

BLACK AND WHITE AND E-READ ALL OVER

BY MARGARET WINCHELL MILLER

When it comes to e-readers, book lovers are divided. Many love the practicality of packing a library in a pocket-book or briefcase and appreciate the sleek design and the handy extras, like built-in dictionaries and 3G (third-generation) Internet access for instant downloads from virtual bookstores. Other bibliophiles reject them on principle. Nothing can compare, they say, with the experience of pulling a novel off the shelf, shifting its weight in your hands, turning the pages, and breathing in the fragrance of ink on paper.

All kinds of e-readers are selling fast. Market research firm Forrester Research estimates the Kindle has a nearly 60% share of the United States e-reader market, followed by the Sony Reader with 35%. Forrester expects e-reader sales to double to 6 million units this year. And those estimates came out before the Apple iPad hit the shelves, selling more than 2 million units in the first 60 days after its release.

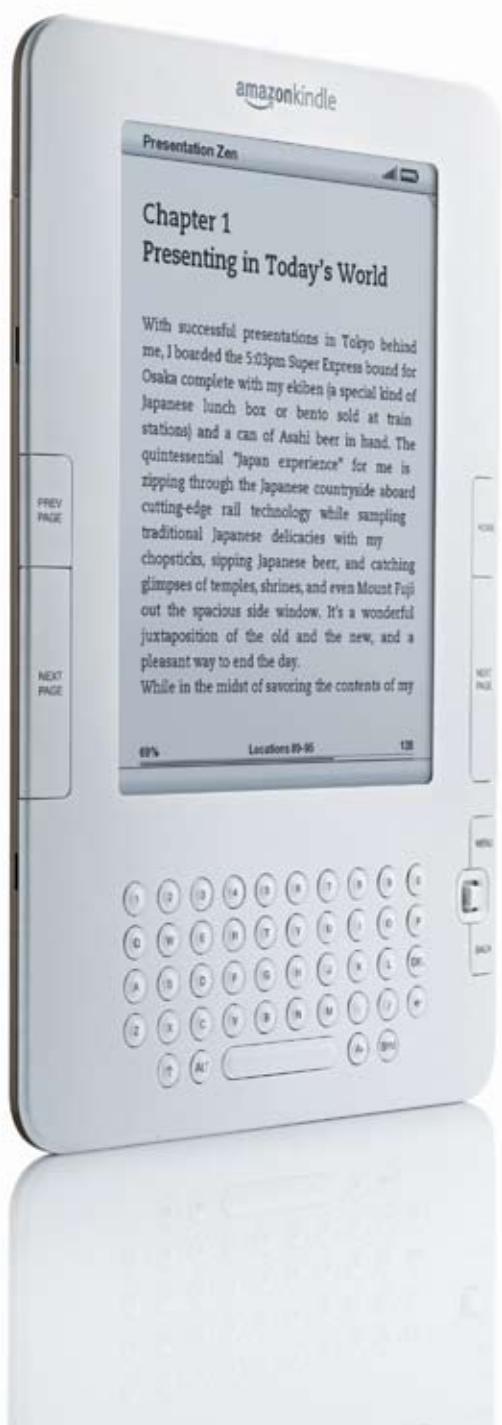
Whether you find yourself in the first camp and have made the move from “real” books to e-books, or you’re just expanding your reading options, here are the top-selling devices:

AMAZON KINDLE

In the family of e-readers, the Amazon Kindle is the patriarch. Two versions of the Kindle are available on amazon.com, each with slightly different features. The Kindle First Generation made its debut in November 2007. Priced at \$189, the latest-generation basic Kindle can store 1,500 books and has a battery life of about a week on a single charge. Turning off the wireless gives you an additional week before recharging. The Kindle DX (\$379), Amazon’s latest device, features a larger screen and a built-in PDF reader. Both editions feature electronic paper displays (EPDs), which, unlike a backlit computer screen, can be easily read in bright sunlight or dimly lit environments. The Kindle gets high marks for quick page refreshing and crisp, readable type. Like a mobile phone, the Kindle has built-in 3G wireless capability. This high-speed transmission allows you to download books purchased through Amazon.com directly to your Kindle—with no annual contracts and no monthly fees. Users can browse the website before buying by downloading a chapter at no charge.

