Kobo Touch eReader Pilot at Auckland Libraries

Reyno, Shirley\textsuperscript{1}; Pigott, Chris\textsuperscript{1}

Libraries and Information, Auckland Council, Auckland, New Zealand\textsuperscript{1}

Abstract

In October 2013 Auckland Libraries conducted a Kobo Touch eReader pilot for six months using fifty devices in five libraries. The devices were pre-loaded with free content sourced from the Kobo website. Customer and staff feedback were gathered during the pilot, which informed a report. The findings of the report and experiences of the pilot working group are detailed in the presentation. It also describes the pilot project from a practical view point. This includes discussion about purchasing, content loading, legal opinions, cataloguing decisions, lending methods, terms and conditions of use, marketing, training, user guides, device management, feedback gathering, and potential future use of eReader devices at Auckland Libraries. The results of the trial were positive, with wide customer and staff support for the devices being rolled out as a core part of Auckland Libraries collection and to introduce lending eReaders lending as a new service. Some reservations were noted, including about the range of content loaded during the trial, the booking system used during the trial, the requirements for staff management, and access to eBook contents within copyright.
Background


- Trial use of eReaders or tablet devices for reading content in libraries
- A new content divide is possible for those that do not have access to a device on which to read

The document has stipulated the strategy in addressing this content divide. Auckland Libraries “will pilot the supply of eReaders or tablet devices in selected libraries so that customers may trial the devices for themselves.” (Auckland Libraries, 2012)

Te Kauroa is the mandate to experiment, innovate and learn. The overarching need to adapt to the 21st century and remain relevant is the main driver why Auckland Libraries is undertaking a trial of lending eReader devices preloaded with content to customers. In examining the potential and feasibility to loan eReading devices to become part of the Auckland Libraries mainstream service, a pilot to five libraries was conducted.

A small team of staff was formed as the project group to implement the pilot and assess its challenges and successes. This will provide a “temperature gauge” of the Auckland Libraries’ customers’ interest in this service. Once the project group had initially scoped and brainstormed; they looked at how to proceed with the implementation of the pilot with the following deliverables:

- Purchase 50 Kobo Touch in the $150 range, and divide into groups of 10, creating 5 collections
- Theme out of copyright collections loaded onto the devices
- Identify five libraries to trial the eReader collections and work with staff to ensure buy in and confidence in the technology
- Develop a marketing strategy to promote the trial
- Develop survey questionnaires both for customers and staff to assess the pilot
- Train staff from participating libraries over two weeks prior to trial launch, focusing on content management and management of the devices including troubleshooting
- Manage the likely impact of the trial on operational roles and responsibilities of the participating libraries

Findings

The project group held a series of discussion and assessment of the six month trial which run from October 2013 to April 2014. The key points that emerged from the pilot are:

- Overall the pilot was successful despite out of copyright content loaded onto the devices
- Both staff and customers have a positive opinion of its potential as part of the Auckland Libraries’ mainstream service
• Considerable work remains to be done in pre-loading content to eReaders; developing circulation policies and procedures; promotion, and staff and customer training

A total of 204 Customer Survey feedback forms were completed and returned. Below is a snapshot of responses:

• 56% found out about the trial through marketing poster and 42% through staff
• 86% did not experience technical difficulties with the Kobo Touch; only 14% reported technical problems
• On describing the respondents experience with the Kobo Touch device:
  o Easy to use – 50% were very satisfied and 27% were satisfied
  o Training provided – 44% were very satisfied and 22% were satisfied
• 70% would borrow an eReader device again from Auckland Libraries
• 34% are prepared to pay to borrow an eReader device, 49% are not; and 16% did not know
• 52% stated the trial influenced how they plan to read books in the future, 31% said it did not influence their reading and 17% did not know
• 81% would use eBooks from Auckland Libraries if they had the opportunity and only 17% would not
• 54% were happy with the range of pre-loaded eBook selection of the Kobo Touch, and 33% said they were not
• Most popular genres were: Crime (21%), Classic (17%), Romance (14%), and Action (13%)

Methodology

The period of the pilot was six months, running from October 2013 until April 2014. The length of the pilot was set to ensure a meaningful amount of data was returned for analysis. The libraries participating in the trial were decided according to the parameters listed in Auckland Libraries guiding document, Te Kauroa, which dictated that the trial libraries should be focused in southern and western parts of Auckland as these were the areas of the city most likely to be affected by the digital divide. The participating libraries were Papatoetoe, Papakura and Manurewa in the south, Henderson in the west and Whangaparaoa in the north.

Each device was allocated a login that could be administered centrally. While this made it easier to refresh or change content, it was a challenge and time consuming to setup each device with an individual Kobo and Gmail account.

