



Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library

Upgraded eBook service pleases library patrons

When Tom Letson sits down to relax for a good read these days, it's with his iPhone in his hand, not an actual book.

He's an extensive reader, enjoying everything from a two-volume biographical tome of Margaret Thatcher to the latest Michael Connelly mystery, and he likes to plan his reading in advance. He does that by having an assortment of books he can go to, and at the moment, as he sits in Mexico, where he has escaped at least a few weeks of Canadian winter, he is reading the first volume of the authorized Thatcher biography.

He will read the newly released hardcover when he gets home, borrowing it from the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library.

But the books he reads on his iPhone are also available to him through the library, thanks to 3M Cloud Library for eBooks, which the library has recently switched to from OverDrive, a rival service.

He hasn't bothered with a device such as a Kindle or Kobo - he has an app on his phone to access the library's 3M eBook service, and he finds the phone, which allows him to change font size and back-lighting to read in any light, a convenient and comfortable way to read.

"I call it a library in a pocket," he says. While it makes it easy for him to access books while he's travelling, that was only one of the factors that led him to eBooks, he says.

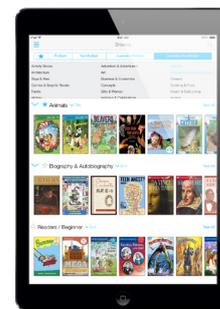
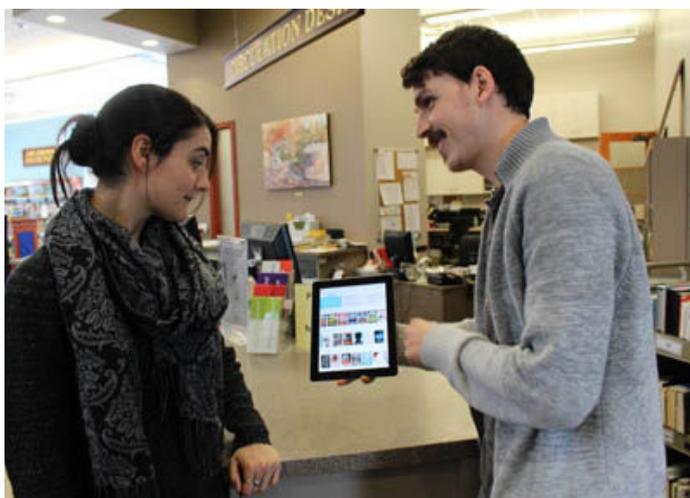
"I wanted to get caught up with technology. I had an iPad and a laptop, but I felt it was time to take the plunge, so I bought an iPhone. The page is big enough to read, and I always have it with me."

There is a full selection of books in the public domain, he says - some current and some not so current - and he can plan what he wants to read next.

Some eBooks have a bit of a waiting list - the newest Michael Connelly mystery was about a 14-day wait - but he says he's a patient man, and there is always something else he can read while he waits his turn.

When he's at home in Virgil, he still likes to visit the library several times a week, and hasn't lost his enjoyment of holding a real book in his hands - his eBooks just give him more choices.

The OverDrive service was not as convenient, he says - he much prefers the 3M the library currently subscribes to.



Sarah Bowers and Matt Furlong of the NOTL Public Library look at the new service the library offers: 3M Cloud Library, for members who read eBooks. It's an upgrade to OverDrive, which was their first digital book service.



“The 3M Cloud Library is very user-friendly and we’re hearing people find it much easier to navigate. It’s a transition, but once it’s installed, they’re happy with the service.”

Beth Labelle, Outreach Coordinator
Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library

“It’s brilliant visually and brilliant in its content. I check it often and it’s regularly updated.”

He’s also a huge fan of the library staff, and their efforts to help their patrons.

“They’re very co-operative, and so customer-oriented. I lived in Toronto for 44 years, and I miss the TO library system, but I love our little library. It’s the little library that could.”

The OverDrive service was not a model that worked well for library patrons, says Beth Labelle, outreach coordinator for the NOTL Public Library.

The waiting times were considerably longer for new releases, as NOTL library members were placed on waiting lists that included all Ontario libraries using the service. Buying extra copies to speed things up meant using up too much of the eBook budget, she said, which is \$16,000 this year.

“People just weren’t satisfied with the service,” she said.

“It was not user-friendly.”

Matt Furlong, the library’s “tech guy,” did his research and discovered 3M Cloud Library, a service which gives the library complete control over which books it offers and how many copies. It allows library staff to encourage patrons to make suggestions about books to include, and although the collection is small, it’s growing quickly. When they notice long waiting times for specific books, they can order more copies.

It’s also easy to access, Labelle says, and library staff are available to help anyone having difficulty making the change.

Furlong is offering a drop-in session Wednesday mornings at 11 a.m. to help eBook readers, but a call or question to any library staff member can usually be answered, says Labelle.

The 3M Cloud Library “is very user-friendly and we’re hearing people find it much easier to navigate. It’s a transition, but once it’s installed, they’re happy with the service.”

The number of active users has increased 35 per cent in the last six months, she says - 3M has been available for the last two months. But eBook readers are still a small, although growing, percentage of book borrowers.

“Most of our circulation is still for physical books.”

The senior members of the library are increasingly turning to eBooks, while the younger members, kids and students through to university age, still like to pick up a real book, says Labelle, likely because they associate reading online with studying and school work.

“We’re finding that middle generation can go either way.”

Of interest to seniors is the convenience of turning any eBook into a large-print book with the simple adjustment of font size, she said.

There’s no charge for the service to library members, and it can be accessed on most eBook readers (although not Kindle), on iPads, tablets or phones. Simple instructions can be found for downloading the app and using the service on the library’s website.

The library also offers digital audio book and magazine collections, with downloading instructions on its website.

All you need to get started is a library membership, says Labelle.

 Contact us to get started:
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Written by Penny Coles, Niagara Advance
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