

# Older readers kindle fondness for e-readers

December 8 2010, By Bill Ward

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Judy Ellis, 67, got her first cell phone two years ago. So it's fair to say that like many in her generation, the Minneapolis resident has not been an early adopter of new technology. Then Amazon's Kindle came along.

"It's just so easy to use," she said, "and the adjustable font size makes a big difference in how quickly you can read."

But don't typecast this as a one-note phenomenon. For Ellis and many of her peers, larger type size is just one reason they have embraced e-readers, the increasingly popular [mobile devices](#) for reading electronic versions of books, newspapers and magazines.

Portability, accessibility, affordability, readability (beyond the font size) and the availability of thousands of titles have made Kindle, the Barnes & Noble Nook, the Sony Reader and other e-readers enormously appealing to seniors and baby boomers.

"It should be a very good holiday for e-readers and tablets," said Ross Rubin, executive director of industry analysis for the New York-based consumer-research company the NPD Group. "And relative to many other device categories, the early adopters have tended to skew older."

While demographic breakdowns are not available, there's little doubt that a mature audience has helped drive sales of e-readers. An estimated 6.4 million units will be sold this year, compared with 580,000 in 2008, said Steve Kidera, spokesman for the Consumer Electronics Association. E-book sales rose 177 percent last year, according to the Association of

American Publishers, and about 350 percent in the first four months of this year.

Some older readers have found a lot to like with the new technology.

"The background is so easy on the eyes," said Minneapolis poet Phebe Hanson, 82, who has limited vision in one eye and no vision in the other. "I can read it for longer than I can a computer."

The lack of glare makes Ellis' Kindle "as comfortable to read outside as any book." And "you don't have to turn pages," she added.

Marie Behrens, 61, of Hudson, Wis., loves having access to her e-reader's dictionary, "something I'm using for the first time in my life."

Having an e-reader "saves a lot of suitcase space," too, said Lyn Lawyer, 71, of Arden Hills, Minn.

Rae Katherine Eighmey, 64, of St. Paul got a Kindle when it first came out and loves being able to download a new book anywhere and anytime. She said she has "bought e-books on the beach, the back deck, in bed and on a train."

That's also what Hanson likes most about her Kindle: "the instant gratification, to hear about a book on NPR, and within five seconds I can download it."

And don't discount the green factors, financial and environmental. On the cost side, many older books are in the public domain and thus are usually free as e-books, and the prices of the devices have plummeted as competition has intensified. And eco-minded readers can avoid the clutter of physical books, feel good about saving paper and avoid gas-guzzling trips to the bookstore.

An October poll of 3,000 U.S. book buyers by the trend-tracking company Bowker found that people over 55 were more likely to find "high benefit" in these e-reader factors: font size (61 percent vs. 45 percent for those under 55), portability (87 to 70 percent) and instant access to books (77 to 66 percent). That helps explain why 66 percent of those over 55 purchased an e-book last month, compared with 5.2 percent of those under 55.

Have baby boomers and seniors caught up with technology, or have the newer electronic devices, especially tablet-like e-readers, caught up with older consumers?

Yes, and yes.

The NPD Group's Rubin said, "Seniors and especially women love books."

The timing also was good for seniors, said Kidera of the Consumer Electronics Association

"The older generation has been around technology for 15 years now and have become more familiar and comfortable with electronic devices like cell phones, iPads or whatever," he said. "It may take them awhile to get to know the technology, but once they do, they're embracing it."

That's certainly true for Hanson, who is reading "at least one book a week" now,

Behrens said, "I got my [Kindle](#) last month, and I've read seven books," she said. "I'd be lucky if I would have read one in that time."

For others, the quality of the experience is more important than quantity.

"Being able to read 'one-handed' under the covers," Eighmey said, "is pure joy on Minnesota winter nights."

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