

Talking with a Turkish university librarian about lending eBook readers

As reported in the last issue, at Bahcesehir University in Istanbul, Turkey, the library has offered eBooks for some time and now is lending the WalkBook — an eBook reader designed by the university. Here Dr. Kenan Erzurum, the head librarian there, shares additional thoughts on the device and users' reactions to it.

Please, can you give a bit of background about your university's development of an eBook reader?

Dr. Kenan Erzurum: Since 2004, we've offered eBooks to our readers. In 2007, we expanded our eBook title list significantly with licenses including one with Elsevier. After notifying our readers about our steps in this area, I was thinking they needed more comprehensive, yet easier access to content. At that time, I remembered the eBook readers I used to read about and remembered their advantages: One can lend several books on the devices so users can read at their homes, during travel and basically any time and anywhere.



(Left to right) Bahcesehir University student S. Gürol Vatansver and librarian Ayhan Tulu take a look at the WalkBook.

Also last year, in 2007, our university designed a patented unit called "WalkBook," which is now for sale via the Ubit company (www.ubit.com). I received one of these devices immediately, downloaded a few samples and observed the experiment was successful. At this moment, I concluded our readers should profit from eBooks without time and place constraints and shared this view with my library colleagues. After numerous downloads and trials, we remarked the result was excellent and started our new service: making WalkBooks available to all our users.



Kenan Erzurum

At Bahcesehir University Library, we can now lend many eBooks to our readers. This practice allows us not to deny users because they can't or don't want to use a PC for long hours to read books. A WalkBook can hold several books at a time (from our technical sources, up to 400,000 pages in total).

This is the first time such a practice — loaning eBook readers — has been done in Turkey. The time for reserving books has ended.

What exactly is the WalkBook?

The WalkBook is an electronic, ink-reliant eBook-reading device. It uses a Philips screen and as a consequence is comparable to regular paper. Its transportation and use are very easy. Once charged, the batteries can turn 40,000 pages. In addition to its internal memory, the device holds an SD card comprising a secondary memory. The card can hold up to 8 GB. Soon, SD cards are going to hold larger amounts of data, thus increasing the WalkBook's capacity.

The device supports PDF, TXT, DOC, HTML, MP3, WOL and picture files. With its headphones, the device allows users to read and listen to audio files; therefore audio books can be accessed with the reader. And, yes, you can listen to your favorite music with the WalkBook. The transfer of records is extremely easy since the SD card reader is used for that sole purpose. As one reads, the size of a book can be zoomed to three times its original size. Additionally, the

device makes reaching specific books, pages and paragraphs quick and easy.

The new WalkBook version, with its second, touch-sensitive screen, allows viewing footnotes. From this screen, one can also search for book titles, authors, publishers or key words. And the device includes an instruction manual.

What are the costs of your device lending service?

The main cost is that of the devices themselves. Purchasing a WalkBook costs USD \$300. The rest of the work — requiring staff time but no additional expense — involves loading eBooks or their chapters onto the WalkBooks as requested.

What about theft?

Since the system is new and people need time to get used to them, WalkBooks are lent only to our registered users — academic personnel and students — for now. This means WalkBooks are handed to those within the university and keeping track of records is no problem, thanks to our library automation system. We get notices from the system when someone fails to bring back a WalkBook. Moreover, our users are informed that they are responsible for WalkBooks while the devices are in their possession. In other words, security procedures for lending books apply to the WalkBook as well.

Does the device offer any restrictions?

The device measures 184 mm x 120.5 mm x 9.9 mm. The display is 6 inches tall, and has an 800 x 600 pixel resolution



Here you can get an idea of the WalkBook's size. Though the device is only the size of a small notepad, it allows users to carry lots of books and thousands of pages all in one go.

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with four-tone gray color. The device doesn't offer a color display for now. The device has 1 GB memory, though this can be upgraded to a maximum of 9 GB with an SD memory card.

How is success of the service being measured?

Because we have a limited number of WalkBooks now, we can't measure the success of the service properly. As soon as we get more WalkBooks for our library, we'll be able to get proper results. For now, we're relying on checkout rates and users' comments. So far indications are that the WalkBooks are a success; they're in demand and liked.

Did the library decide to lend eBook readers in response to user demand?

It was my proposal. I wanted to expand our eBook offerings, but we needed a



(Left to right) Elsevier Sales Manager Turkey & Central Asia Tayfun Basal, Elsevier Head of Sales Online Books EMEA Olivier Diesnis and Bahcesehir University Library Head Librarian Kenan Erzurum with the WalkBook — an eBook reader.

device to make the additional titles more accessible. As soon as we started offering WalkBooks to our users, the device caught their attention immediately. Some even wanted to buy WalkBooks!

Have young users been particularly enthusiastic about the readers?

Both young and old users have been enthusiastic about the readers. Take someone, for example, who wants to borrow five or six books at once. Imagine how difficult it is to carry them all at once compared to carrying them in a WalkBook. Now, just by carrying a device weighing 220 grams, a device that can fit inside big pockets, users can carry thousands of pages, lots of books, with them. By nature, young people don't want their movement to be limited and old people don't want to carry too much. The WalkBook provides young and old with what they want. **LC**

 <http://library.bahcesehir.edu.tr>

Interview by Olivier Diesnis, Head of Sales Online Books EMEA, Elsevier, Amsterdam, The Netherlands