Each of the libraries received ten Kobo Touch devices. Each Kobo was preloaded with content from a specific genre. Each device was placed in a plastic Ziploc bag that also contained a feedback form and the device charger.

Each library received a manual booking sheet and an information pack. The information pack included:

• An overview of the trial
• Key contacts and technical help
• Branch procedures
• A3 promotional posters
• A booking sheet template
• Charges
• Auckland Libraries Kobo customer agreement
• Auckland Libraries Kobo borrowing terms and conditions
• Customer survey form

A Kobo could be borrowed by customers for up to four weeks. Customers could book to receive the available Kobo in the genre of their choice.

The devices were not catalogued through Millennium, Auckland Libraries library management system. The decision to instead manually issue and reserve the devices was taken because of the short term nature of the trial, and to limit access and movement of the devices to their home library. Feedback from the libraries involved indicated that this made the borrowing and reserving transactions more labour intensive, including having to manually complete borrowing and reservation forms and having to call customers when a device was ready for pickup.

Customers were required to sign a customer agreement, agreeing to pay $150.00 in the event of loss or damage. Under 18s required a parent or guardian to sign this agreement for them, which could have contributed to lower rates of borrowing amongst this demographic group.

There was no charge to borrow the devices. Customers were provided with device training at the point of transaction by a library staff member and encouraged to contact the library if they encountered any problems with the devices when they returned home to use them.

Mid- and end-point feedback meetings were held with librarians from each library involved in the trial, and to informally view early feedback form returns.

At the end of the trial, all devices were returned to the working group. They were then delivered to libraries with an active housebound programme for use while the findings of the trial and next steps were finalized.

**Promotion**

A3 posters were distributed to the libraries involved to promote the trial to their customers. An article about the trial was published on the Auckland Libraries Team Site, to provide awareness to internal stakeholders.

However, no external or Auckland Libraries-wide promotion was undertaken. This was deemed to be unnecessary as the trial was limited to customers from the five selected libraries, as was the movement of the devices.

Staff at the five libraries were identified as a key promotional asset. Led by onsite champion also called digital super users their promotion of the trial to customers was essential to a high uptake.

To encourage responses, customers who completed the feedback form were eligible to win a Kobo Touch.
This low key but targeted approach was successful. Most libraries reported that the pilot was oversubscribed, and some undertook measures to mitigate the length of the reservations list, including reducing the number of days a device would be held awaiting pickup. The total number of returned feedback forms was 204. The questions in the feedback forms sought to determine the customer’s overall experience with the device, titles read and preferred and the motivation for borrowing the Kobo Touch.

**Training**

One digital super user from each library was given full training in how to manage the Kobo Touch device and how to administer the trial onsite, including familiarity with the reservation and borrowing system. This training was completed by two members of the working group.

The digital super user was responsible for ensuring other staff at their library were trained and aware of the trial. They were also responsible for ensuring that each customer who borrowed a device was comfortable using it before leaving the library.

This training method was effective, with 14% of customers indicating they had competence issues using the devices.

**Trial Starts**

So the trial started in October 2013 with:

- Five participating libraries
- Pre-loaded devices
- Trained staff
- Supporting collateral
- A very soft launch

**Mid-Point Review**

In January the working group gathered the digital super users from the participating libraries together to discuss progress and identify any impediments. It was clear at this point that the pilot was progressing effectively, although with some areas of concern. Libraries reported long waiting lists for the devices, but that there was genre bias with Crime the most popular. Horror and Teen devices were less popular and some libraries asked for these to be converted to more popular genres, which the training team completed.

The 28-day lending period and the 8-day hold period were also identified as problematic, reducing the turnover of the devices, leading to swelling waiting lists.

There was also negative feedback about the paper-based borrowing and reserving process, which was identified as fiddly and time-consuming. Some customers were also returning the devices without the accompanying bag.

Content was identified as the prime concern amongst customers. Being free and DRM-free, the content was not of a uniformly high standard, and customers made this point strongly,
indicating they would be more enthusiastic if the content was more modern, more popular and more bespoke.

Technically, most customers seemed to have managed their interaction with the device well, with few reporting issues. Libraries reported some incidences of the devices requiring a reset, or for added content to be deleted, and did suggest looking at a way to lock the content.

Staff were largely engaged with the trial, with none of the libraries involved reporting notable resistance to the technology, training staff, or being involved in the pilot.

The issue of whether to charge customers for the devices or not was also raised, including a suggestion that there could be a free and a pay collection, mirroring Auckland Libraries Top Picks collection.

