library representatives should allow Amazon to engineer the product to meet library needs.

Managing orders is not all doom and gloom, however. A promising glimmer exists in the world of Kindle e-book purchasing—if the technology on the PC-accessible Amazon.com website can be enhanced. When the United Library ordered both the Kindle version ($9.99) and the paper version ($16.49) of Bryan Chapell's *Christ-*

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[3] Calvin Reed, "E-reader Scorecard," *Publisher's Weekly* (August, 31, 2009), 19.

[4] Chris Smith, "Plastic Logic Announces QUE ProReader," *TFTS* (October 19, 2009) http://nexus404.com/Blog/2009/10/19/plastic-logic-announces-que-proreader-barnes-noble-ebook-reader-officially-revealed-full-specs-pricing-arrival-dates-coming-at-ces-2010/.

[5] Rich, Motoko, "A New Electronic Reader, the Nook, Enters the Market," The New York Times (October 20, 2009). http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/21/technology/21nook.html?_r=2.

Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice (Baker Academic, 2009) in a single acquisitions session, the e-book zipped to the designated e-book reader chosen from a handily efficient drop-down menu of multiple Kindle devices owned by the library, but the paper version remained in the basket, patiently awaiting acquisitions personnel to select the corporate account. Separate confirmation e-mails from Amazon provided a ready receipt for both physical and e-versions, and staff was able to view the order of Chapell's Kindle book as well as all prior e-book purchases by logging onto the United Library's online account and selecting the "*Your Digital Orders*" link. This was an easy exercise, and it inspired the Acquisitions staff to dream big about potential improvements to the entire Amazon purchasing site. For instance, the idea that Amazon may someday develop its library order management software so that libraries may designate and create separate lists within Amazon for items ordered on a common Corporate Account, just as is now the case for differentiating e-books and all other purchases, was rather titillating. Imagine if Amazon gave libraries the tools to craft and export (now we're really fantasizing) to common software spreadsheets orders/items destined for individual endowed funds, files of purchased materials by format, or any other category of which librarians might dream while neatly billing all on a single invoice?! Beautiful. But not quite reality. Yet. But Amazon is adept at turning the cumbersome into the dexterous if it senses a lucrative and receptive market.

Not only is there room for improvement with relation to how libraries might execute purchases of Kindle e-books, but some theological libraries may wait to imbibe the Kindle magic potion on the grounds that some Kindle-formatted books in religious studies are, frankly, defective. A mix of well-turned-out Kindle books and those that are flawed lend the purchasing exercise all the spice of a game of roulette, especially as there is no clear procedure for returning and receiving credit on deficient Kindle e-books.

Experiments by the United Library with Kindle e-books are a case in point. The wide array of religion publishers offering texts in the new format was impressive given the Kindle's short time on the market, but quality was uneven. The Chapell text, mentioned previously, transferred marvelously into Kindle configuration. Title pages and the opening pages of chapters have attractive graphic design. And, footnotes are easily accessed by placing the cursor on the hyperlinked word preceding the note number. Not all Kindle offerings are as gracefully rendered. The "pages" (Kindle books make use of location numbers rather than page numbers) of Karen Baker-Fletcher's *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* published by Chalice Press (St. Louis, 2006; $14.25 Kindle version; $19.70 Amazon's price for the paperback) are liberally sprinkled with note numbers, but the reader has no idea where to find the notes themselves. One patron reported a fifteen-minute quest that involved advancing pages to the end of chapters, moving the cursor around the screen while futilely trying to click on the note numbers and valiantly attempting to remember the ending location code "3240" in order to turn pages from the back of the book forwards. She ultimately triumphed after going to the table of contents and clicking on the hyperlinked "Notes" entry. It was a trial by fire, but at last the notes were located. Such was not the case with *Engaging God's World* by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002). There are note numbers in that book, but the note material itself simply does not exist. At all. Anywhere. In an academic setting, that means the Eerdmans e-book is utterly inadequate, and the library is out the $9.99 Kindle book purchase price. The acquisitions team gambled and lost. The salt in the wound? Amazon was offering the paperback version of the Plantinga book new for $10.88. For less than a dollar difference in price, the library could have had a complete, pristine, paper copy.

