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Digital Readers: Fact and Fiction

Beginning in early 2008, Texas A&M University at Qatar Library ordered three electronic readers: the Amazon Kindle, the Sony eReader PRS 505, and the iRex iLiad. The purpose was to find a way to deliver electronic content, either casual or scholarly, to faculty, by comparing the reading devices using available or purchased content. For casual reading, the Sony eReader was by far the more easily accepted, consumer level device, whereas the engineering faculty, preferred the iRex iLiad for its advanced features. The Kindle was generally dismissed as too flimsy and unattractive. The library began a program to purchase books on request, load them onto the device of choice, and deliver to content to readers, as an alternative to a purchased or borrowed print copy of the title. The notable success indicator seems to be that once people check out the device, they are reluctant to return it. Several users have purchased their own devices. Feedback has been very favorable, although users speak eagerly of future improvements, such as the addition of color, integration of notes into .pdf documents, backlighting for low-light reading.

Carole Thompson is director of the library at Texas A&M University at Qatar. She holds an MLIS from University of California, Berkeley and an MBA from California Lutheran University. Specializing in the use of technology in information environments, she has explored use of devices such as iPods, smartphones, and digital readers for electronic text at the branch engineering campus of a large American University in the Middle East.