BARNES & NOBLE NOOK

Money magazine called the Nook the “#1 Pick for e-Readers,” and for good reason. At \$149 for a Wi-Fi-only model and \$199 for the 3G version, the Nook offers a few noteworthy features the Kindle lacks: a 6-inch dual screen that includes a color touchscreen for easy navigation, and the ability to display EPUB format (so you can read titles from your public library and from Google). The Nook



A USER'S GUIDE



holds up to 1,500 books, magazines, and newspapers. A real plus for many readers is that Barnes & Noble offers users in-store technical support, as well as the opportunity to browse every book on the shelf for an hour at no charge. Nearly 40 cool covers designed by Kate Spade, Jonathan Adler, and others are available to adorn and protect your investment.

APPLE iPad

Evaluating the iPad against other e-readers is really like comparing Apples and oranges. While it isn't a dedicated e-reader, the iPad figures into this mix because it functions as one via its iBook app. If you're not dissuaded by the \$499 price tag, this full-fledged computer will also give you the ultimate e-reading experience with a 9.7-inch full-color dual screen. The downside is that, at 24 ounces, it's twice as heavy as the Kindle or Nook and may feel cumbersome when you curl up in a chair with it. And instead of reading on energy-saving virtual paper and e-ink, you're looking at a computer screen, whose backlight cuts into the battery life and makes reading in bright light difficult. Still, the iPad costs only \$100 more than the Spring Design Alex.



SPRING DESIGN ALEX

You might not have heard of the Alex, but *Laptop* magazine named it the "Best of Consumer Electronics Show 2010" in the e-reader category. A couple of unique features set this device apart from the competition. Its unique dual-screen design (one monochrome EPD for reading, one full-color LCD for Web browsing) gives users multiple options. It's also the first e-reader to offer multiple languages (Chinese, Spanish, Russian, Korean, and Hebrew). Web access and e-mail are available through Wi-Fi. And in June, Spring Design partnered with Borders, giving the Alex access to more than 1 million titles through Kobo and the digital bookstores eBooks and Books on Board. The \$399 price tag may deter some would-be buyers, but the Alex has a distinctive appeal that's sure to keep it in the game.



SONY READER DIGITAL BOOK

Affordably priced at \$149, the Pocket Edition features a 5-inch monochrome e-ink Vizplex Screen, holds up to 350 books, and is a good option for readers on a budget. For just \$20 more, the Sony Reader Touch Edition upgrades to a 6-inch screen with five font sizes and is available in red, silver, or black. The sleek Daily Edition, with its 7-inch

touchscreen, weighs just over 12 ounces, fits easily in a jacket pocket, and, unlike the Pocket and Touch models, features free 3G wireless access. Priced at \$299, this edition is the exclusive digital reader for the *Wall Street Journal*—a key selling point for executives. The platform supports EPUB and PDF, as well as DOC, DOCX, RTF, and TXT formats. For the same price, readers get more memory with other devices—but no *Wall Street Journal*!



BORDERS KOBO

The Kobo has been called a "no-frills alternative" to the Kindle and Nook because it doesn't include Wi-Fi or 3G access. To purchase e-books, users must connect to a computer via Bluetooth and USB. At \$150, including 100 free books, it's another good choice for budget-minded buyers. Like the Nook and Kindle, there's no backlight, so there's no glare or reflection. When you purchase the Kobo, you can install the free app on your iPhone or BlackBerry, converting the smartphone into a reading device as well.



100 CLASSIC BOOKS (SOFTWARE FOR NINTENDO DS)

Black Beauty, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Treasure Island, Little Women, The Red Badge of Courage—and 95 more! This e-library for kids made a big splash when it debuted in June. DS means "dual screen," and that makes the Nintendo an ideal device for this new e-book application, which may inspire kids to do more reading and less gaming. Turn the DS sideways and the screen becomes two pages, which are turned with the swipe of a stylus. There are two font sizes to choose from, and titles are searchable by genre for newcomers to the classics. Click on Adventure, Fantasy, or Science Fiction, and suggested titles pop up. The software not only features e-editions of 100 of the greatest books ever written, but also includes author biographies and a guide that suggests books based on a few simple questions. Users with access to broadband wireless Internet can download an additional 10 books through Nintendo Wi-Fi for future enjoyment. ☘

Margaret Miller, a freelance writer based in Texas, specializes in corporate communications and is partial to audio books. She doesn't own an e-reader. Yet.

Editor's note: Recent price wars among e-reader manufacturers have made some of the information in this article hard to pin down. Please note that prices included here were correct as we went to press.