In addition to providing content from a fairly large number of the "usual religion publishers," the Kindle does win praise in that it is also possible for acquisitions staff to download some files directly from library computers into the Kindle 2 by using the cute convertible power/USB cord that comes with the unit. Amazon provides a list of file types that may be downloaded directly (including, amongst others, .AZW, AZW1, .TXT, and .MP3). Files with extensions such as .PDF, .DOC, JPEG, and .GIF may be e-mailed to Amazon and converted for free provided one is willing to manually download them later.[6] If the converted documents are to be transferred directly from Amazon to the Kindle via the G3 network, known as Whispernet, there is currently a fee of 15¢ per megabyte within the U.S. and 99¢ per megabyte if the transfer is being initiated internationally. In theory, then, theological libraries with book and other digitization projects should be able to submit PDFs to Amazon for conversion to the requisite .AZW1 files for readability on the Kindle. Sadly, OCR programs like *Omnipage Professional 17* are able to execute a workflow procedure that directs documents to Amazon, but cannot yet in and of themselves "save" the document in .AZW1 or .AZW formats for local use on local Kindles. Amazon's role as a middleman in the conversion process cannot be circumvented. This inconvenience is yet another point that Amazon might want to examine for future applications since libraries are not only consumers but also producers of digital content. All the content in the world, though, whether purchased or produced in house via scanning, would be valueless unless the Kindle and its content are adaptable to either physical or virtual circulation procedures.

CIRCULATION CONSIDERATIONS

The announcement that the United Library was exploring putting Kindles in circulation was hailed most warmly, not by tech-savvy Millennials and Gen-Xers, but by emeritus faculty members. They were eager to explore the Kindle's ability to select six different sizes of text. A dedicated button on the device easily allows the reader to change the pitch of the font, but does make page numbers functionally obsolete since the quantity of lines of text displayed per page-turn varies with the height and width of type displayed.[7] Thus, the Kindle uses "location" numbers which are consistent throughout the book, no matter if there be six words per line on the screen or twenty. This ability, combined with text-to-speech programming, makes the Kindle an attractive device for libraries serving those with reading disabilities or other handicaps.

While these superlative features add to the Kindle's functionality across a wider patron base than a standard paper book, they do create complications for library circulation and for reserves. Indeed, for true efficiency, circulation desks would be wise to stock not only the Kindles themselves, but provide headphones for checkout so those wishing to engage the text to speech function may do so without disturbing other readers within the library. The use of Kindle versions of books for reserves also requires careful planning prior to deployment due to the Kindle's convention of using location numbers. If a faculty member lists locations for reading assignments in a syllabus, then the library reserve version of the book must be the Kindle version, not the paper lest the students be befuddled by the incompatible pagination. The converse is also true. This means that should the library decide to save money by purchasing a less expensive Kindle version of a book rather than its paper counterpart, the library

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6 A full list of applicable file extensions and costs for Whispernet use is available at http://www.amazon.com/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=200375630&#fees.

7 One troubling feature of the ability to change fonts involves the wide spaces that are ever more prevalent with each sequentially larger font that is used. This problem might be solved if the user could adjust justification from fully justified to flush left when reading in English and right for languages like Hebrew.

must work closely with the faculty member and or the appropriate teaching assistant to ensure that the reading assignments on syllabi are recalibrated from page numbers to location numbers.

While features like text-to-speech and the ability to select font sizes work fairly well in a library setting where a single Kindle device may be checked out to multiple patrons, another reader option, that of marking texts, has the potential to be the bane of circulation personnel. Because it was originally designed for individual use by the general consumer rather than the library patron, each Kindle unit comes programmed with a drop-down menu that allows a reader to both highlight lines of text and type in comments or notes. These remain even when the device is powered down or when the book is transferred between Kindles or to the Amazon archiving service. While this is a convenience for those individuals who own their own Kindle and purchase their own Kindle books, unfortunately, there is no readily apparent way to "erase all markings" at once and re-set the book to pristine condition in the library setting. Rather, eliminating notations and highlighting requires laboriously scrolling through the text and removing them one by one. If Kindles are to be successfully implemented in theological library settings where graduate students may be tempted to interact with the text through marking, then individual libraries must develop policies about highlighting and commenting within Kindle books that serve both library staff and patrons. These might range from levying fines for returning Kindle texts as "marked books" or patron training that shows users both how to add notations as well as to remove annotations. In some libraries, signs might be posted in which patrons are requested not to use the marking feature on the Kindle. More formally, information about the desired condition in which to return Kindle books (and the reader devices themselves) may be incorporated into a written check-out agreement that patrons are required to sign. In any event, as users become familiar with the expected conventions and courtesies related to using library-owned Kindle books and the capabilities of the Kindle device itself, the percentage of e-books that are retuned "marked" should be lower. After all, an entire generation of VHS tape renters was trained to "Please be kind; rewind." Maybe the use of Kindle devices will bring a new mantra in vogue: "Make reading a walk in the park; please unmark."

