

## Book Reviews

Editor's note: this review was intended to appear as a companion review alongside last month's [review](#) of *Books in the Digital Age*, by John Thompson.

### **The Future of the Book in the Digital Age**

by Bill Cope (Author, Editor), Angus Phillips (Editor)

Chandos Publishing, 2006

This volume, somewhat slimmer than the Thompson<sup>1</sup> book, complements and brings up to date the final section of books in the digital age. *The Future of the Book* is a series of essays presented at the Third International Conference on the Book hosted by the Oxford International Centre for Publishing Studies. The essays vary in length and some are better written than others in this format. Some chapters are more reflective and others are more practical. It is the practical ones I particularly enjoyed, such as those on new reading habits and publishing. Overall, though, the volume seeks to ignite debate on issues surrounding the future of the book, and whether this is a future. Each chapter has a number of references that can be followed up, a useful set of tables and illustrations and a fairly detailed index all of which make for getting the most out of this book.

Given that the book is the key asset which UKeiG members deal with and which informs and underpins all our work (from collection development policies to space requirements) it was refreshing to read this volume about that asset and see how rarely the word library is mentioned (only one chapter has the word library in it). To me it was less about the future of the book and more about the future of where I work. Each chapter needs to be read by substituting library/information centre every time there is mention of "bookshop". By doing that, you find that this volume provides a lot of food for thought on how the library can adapt and change in the future.

Of particular strength in this volume are the discussions on the various new business models affecting libraries, from print on demand to vanity publishing opportunities. It provides clearer signposts for the future, and considers what effect these new developments might have on collection development policies for libraries. The chapter on the rise of audio books was very informative and provides a useful insight into the challenges of the oral tradition, and what this

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<sup>1</sup> *Books in the Digital Age*, by John Thompson (Polity Press)

means for conveying information to our users – something which is often overlooked. Similarly the chapter on reading habits, focusing on a number of different countries, was very informative, and provides useful data on the rise in reading habits (despite Victoria Beckham's best efforts to reduce this). Did you know that only 50% of people in the US read a book (compared to 85% in Israel), whilst 100% of Swedes read newspapers (compared to 75% of the Portuguese?) (see page 97). This should be read in conjunction with the chapter on book consumption, which suggests that perhaps bookshops (aka libraries) might be responsible for reducing availability of book titles due to lack of space.

The role of the information professional in dealing with the future of the book was not well represented in this volume. The chapter on the future of librarianship was, by far, the weakest one, with little reference to advances in technology to help make reference librarianship meet the needs of changing users. The book, whether in electronic or print, on the internet or an iPod, needs to be managed and curated if it is to survive for future generations. It would have proved useful if that aspect has been more effectively dealt with. After all, if there is a future for the book then there is a future for the Information profession. Isn't there?

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