

Accessible Ebooks and Readers

20 May 2013

The Lawsuit: In June 2012, library users, assisted by the National Federation of the Blind, filed suit against the Free Library of Philadelphia for having ebook readers that did not have text-to-speech capability. The Library had 60 Nook readers, which were purchased with an LSTA Accessibility grant. The suit was settled in September with an agreement by the Library to purchase 10 accessible readers immediately and to replace the Nooks with accessible readers within four years. A similar suit against the Sacramento Public Library was settled in a similar manner.

The IMLS Advisory: Last fall the Institute for Museum & Library Services (IMLS) encouraged libraries to incorporate the following technology “best practices” into their programs:

- Build an accessible program from the outset:
 - Make accessibility a key program criterion.
 - Ask (or require subgrantees to ask) specific questions of vendors, and have vendors demonstrate and document their responses.
- Periodically assess community needs, including through surveys and outreach.
- Provide all library users (including individuals with disabilities) with the opportunity to access the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services with substantially equivalent ease of use.

The Problem: Ebooks are not particularly well-suited for use by persons with visual disabilities. Many ebook readers do not have text-to-speech capability and are difficult for people with visual disabilities to use. One of the standard ebook standards, EPUB, has not lent itself to easy use by non-sighted individuals. And not all ebooks have text-to-speech access enabled; generally publishers choose whether to enable or disable text-to-speech access. At this time no e-readers can really be considered accessible.

Fortunately, things may be looking up. Publishers and e-reader producers are now aware of this issue and are open to improving accessibility. The new EPUB 3 standard will allow publishers to more easily integrate accessibility features into ebooks. Late last year Amazon announced planning for new accessibility features for the Kindle Fire.

The issue for Libraries: The Federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that libraries (and all public entities) make their services available to persons with disabilities unless making the service accessible would place an unreasonable burden on the agency or the changes necessary to make the service accessible would make significant changes in the nature of the service. The Ohio State University ADA Coordinators Office has reviewed ebook readers and

has determined that none of the currently available readers is accessible. The Apple iPad seems to be the best portable device at this time. Other platforms that receive good scores include:

- The Read 2 Go app for iPad, iPhone and iPod touch. <http://read2go.org/>
- VitalSource Bookshelf for e-textbooks. <http://bookshelf.vitalsource.com/>
- Apple iBooks 2
- Learning Ally ReadHear. <https://www.learningally.org/>
- Google eBooks

Additional resources

An in-depth look at ebook and reader accessibility from Ohio State University

<http://wac.osu.edu/ebook-access-overview/>

National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials

e-Books and e-Book Readers

- http://aim.cast.org/learn/e-resources/accessibility_resources/ebooks_ereaders

Accessibility Upgrade: EPUB, Libraries, and Ebook Accessibility

Library Journal, Apr 16, 2013

- <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2013/04/technology/ebook-accessibility/>

E-Book Reader Accessibility and Comparison Matrix from Ohio State University

- <http://wac.osu.edu/ebook-access-overview/matrix.html>
- <https://carmenwiki.osu.edu/display/10292/E-Book+Reader+Accessibility+and+Comparison+Matrix#E-BookReaderAccessibilityandComparisonMatrix-E-BookReaderFunctionalAccessibilityMatrix>

IMLS Advisory: E-book Reader Lending Programs

- http://pld.dpi.wi.gov/files/pld/pdf/ebook_guidance.pdf