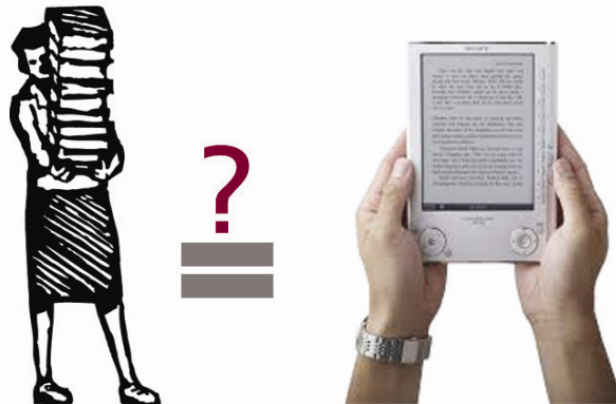


Annotations

The E-Reader as Book-Selection Tool

Posted by Brian Hotchkiss on Mon, Apr 25, 2011

In a blog posted at the end of January, I confessed that [I was about to buy a Kindle](#). Looking back, I think I used that post, in part, to force my own still-reluctant hand. Having spent many hours over the past two-plus months learning the ropes, I can unashamedly report that *I have become a convert*. And a big part of that conversion resulted from discovering the economic upside to e-reading.



A couple of weeks ago I read yet another anti-ebook screed. This time, the writer gleefully refutes the pro-ebook "it saves trees" argument by citing in stultifying detail how the minerals used to make an e-reader are far likelier than the use of paper to destroy the world as we know it. (I still can't shake a visual of him furiously poking away at the keyboard attached to his mineral-laden PC, oblivious to his own sophistry, but that's okay, it makes me grin.) What I find particularly egregious in this particular rant is the writer's failure (unwillingness?) to consider the economics involved.

A tally of the books I've bought over the past three years reveals a total just north of 160. Of them, three were full-price purchases from bookstores—new offerings by favorite authors, which made me pretty certain they would remain in my library for years to come (N.B., just one has). The rest were priced 40 percent or more below their cover prices, which is the only way I can afford to take chances on interesting premises or writers about whom I've heard good things or (I admit it) enticing covers. (Of those 160-some titles, 37 remain on my shelves, most still to be read.) Positing an admittedly low average per-book cost of \$11, that amounts to \$1,760. When I add in the three extravaganzas (at \$30 a pop), it looks like I spent about \$1,850, or roughly \$620 a year.

Like so many book lovers, I am continually running out of room to house, or novel ways of shelve, additional volumes, but what I really lack is sufficient "discretionary income" to permit me to take a flyer on whatever catches my eye in a bookshop or a review, ad, or catalog.

Enter the Kindle. Today, if I'm interested in a title that's available in a compatible electronic format, I just download a free sample. Usually the length of a chapter or two, the excerpt provides a clear idea of how interested I really am in the publication, how much I like the tone and quality of its writing, and whether its overall subject warrants purchasing a copy—whether via Kindle or bound book.

Sample reading provides thorough familiarity and is far more helpful than what I glean while standing at a bookstore's New Arrivals table or in a library's stacks. In the two-plus months I've had my Kindle, its e-shelves have become populated with 39 publications—from the complete works of Goethe to a wonderful new book by Jenny Diski called [What I Don't Know About Animals](#). The former cost nothing, the download of the latter was \$13.42.

Although I had read several snippets *about* Diski's new book, the sample boon became apparent once downloaded. It was about 25 pages long—plenty to provide all the evidence I need to know it's a keeper. Meanwhile, I have also downloaded samples of 10 other titles, one of which I am saving up to buy in hardcover; the other 9, pretty much all wastes of time, didn't cost a cent.

Nearly everyone has a story of reticence to adopt a new idea, technique, or method, and common to the lesson that I re-learn with every such "growth experience": ***It's never as simple as "either/or"***

When one switches to something new, neither complete nor immediate renunciation of previous ways of doing things is entailed. There is always room to retain prior approaches, and e-reading may be a more cogent example of this lesson than most. [Seth Godin](#), who definitely knows about such things, calls a book a "fabulous souvenir, a long-lasting, easily displayed, easily shared, makes-you-happy remembrance of an idea."

My love for and devotion to printed books hasn't waned in the least, and I certainly have no intention either to cease buying them or dispense with my library. But the Kindle permits me to make far better judgments before spending, and the money saved can be used to add to my collections of paper-based books that cannot be replaced with electronic facsmiles, not even with the highest-end technology presently available. So, here's my attempt at a new equation:

increased reading
+ *more adventurous literary exploration*
= *reduced stress,*
greater pleasure, and
clearer perspectives
(not to mention significantly fewer TV hours clocked.....)