The Future of the Book

We are still very much in the middle of a revolution in book formats. Forty years ago the new fad was publishing in microforms in microfilm or microfiche. Today most microformat collections sit back in a dark corner of the library, a testament to an outdated technology. Will electronic books finally kill off the printed book or will ebooks suffer the fate of microformats? Let's take a look for a moment at why microformats fell out of favor. For one the text was hard into read inside tomblike readers. If you have ever scanned microfilm pages for four or more hours straight you know what I mean. In addition to having to look at fuzzy screens, you had to pay homage to a large expensive machine that was often broken or simply would not work for you. Fiche and film were formats that might work if you need an occasional lookup, but not for continuous reading. For close up intimate reading, the codex book is hard to beat: it's pleasing to look at, you own it (not rent the use like with e-books), it's fairly durable, and if you drop it you just pick it up off the floor and continue reading. If you leave a book on the dash of your car it will not melt. In fact codex books have been around for 500 years with only modest care. Want to bet that a Kindle or Nook will be working in 2514? How many of you are running computers with Windows 95 operating system? Probably not many.

Recently I decided to check out some books from my local library that were on the Wall Street Journal and New York Times recommended list. All of them were the type of book that you would curl up with in front a fireplace in Asheville when the temperature is -9F. What I enjoyed most about these paper codex books was not the text, but the graphic images. Now you would think that graphic images would work well on e-readers, but for me it's not the same as looking at the printed image. Printed books are often cheaper to purchase than e-books with many titles available for purchase at book sales and Amazon at modest prices. After you have read the book you can sell it or pass it on to a friend. You can't do that with your Kindle and Nook. In fact e-reader sales are down over last year. Some people think that everyone who wants an e-reader already has one by now and that sales will be essentially flat for readers from now on out. E-readers are also evolving with cell phones morphing with tablets in phablets (phones with a 5" or larger screen). While you might occasionally want to read a book on your cell phone I think the codex book is here to stay. The printed book still wins the design competition and works very well for its intended use. E-readers like microformat devices have specialized uses, such as travel where they are very convenient. While we don't know what fantastic things are in the pipeline, printed books still seem to be the practical choice for most users.

Letters to the editor should be addressed to the editor and sent to Joyner Library, East Fifth Street, Greenville, NC 27858, or by electronic mail (scottr@ecu.edu). We reserve the right to edit all submissions. If you are interested in writing for North Carolina Libraries or would like consideration for news and product information, please send brief information to the editor at the above address.

Submission requirements for North Carolina Libraries

Eletronic articles can be submitted online at http://www.ncl.ecu.edu

- To submit you must login; if needed you can register using the link in the header.
- We use the *Chicago Manual of Style* (15th edition, 2003).
- We have a rolling deadline, articles are juried when received.
- Publication of approved articles is in about 3-9 months depending on space available.
- For additional information, contact Ralph Scott scottr@ecu.edu.