



IT ISN'T BLACK AND WHITE

What gets my goat? The 'all or nothing' attitude many people hold towards changing technologies and their impact on libraries. On the one hand, there are people who refuse to use the self loan machines because they feel bombarded by technology or fear that librarians will lose their jobs. On the other hand, there are those who say that print is dead, that in the near future we will achieve a paperless society. Some seem to think that buying an e-reader means that all physical books must be thrown away and others resist the lure of e-readers, suspecting that if they purchase one, they will bring on the tragic demise of the physical book.

Are people putting too much faith in technology and global corporations or are they reading too many dystopian novels? Surely what will eventuate, and what will be the best outcome, is an harmonious co-existence, or am I being utopian?

Self loan machines are excellent when patrons wish to quickly borrow items and leave. Children love using them, perhaps because they give a sense of independence. They cannot, however, give information about library services or help you remember the title of the latest bestseller, let alone have a pleasant chat. This means that the very same patron could use the self loan machine on some visits and on others choose to have staff lend them their items

while suggesting new books to read and chatting about the weather. Is customer service not better when both options are there?

There is nothing like a room full of weighty, colourful, even dusty books. Such a room is full of the possibility held within those books, of romance, mystery, new and old worlds, fantasy and reality. Our experiences since childhood of such magical journeys have made us attached to the vessels of these worlds and taught us to experience emotion when we see and hold a physical book. This attachment will be hard to break. Not only in our libraries, but also in our homes, it is hard to imagine the bookcases replaced with one electronic tablet. Even from a purely aesthetic point of view, this seems unlikely.

**CAN'T SELF LOAN
MACHINES AND
LIBRARY STAFF,
PAPER BOOKS
AND E-BOOKS ALL
EXIST TOGETHER?**



For some, reading from a tablet appears cold, soulless and even somehow less intellectually stimulating. Yet it is the words themselves that evoke the emotion, that move us, teach us and take us on the journey. Yes, the feel, the cover, the very weight of a book, all contribute to the experience of reading but even the most passionately old-school book lover surely cannot help but see the potential for e-readers. Going on holiday is when we need the most reading material and when space is at a premium. This is when the ability to carry hundreds of books in a tablet that takes up less space than one paper book is very attractive, as is the ability to buy new books without having to go to the bookshop.

Not many of us want a library experience with no personality or warmth, we don't want global corporations to have the power to delete books not only from our devices, but from existence, but we all want a richer, fuller, more convenient life. For the time being, it seems that not only can self loan machines and library staff, paper books and e-books all exist together, but that our customer service and reading experiences are enhanced if they do because they complement each other. Long live technology *and* the book!

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