Whither eBooks - For Libraries
eBooks are a conundrum
promise tremendous reach
yet pose significant technical challenges
arguably a threat to commerce in books
if libraries can do well with eBook platforms
why buy when one can borrow?
it’s a fair question
but ...
multiple quixotic issues
publishers see books as a commodity
libraries see books as a service
access to information
two opposing views of ebooks
to place a different argument about culture (national) in a new context
“eBooks are files, wrapped in a license, surrounded by technology, delivered by a contract”

Michael Tamblyn
Kobo Books
“eBooks are books, wrapped in cultural life, surrounded by readers, delivered by history”

Michael Tamblyn
Kobo Books
yet, weirdly,
publishers have an advantage over libraries
retail / distribution platforms
(however the books are sold)
providing contextual services
(a different kind of metadata)
social reading:
sharing thoughts
on a platform
libraries value privacy
social has been monetized
(because social is valuable)
“[digital] transforms the book from isolated vessel for text into a shared interface”

Craig Mod
“Digital marginalia is a collective conversation”

Craig Mod
so in that light
libraries can buy books and then lend them
without seriously impacting business models
and ensuring
a basic level of service
(access to books)
that’s what we want to do at the Internet Archive
buy books and then lend them
we’re old fashioned that way
greatest commercial value of ebooks is
not really
the book
itself
but the conversation around and through the book
people will exchange money for
the social life of books
for experts’ glosses and the thoughts of friends
a digital book is a centroid on the social graph
“At MIT, his office … was crammed with books, most overdue from the college library. Dr. Lettvin claimed he did not return them because the library would send him the students who wanted those books, and he would interview them as potential assistants.”

Jerome Lettvin; MIT professor with passion for ideas, a good debate by J.M. Lawrence, Boston Globe, May 15, 2011.
selling a book is
selling a ticket to that conversation
and let’s be real
(for a second)
libraries are already less than 5 percent of the book market
and rather sadly we keep getting poorer
we’re not going to buy,
and not going to lend
enough books to impact sales
but we can add connections among those conversations
publishers might call it “marketing” aka targeted impressions
maybe we should get a commission on sales
Alexis Madrigal said it more holistically in *The Atlantic*

“The library has become a social network with physical and digital nodes.”

(emphasis added)
but there’s one more problem
a problem in the future
for everyone (pubs and libs)
that we’ll have to solve together
because books are moving to the web
and if a book is not a container of things
but a collection of links to places on the web
interactive experiences across the network
there’s nothing to download
and I don’t know what it means
to buy or borrow
access to the web
particularly
if books can change
where I read them
when I read them
who reads them
who has read them
who I read them with
these will be
the new books
thanks!
“Centroid”, Flickr!, CGehlen
peter brantley
internet archive
peter @ archive org
@naypinya