

Which e-reader is best for me?

June 2 2011, By Mark W. Smith

It's the question I field most often from readers: Which e-reader should I buy?

There's no easy answer. Each device and its corresponding platform has its own nuances and quirks.

Bookselling giant Amazon - maker of the Kindle - said in May that it now sells more [e-books](#) than hardcover and paperback books combined.

And as we head into gift season for both dads and grads, the e-reader is sure to be a hot [commodity](#).

Here's a look at what's out there:

AMAZON KINDLE

The [Amazon Kindle](#) is responsible for bringing E-ink readers to the masses.

An E-ink display looks just like paper, creates no [eye strain](#) and can be read in direct [sunlight](#). Even the most fervent hard-copy book devotee can easily fall for the charms of an E-ink device.

There are two Kindle versions: 3G (\$189) and WiFi (\$139). The 3G version allows you to download books, newspapers, magazines and blogs anywhere you have a [3G wireless](#) connection. There is no monthly charge for that access.

My advice: Go for the 3G model. The one-time premium is worth it to have always-on connectivity.

Amazon began offering ad-supported models of its two Kindle e-readers this year, selling them for \$25 less than their ad-free counterparts. Called Kindle with Special Offers, ads display on the device's screen when it falls asleep.

For my money, I'll take no ads and pay a \$25 premium. The device's original screensavers of artist portraits are charming and I don't enjoy feeling like a billboard.

BARNES & NOBLE NOOK

The first-generation Nook was plagued by problems with a clunky software interface and hardware that didn't feel anywhere near as streamlined as the Kindle.

But Barnes & Noble last week showed off the new Nook: an E-ink touchscreen device that appears to meet the Kindle in simplicity and comfort.

The new Nook, which matches the Kindle's \$139 price, ships June 10 and is available for pre-order at barnesandnoble.com. There is no 3G version of the Nook.

The biggest perk: The Nook can load e-books in the universal ePub format, which allows readers to rent books for free from many libraries. The Kindle does not support ePub, but Amazon says a book-lending feature will come soon.

The new Nook also comes with a claim that it has the longest [battery life](#) - two months - of any e-reader out there. Barnes & Noble is playing with

the numbers a bit, though.

A closer look reveals that Barnes & Noble assumes a half hour of reading daily to come up with that number. Amazon, which had rated its Kindle with a battery life of one month, had assumed a full hour of reading each day.

Amazon has since changed the battery life of the Kindle to match the Nook.

Barnes & Noble also sells the Nook Color (\$249), a more tablet-like e-reader that has an LCD screen. It runs a version of Google's Android operating system and supports some simplified Android apps.

OTHER PLAYERS

Borders has partnered with Kobo for its [e-reader](#). The original Kobo was a confusing device that couldn't [connect](#) to either WiFi or 3G, requiring a computer to sync e-books.

But a new model (\$129.99) will come out by July, matching the Nook's WiFi-connectivity and E-ink touchscreen interface.

Borders said last week that under a new agreement reached with Kobo, the troubled bookseller would share in the profits of e-books bought on the device.

Many costlier [tablet computers](#) - like the Apple iPad - also compete in this space, touting apps by Amazon, Barnes & Noble and Kobo that allow you to read the same books.

All that and you get to play Angry Birds.

Here, it depends how much of a reader you are. If you read sparingly, a tablet is a good option that can also fill that need. But if you read all the time, you won't want to be tied to a heavier, eye-straining tablet screen to do it.

KEEP IN MIND

The pricing model for e-books still hasn't quite been worked out. While e-books in the beginning were almost always \$9.99 or less, many have crept up to \$12.99 or higher in recent months.

And, even some books that have long been in paperback can still have e-books that cost \$10 or more.

Both Amazon and Barnes & Noble allow users to lend e-books to registered friends with the same device, although some publishers keep this feature unlocked on certain e-books.

HTC FLYER FILLS A NICHE BETWEEN SMARTPHONES AND E-READERS

As smartphone screens get larger and larger, many tablets may be about to meet them in the middle.

The HTC Flyer is a compact, 7-inch tablet computer meant to compete for the market between larger tablet computers like the Apple iPad and cheaper, single-function e-readers.

The Flyer is easy to hold and transport, even though it feels a bit heavier than it should and isn't exactly the thinnest device on the market.

There are a few nice touches that set it apart from the slew of Android-

based tablet computers headed to market.

When the device is turned to landscape mode, the navigation buttons automatically move to the bottom of the device's black border under the now-horizontal screen.

It also works with a stylus, sold separately, that allows users to take notes by hand or manipulate drawing programs.

The Flyer uses an app from Kobo to allow e-books to be read, and the size makes it a natural for longer reading sessions.

Unfortunately, the Flyer is running Android's Gingerbread operating system, which places it one step behind tablets like the Motorola Xoom that run on Android's more advanced Honeycomb software.

HTC has said an upgrade to Honeycomb will come at some point, but when remains uncertain.

The Flyer has a 5-megapixel camera on the back, but you won't be giving up that point-and-shoot for this any time soon. Its pictures are poor quality, even in good lighting.

It also has a 1.3-megapixel front-facing camera suitable for video calls.

The Flyer is available for \$499 from Best Buy.

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