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Kimberly Johnson: Reports of the old-fashioned book's death are greatly exaggerated

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...but a lot of people are reading digitally

By Kimberly Johnson Jul 28, 2018

"Do people even read books anymore?"

That's one of the questions I hear fairly often when people discover I work at the library. The answer to that question is: Yes!

People still love to read. Circulation is up at the library and people of all ages are reading as much or more than ever before.

"But aren't people reading e-books now instead of print books?" is often the next question I'm asked. It's true that digital use is growing, digital formats account for about 20 percent of the circulation at the library last year. Many people tend to think of e-books and print as an either-or proposition and that e-books, being the newer format, will eventually replace print. While the death of print books because of e-books is a common thought, readers and reading preferences are more complicated and interesting.

E-Books have gained popularity because of their portability, flexible font sizes and that you can carry a large, varied collection of books on one lightweight device. You can download a new title almost anywhere and start reading it right away. Given the convenience, flexibility and ease of use, it's not surprising that e-book use has grown over the past decade.

Print books, on the other hand, are a well-loved tactile experience that doesn't require charging. The print book is a simple but perfectly functional format that has survived centuries with very little change. As a container for stories and knowledge, books are responsible for the spread of ideas across borders and time. Much of the appeal of print lies in the design of each book, the paper choices, cover art and the look and feel of printed ink on paper. Curling up on a rainy day with an e-reader just doesn't quite have the same appeal.

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When you talk with readers, many will tell you that they appreciate and read both print and e-books. While some people are dedicated to their preferred format, many find a place for both. If you ask them to choose, their choice of format may be completely dependent on the type of book or where and when they plan to read it.

Readers may choose e-books when going on vacation, or for specific genres, but when their favorite author has a new book, or they're reading it for a class, they choose to read it in print. Cookbooks? Print please. Travel guides? Load them all up on an e-reader and take them along. Many readers will also choose audio books when walking the dog or going to the gym. The choice of digital vs. print breaks down when you get down to specifics with readers. Everyone loves to have choices.

Just as TV never actually brought about the end of movie theaters, it's unlikely that e-books will ever completely replace print. Readers are particular in their preferences and don't want to compromise when it comes to reading. Print vs. e-book? Thankfully, we don't have to choose, we can have the best of both worlds, and they're both available at your library.


Kimberly Johnson is CEO of the Tulsa City-County Library System.

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Write a Readers Forum column

Op/ed space in the Tulsa World is limited. To preserve the space for the pieces we think our readers will most appreciate, we have these guidelines for submissions:

1. Op/eds should be about public policy issues not personalities.
2. They should be debatable in nature: They should take a stance that some but not all of our readers would agree with.
3. They should not be in direct response to previous op/ed columns, syndicated columns, letters to the editor or Tulsa World editorials. The proper forum for such responses is our letter to the editor space.
4. They should come from authors who are authoritative on the topic or offer some unique identifiable perspective.
5. They should be about 600 words long.
6. They cannot be election endorsements or un-endorsements, although at times the editorial department will solicit op/ed columns on both sides of an election for publication.
7. They cannot be product endorsement.
8. They should come from an author who lives within our circulation area.
9. They should not have been published elsewhere or submitted for publication elsewhere.
10. They cannot be libelous, incendiary or offensive to broad portions of our readership.
11. They should be accompanied with an electronic photo of the author for publication.

These are not hard-and-fast rules. Sometimes, typically because of relative light demand for op/ed space, the editorial editor may waive one or more of the guidelines. At times of high demand, he may not be able to do so.

Columns should be submitted to:
wayne.greene@tulsaworld.com



Johnson
courtesy

What's in the library?

In 2017, the Tulsa City-County Library System owned:

- 605,232 adult physical items (such as books)
- 454,663 children's physical items
- 66,587 ebooks and audiobooks

The library system also had subscription access to 350,933 ebooks and audiobooks, 8,878 electronic magazines and newspapers, 9.2 million pieces of music for streaming or downloading and 15,445 movies or television programs for streaming.

Children's printed materials were the largest single element in the library system's circulation, accounting for 2,197,303 uses out of 6,467,064 for the year.

Source: Tulsa City-County Library, Fast Facts, 2017

Paper or pixels?

Amazon's top five selling books (hardback and paperback) for 2017:

1. Wonder, R.J. Palacio
2. Milk and Honey, Rupi Kaur
3. Giraffes Can't Dance, Giles Andreae
4. The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck, Mark Manson
5. Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Getaway, Jeff Kinney

Amazon's top five selling Kindle Ebooks for 2017:

1. The Handmaid's Tale, Margaret Atwood
2. Beneath a Scarlet Sky, Mark Sullivan
3. Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, J.K. Rowling

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