

E-book Lending and America's Libraries

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After many years as a niche product, e-books are now a part of the digital information mainstream. The e-book ecosystem of information producers, intermediaries, and users is rapidly evolving, and provides both great opportunity and challenge for all parties. Libraries reside at the epicenter of this revolution because the rise of e-books radically affects a core function of libraries—the acquisition and lending of books. The library community must find its way to negotiate through the problems and capitalize on the potential of e-books to provide yet better service to the nation's communities.

Our society benefits from library book lending because it:

- encourages the experimentation with new authors, topics, and genres. Library lending promotes literacy, creativity, and innovation—critical for being competitive in the global knowledge economy. This experimentation stimulates the market of books, with the library serving as a de facto discovery, promotion, and awareness service for authors, publishers, and other intermediaries, which is especially important with the smaller number of physical bookstores.
- provides access to books to the significant number of people who cannot afford to purchase them. Access to books should be available to everyone regardless of financial circumstances.
- promotes substantive (contemplative) pursuits that necessitate access to diverse materials. Educational, research and other projects may depend on access to tens, hundreds, or even thousands of books. Library lending represents the only practical mechanism for enabling such projects.
- is integrated with other library programs to maximize service to the community. Decisions about book collection and lending support critical programs on job search and career development and other community priorities.
- is complemented by library support for digital literacy. The technologies, formats, and systems associated with e-books are rapidly evolving and can raise complex technical and administrative issues and questions. Libraries help people make the best use of e-books as a technology and service, which complements libraries' role in providing access to these materials and in promoting literacy more generally.
- is accompanied by libraries' values and advocacy on behalf of individuals. Libraries advocate for the rights and interests of individuals on privacy, free expression, and other important facets of e-books to serve the public interest.