eBook Update: November 2011
Written by Glenn McEowen

When can we start checking out eBooks to our church library users?

While we don't have all the answers for your library, we do have some recent information that might be helpful. So let's dig in and see what we can discover.

eBooks are computer files that contain the text that can be read on a computer, an eBook reader (Kindle, Nook) a tablet (iPad) even a smartphone (iPhone.) (For the sake of this article, we will also include *audio books* when we use the term *eBooks.* These are typically MP3 files used in iPods and similar devices.) The eBook files are downloaded from a web site into the reading device. During the download an authorization and decryption process takes place to permit the eBook file to be used on the 'reader" device. When a library checks out an eBook, a digital time-stamp is included in the file that sets the eBook's *due date*.

As you can see, the download/decryption process is quite involved and will require the services of a qualified eBook service provider. Most of the nation's public and school libraries use the services of one company, Overdrive. We are pleased to announce that this company has recently developed a structure for church libraries. The Overdrive folks understand that many church libraries have limited budgets and that cost will be a factor. They also know that their individual library pricing would eliminate most church libraries.

Here are some particulars we have learned about Overdrive's services:

- Overdrive will work with a *consortium* (or group) of church libraries so the cost is shared.

- The consortium will be limited to a geographic area.

- A percentage (2/3) of the annual cost will be allocated for the purchase of eBooks.

- Overdrive will provide a unique web page for each church library. This will be the point where our church members access the individual eBooks in the consortium's collection.

- Overdrive will handle the online authorization for your members as a part of the check out process. It will provide usage statistics and will coordinate the update of a church's authorized user list.

- Overdrive will provide training for the library staff.

- Each church's annual fee is based on the total church membership. Pricing is tiered. For example church membership up to 1000 will be $750/year; 1001 to 3,000 is $1500/year; 3,001 to 6000 is $3,000/year; 6,001 to 10,000 is $4,500/year and up.

That is what Overdrive will do. The other side of the operation will be the *consortium*. Here is how that is expected to work.

- Each participating church library will share ALL of the eBooks purchased by the consortium members. The collection titles will be equally available to any of the participating church library users.

- The selection of eBook titles for the collection will be made by the individual librarians. The number of titles each can purchase will be determined by the 2/3 portion of their annual fee.

- The group will want to limit duplicate titles. On the other hand, a few duplicates might be a sensible choice for very popular titles. (eBooks, like traditional books are allowed to be checked out by one person at time.)

- Additional signup periods are provided each year where new consortium members can be added.

- The consortium will be responsible for setting common "settings" such as the length of the loan term and renewal policies.

- One of the churches in the consortium will act as the "lead church" serving as the communication link between the member libraries and Overdrive.

That is a summary of what we know up to this point. Certainly there are many more questions and details to resolve. We will soon know more as a trial is now underway. Overdrive's first "church" test market involves Baptist churches in Dallas and Rockwall Counties in Texas. This group is in the organizational phase just now, so it will probably be early 2012 before any eBooks are actually checked out.

We are excited that the eBook service is coming soon. Of course, it may not be available immediately for your church, but Overdrive has assured us that they will add more consortia as soon after the trial is underway. In any case, there are some things you can do now to prepare:

- If you don't already have one, ask for an eReader for Christmas. (*Consumers Reports* highlighted that the hot Christmas items this year will be eReaders and tablet computers (which are just eReaders on steroids.)

- Become familiar with the eBook check out/in process. Does your local public library provide eBook check out? If so, try it. You can download free apps to your smartphone or computer. Check out a book. Is the process easy? Try reading the eBook. What do you like about it? Dislike about it? See what happens when the eBook is overdue.

- Knowing the approximate costs, you can now budget for the eBook service. Some libraries may want to raise the funds apart from the budget. Keep in mind that 2/3 of the cost will go for eBook titles. It is not an inexpensive deal, but it is a good deal.

- Get your library catalog on the web. Your online catalog will be the link to your church's eBook check out page.

- Begin preparations to establish your local *consortium*. Contact interested librarians in your association and begin the discussion.

Finally, we have the eBook tools realistically in place. Yet, for most of us the BUDGET will be the biggest challenge.

When we consider the future of the church library, our church people must realize the library ministry is changing, enlarging, serving in places it never has served before. Such changes come with a cost… a cost that may seem unaffordable for a value we cannot afford to lose.

––––––––––––––––––––

Glenn McEowen is founder and president of Library Concepts. His e-mail is glenn@libraryconcepts.com