



**BOOK REVIEW - *No Shelf Required: E-Books in Libraries*
Sue Polanka (Ed.), ALA Editions, 2011.**

As any academic librarian knows, the electronic version of journal articles has quickly become the “version of record” for scholars and publishers. Access to e-journals their archives is essential to most academic libraries today. But what about e-books? Electronic books have been available for decades but have experienced a much slower uptake compared with e-journals. However, the tide appears to be turning, perhaps because of the arrival of more user-friendly and portable e-reading devices, or maybe because people are becoming more accustomed to reading online.

Whatever the underlying cause, e-books now seem to be taking off and libraries are responding. What better time for a compiled book on just this subject? In *No Shelf Required: E-Books in Libraries*, Sue Polanka (Ed.) has brought together librarians and representatives from the publishing industry to explore the many and varied issues and challenges of introducing and managing e-books in library collections.

Sue Polanka is Head of Reference and Instruction at Wright State University Libraries and Editor of ALA Editions. She is also well-known as the author and moderator of the award-winning ([1st Place, Academic Library Blogs, Salem Press Library Blog Awards, 2010](#)) blog of the same title as this book: [No Shelf Required](#).

No Shelf Required is divided into nine chapters covering a range of topics related to e-books and how different types of libraries handle them. The chapters are written by various contributors and are intended to stand alone. Chapter one opens this book by exploring the history of the e-book online – touching on early digitization projects like Project Gutenberg to the more recent Google Books controversy. The focus of the second chapter is on the emerging reader and e-books. Introducing young learners to e-books early can build comfort levels with this technology that will serve them well later. Additionally, many e-books created for children contain very useful interactive and audio features that may aid in the teaching of reading to the very young.

Chapters three, four, and five focus on issues particular to school, public, and academic libraries respectively. Collectively, these chapters cover an array of topics related to types of e-books, vendors/producers, cataloguing, accessing/delivery methods, formats, licensing, marketing, collection management and usage statistical tools, workflow, consortia purchases, and funding options. Two case studies, one of a public library and the other of an academic library, illustrate the complexities involved in lending e-readers to patrons.

Chapters six, seven, and eight delve more deeply into acquisition, use and preservation, and standards of e-books. The acquisitions discussion is likely the most complex area to tackle, but the inspired teaming of an industry representative and an academic librarian handles this subject very clearly, concisely, and in a balanced manner. It is a head-spinning overview of business models, acquisition methods and routes, access issues, workflow, licensing, and cataloguing. Chapter seven provides a succinct introductory discussion of standards for usage data, and options for the preservation of e-book content. Few standards actually exist yet in the realm of e-books, since each publisher seems to handle them differently, but the authors of chapter eight suggest that the lack of standards has actually spurred some innovation on the part of publishers.

In the final chapter, Rolf Janke, founder and vice president/publisher of Sage Reference, offers an intriguing window into the challenges facing academic book publishers in the switch from print to e-books.

There are considerable challenges to compiling a book on the topic of e-books in libraries. As Polanka understates in her introduction: “[t]he e-book is complicated”(p. xi). How to tackle the plethora of business models, formats, and licenses? And how these issues impact the various types of libraries? Polanka wisely invited an assortment of contributors to address these topics

from their own perspectives. Although this strategy results in some degree of overlap among the chapters, repetition from different angles is actually helpful in grasping such a complex topic. And since the chapters are intended to be read individually, the negligible overlap in content is not an issue.

Having said this, you would expect a book dealing with this complicated subject to be exceedingly long. However, this is not the case. *No Shelf Required* is a mere 182 pages. This book covers a lot of ground, but not in excessive detail. It is difficult to teach collections work in a detailed, practical manner because every library does it differently; all of the relevant issues are introduced in this book and examples are given, but no magic formulas exist. The myriad of decisions regarding library e-book acquisitions and workflow remains with each institution – so it is difficult to be any more detailed. The brevity of this book succeeds in giving an accessible overview of the many issues involved in collecting e-books in libraries. Those already in positions with responsibility for managing e-book collections might find the coverage in some chapters to be too introductory; however they will likely find interesting new angles in the chapters focusing on different library types.

The most significant challenge in compiling this book is likely that the subject of e-books in libraries is a moving target. Changes occur rapidly in this area, and Polanka certainly recognizes this challenge by concluding her introduction with this statement: “[e]very attempt was made to ensure currency, but there is no way to stay on top of this subject, for it is constantly evolving” (p. xiii). It is certainly an unavoidable reality that *No Shelf Required*, written in late 2009, will become outdated in a few short years. For now though, it is a great introduction to a complex topic for new librarians in any library setting.

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