While the ability to transfer individual Kindle books from Amazon device to Amazon device amongst those owned by a single library may be problematic in terms of the fact that reader annotations and highlights remain in the books, the ability to convey books between Kindles in such a way may be the trick that will enable Amazon to successfully adapt to the library market. True, Amazon has been critiqued for using a proprietary format rather than the more versatile e-pub standard[8] for its e-books, which means they can only be read on Amazon Kindle devices[9] and may not be transferred from one user to another registered with different accounts. In essence, a Kindle book owned by the United Library, while able to be passed between any of the Kindles devices owned by the United Library, cannot be loaned to a partner institution's Kindle via interlibrary loan. However, it is not clear, despite the attention-grabbing announcement that books purchased for the Barnes & Noble Nook may be lent by the purchaser, that the Nook will provide a better solution than the Kindle for library applications like ILL. Indeed, descriptions of the lending feature on the Nook that appear on the Barnes & Noble site indicate that while e-books may be loaned to a wide range of computers, phones, and other of devices from the Nook there are serious drawbacks. Not every book may be loaned, the limit for loaning is only fourteen days, and a book may only be loaned out once, not multiple times.[10]

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[8] For more information on interoperable publishing standards, please see the International Digital Publishing Forum at http://www.idpf.org.

[9] Downloading to iPhones is also possible, but not practical as the phone must be linked to the individual account of the library.

[10] "Managing eBooks," http://www.barnesandnoble.com/nook/support/.

By contrast with the tight loaning restrictions of the Nook, transferring between multiple Amazon Kindles owned by a single library is possible and is easy to achieve. Here is how a single library may loan e-books to its patrons: Within the Amazon "*Manage Your Kindle Site*," all books purchased by the library are listed alphabetically, and a drop-down menu with the words, "*Deliver to . . .* " allows library staff to pick the specific library-owned Kindle device to which the book is to be transmitted from the list. This means that rather than checking out devices that hold hundreds of books each and essentially taking a large portion of the collection out of general circulation to other patrons, a few devices may be designated as noncirculating and hold the bulk of the collection while other "empty" Kindle mechanisms are put into circulation so that each respective circulating unit might receive, via transfer between devices, only the e-books that a patron wishes to borrow. Even more flexibility is provided by the archive feature. Items needn't be stored on devices at all, but may remain in the "archive" for re-downloading to one device at a time.[11] It would be interesting to know whether Amazon's archiving feature is perpetual, provides automatically for corrected editions of texts to be delivered when gaffs like versions without footnotes are produced, and enables delivery of new file formats when an institution purchases upgraded or enhanced readers that require Kindle books to have differing file extensions. Although this method of downloading specific e-books onto library-owned Kindles that are then checked out to patrons does not permit e-books to be transmitted through ILL channels, it nonetheless does provide a workable solution by which libraries may "lend" Kindle books.

CONCLUSION

Amazon has accomplished the amazing feat of making the Kindle a mass-market sensation. Whether or not the Kindle and accompanying managerial software will ever be optimized so that this particular e-book reader will be practical in a library context, however, will only be proven in the months and years to come. In the interim, libraries will no doubt take the risk and continue to experiment with this ever-evolving device while waiting patiently for the day when e-book technology fulfils its promise of replacing the ever more crowded stacks.

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[11] Amazon includes the proviso that in cases where the publisher is sued because it did not have the right to sell the content, the archive copy will no longer be available for download, but any copy on a Kindle machine will not be affected. At the time of publication for this article, Amazon was not providing archive space on its servers for Kindle content that had not been purchased from Amazon, such as user-supplied PDFs that had been converted to Kindle formats. http://www.amazon.com/gp/help/customer/display.html/?nodeId=200386160.