

iPads in Libraries: Not an Easy Decision

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While noted blogger and speaker David Lee King has recently talked about "quite a few uses for an iPad in a library setting," I'm wondering if its multiple uses completely undermine its usefulness as a serious reading tool. After all, unlike Amazon's Kindle, which in its simplicity provides a more traditional and intimate reading experience, the iPad is loaded with distractions: Safari, YouTube, iTunes, and of course the App Store. In a recent article in the *Wall Street Journal*, an author lamented the Internet's constant distractions and interruptions and asks, "Does the Internet Make You Dumber?" Perhaps the same could be asked of the iPad. Does the iPad make you dumber? Is the App Store just one more thing promoting a wide-spread turn toward shallow thinking and unsustained focus?

Modern libraries are, of course, about much more than books. I've argued, in fact, that libraries should have widespread computers and technology. Yet, there is definitely a difference between technology for productivity purposes and technology for content consumption purposes. The Tech Guy Leo Laporte talks about iPads as replacements for entertainment tools, but not computers. I think he's right. My iPad does a lot, but it's a far cry from my laptop. That means that the iPad is not a computer but is much more than an eBook reader. And this, in my view, makes it an awkward fit for a library.

As an educational tool, the iPad's potential is enormous. The number of apps in the App Store is growing at an amazing rate. But, I have to wonder if the educational tool can be justified as a library tool. Several questions need answering: Do libraries want to provide this type of

entertainment tool, even if it has educational use? If so, will it be loaned or used strictly in-house? Would patrons be permitted to add content and apps? If so, what types? If not, how could that be prevented? What content will the library provide? Fiction books? If so, the iPad would amount to a really costly e-reader. Could the iPad contain reference sources and act as a portable reference collection? The answer to this is, perhaps in the future, but not



presently, as neither the iBooks Store nor the Kindle Store offer many reference titles. And one final question (from the Library Law Blog): Do prohibitions against lending the Apple software even allow for library usage?

Library mission statements often talk about meeting patron "recreational needs," "promoting life-long learning," and providing "access to modern technology." Maybe in this language librarians can find support for iPad use. And maybe I'm just looking at this subject way too narrowly. As of right now, I'm really not sure. Besides, I'm on my iPad and I'm distracted.

If you're interested in learning more about e-readers, be sure to attend 21st Century Literacies: Redefining Your Library, the NHSLMA Spring 2011 Conference.

What Can the NH State Library Do for Me?

- Need help accessing the state databases (EBSCO or Newsbank)?
- Not sure how to locate statistics for your school's use of these resources?
- Looking for training opportunities?

Contact Bobbi Lee Slossar the Technology Resources Librarian from the NH State Library. She can send you passwords, set up training, or answer your technology related questions.

Email:
BobbiLee.Slossar@dcr.nh.gov
or visit <http://www.nh.gov/nhsl>
for additional information.

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