**Housebound and Content Change**

The trial continued with some changes, including some libraries having some of their devices content changed to more popular genres, and some reducing their issue and pick-up timeframes.

Outside of the pilot, five new devices were purchased and allocated to the Massey Library housebound department. They requested these to test with their housebound customers, and while the data from their response has not been included in the trial it is useful to highlight the generally positive response from the customers. This suggests that housebound customers are open to incorporating technology into their reading, and this could be a future targeted market.

**Pilot End**

The pilot ended in April 2014, and the devices were recalled by the project group. All the completed customer survey forms were also gathered from all the participating branches. Both customer and staff feedback were collated and assessed.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Kobo Touch pilot was a success in gauging the customers’ interest in circulating eReaders for Auckland Libraries. Survey responses had also shown that customers had appreciated Auckland Libraries’ providing access to experience an eReaders, who could not otherwise afford this chance.

There are still a lot that need to be done and hammered out before it can be offered as a service. The project group recognizes that further experimentation with the devices and their contents, as well as impact on staff must be looked at and taken into consideration for the programme to become more nimble.

For instance, despite the purpose of the trial being to assess the customer reaction to the device, rather than the content on the device, the amount of feedback about the low quality content led to a great deal of discussion amongst the working group. It very quickly became clear that for the devices to maximise their benefit to customers, improvements to content
was essential. Because of this two other methods were discussed after the trial to improve the contents on the devices. These were:

1. Use existing content available from the Auckland Libraries eCollection to load onto the devices
2. To develop an agreement with a supplier to purchase new eContent for the devices, for borrowing

**Option 1**

This option would require circulation staff at all libraries within the Auckland Libraries network to be trained in how to load content onto Kobo Touch and how to manage these devices. It would however provide customers with immediate access to more desirable content, noted in the survey by one customer as ‘Make it like Amazon’. This option also had the benefit of no added content charges for Auckland Libraries, and equally importantly extracting more use and value from the existing eCollection.

**Option 2**

Preliminary discussions were held with both the Kobo organization and Wheelers. Kobo agreed that Auckland Libraries could lend the devices, but that we required publisher agreement for the content on the devices to be borrowed. Wheelers agreed that Auckland Libraries could purchase new content from their eCollection, load that content onto the Kobos, and then lend the devices, with a small charge per loan. Wheelers confirmed that this was legal as per their contracts with third-party publishers.

The project group recommends the following:

1. Kobo eReaders should be offered as a standard Auckland Libraries item
2. The 50 devices used in the initial trial should be placed in circulation
3. A wide range of high quality content should be offered
4. In order to establish a sustainable eReader programme; the feasibility of partnering and entering into an agreement with Wheelers for content purchase can be looked at
5. The devices should be catalogued according to genre
6. In order to drive the demand for eReaders the devices should include searchable title information in the bibliographic record
7. The circulation period for each device should be four weeks, non-renewable
8. Regional Collections should have management oversight of the devices
9. Ten titles should be loaded onto each device
10. The launch of the devices should be supported by training for all staff not only for digital super users of each branch.
11. The offer should be reviewed after six months
12. To fulfill the stipulated requirement in Te Kauroa to help narrow the digital divide, eReaders should be issued free of charge to customers

**Next Step**

After a discussion with the business owners of the project; it was decided that in order to investigate a sustainable procedure for patron requested eBook contents on Kobo Touch
device a second, smaller trial at two of Auckland Libraries branches will be implemented. Twenty devices which had been added to Millennium library system would be provided to both libraries. These devices would then have content added to them from the existing Auckland Libraries eCollection, for the usual borrowing period. Customers would select the content, working with library staff. Staff at the libraries would all receive prior training in the use of the Kobo Touch devices.

This trial is scheduled to begin on November 1, 2014.

References

Hamilton Public Library. (2012) *Kobo eReader*. Hamilton, NZ.


Appendix

Customer Experience Survey Results

How customers found out about the trial

Poster = 56%  Staff = 42%

Technical problems experienced with the Kobo Touch device

No = 86%  Yes = 14%
Customers’ experience with the Kobo Touch device

Ease of use: Very satisfied = 50%  Satisfied = 27%

Training provided by staff

Very satisfied = 44%  Satisfied = 22%
Would customers borrow an eReader again from Auckland Libraries?

Yes = 70%

Would customers pay to borrow an eReader?

Yes = 34%  No = 49%  Did not know = 16%
Changing reading habits

Yes = 52%  No = 31%  Did not know = 17%

Would customers use Auckland Libraries’ eBooks

Yes = 81%
Customers’ satisfaction with the range of contents available

Yes = 54%  No = 33%

Most popular genres

Crime = 21%  Classic = 17%
Romance = 14%  Action = 13%