

MOBILE LIBRARIES

“Baby Boomers” have already started heading into retirement age and thanks to new mobile technology (not to mention lessening of responsibilities!), they get to enjoy more leisure time. Much of that free time is spent travelling, returning to studies, participating in group sports, and **reading**. Many book publishers in recent years have scrambled to find ways to keep their paperback/hardback customers who have changed to e-book purchasing. What has evolved and is gaining greater popularity is one’s own library-on-the-go. Instead of hauling around extra luggage, a lightweight, wireless, handheld device will do it all for you: allow you to select and purchase the book, store it and read (or listen in the case of audio books) your favorite topics wherever and whenever you want.

The leader in this field is undoubtedly Amazon’s “**Kindle**” which is offered in a couple of versions, followed by Sony’s “**eBook Reader**,” Barnes & Noble’s “**Nook**,” and a growing list of less expensive (albeit with less capabilities) devices. Each device has different downloading and wireless options, and varying ink and screen resolution qualities.

AUDIO books often just require an MP3/4 player such as an **iPod** (the retail field is awash with many other models at all prices). Today, other handheld devices and **Smartphones** also have capabilities for audio books thus making their availability easy for those who may be vision-impaired or who simply prefer listening to reading. At the forefront of the audio book market is **Audible.com** (an Amazon.com subsidiary), an internet-based firm that sells digital audio books, magazines, newspapers as well as radio and TV programs; it offers thousands of titles, realistic prices and subscriptions. Some other web audio book providers are www.bookdepository.co.uk, www.waterstones.com, www.audiogo.co.uk, and www.digitalaudiobooks.co.uk. **Free** audio books are also available – the site www.e-book.au provides a healthy list of options, **Project Gutenberg** (www.gutenberg.org) being the best known.

Consider when selecting an audio device the sound quality (listening to music and *hearing* a book are quite different), volume control, battery life and storage space. You should test “listen” before purchasing - include testing the ear pods – they need to be comfortable for long-term use.

If you opt for an **E-BOOK** reader, first consider if you will only use it wirelessly in airports, restaurants, cafes, or at home in bed. Should you be atop a remote mountain or in a non-wireless area, you will need a 3G connection so you can select and purchase books on-the-go. An important aspect is the legibility of the reader. Higher-priced devices tend to use **e-ink**: text is easy to read in direct sunlight, consumes minimal power and needs no backlighting. Another key element is the size of the screen that contains the content and the ability to enlarge or minimize font sizes. Some devices such as **Kindle** offer white, black and sepia backgrounds with contrasting text color which can aid with visual difficulties. When you purchase, compare qualities (weight, screen size, sound rendition, battery life and ways to charge, storage memory, compatibility with other devices, customer support service, and of course price range. Most major electronics stores will have devices on display for you to check out. Ebook improvements happen quickly....so stay informed.....Unless of course you still want the smell, touch and feel of a good old book!!