Traveling bookmobile touts 'digital' library

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Technology has crept into every facet of our lives, even reading.

In many homes, paperbound books are being replaced with electronic books that can be read on digital equipment such as Nooks and Kindles — even on one's smartphone.

To encourage more participation in the digital library, the Digital Bookmobile paid a visit to the Bossier Parish Library Central Branch at 2206 Beckett St. The Digital Bookmobile has traveled across the country for the past 10 years presenting library patrons with an interactive experience exploring the digital services available at local public libraries.

Lauren Bajda, digital media events specialist, said the Digital Bookmobile is used as a marketing and promotional tool to show schools and libraries how they can borrow books from their library system. The Bookmobile visited the Bossier library to educate users on Libby, "the newest one-tap reading app from their library."

And what are the advantages? "Through the library, you can borrow e-books and audio books," Bajda said. "The advantage is, one, you don't have to worry about those CDs anymore that might get scratched and whatnot; you can put it right on your personal device — cell phones, tablets, even computers, anything that will initially have an Internet connection."

People enjoy the option "because you can change the font size for any book, the background color. There's books for kids, teens and adults. It's very popular to take an e-book with you on vacation; that way you don't have to carry as many physical or paper books with you.

"The accessibility, I think, is the biggest part. Since it is available online 24/7, your library is now open all the time. So you have access to your books even if you can't make it to the library or if you're out of town."

Just like checking out physical books from the library, you are "checking out" e-books for a two-week period. At the end of that two-week period, Bajda said, "within the app you have the option to renew the book. However, if somebody is waiting in line for that title, you will just be added to the wait list." And at the end of your loan period, the title returns automatically to the library and is removed from your device.

Since it's automatic, that means no more late fees!

So utilizing a digital library is an easier way and an alternative way to borrow books from your local library.

That is not to say that books printed on paper will soon go the way of the dinosaur. Many people still enjoy the feel of a book's pages, the heft of the volume, even the act of physically turning the pages to see what happens next in the story.

Lauren Bajda, digital media events specialist, uses a large-screen monitor to demonstrate the ease and convenience of digital services at the Bossier Parish Library. The local library was visited by the Digital Bookmobile, which travels the country presenting library patrons with an interactive experience exploring the digital services available at the local public library. (Photo by Kerry M. Kirspel)

E-books have been around for quite a few years now, and the Digital Bookmobile has been traveling the country since 2008 introducing library patrons to the ease and convenience of the digital library. Why has it taken so long for this to catch on?

"Just from experience, a lot of people that we've talked to are either on board willing to try or they're resistant because they prefer the physical book, the feel, the touch, the smell. I do find that once people realize that we're not taking over physical books, libraries still exist, libraries want us to be a part of their system, they find, why not? Why don't I give it a try? And I always ask people to try it out and see if you like it or not."

Bajda said some people simply are unaware that they can borrow books digitally from the library or that the process might be complicated. She said, "It's honestly very simple. All you need is your library card, some type of device and Internet connection. So if you have those, it takes just a few minutes to get started, but I think the biggest factor is people just not knowing this is available through the library, and that's one of the biggest reasons we travel around, to spread that awareness."

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