The expression ‘so five minutes ago’, a disparaging phrase about items or trends that once were in favour but are now passé, came to mind on reading this book. This is not because the book topic is outdated - far from it - but because the rapidity of change in the digital milieu is dizzying for most of us. Just as one grasps a new technological iteration or gadget, a newer and shinier iteration begs for attention. Journal articles in databases are old hat for most librarians, but many still struggle with electronic books, given publisher restrictions and the proliferation of digital devices.

This book provides material of great value, as it gives of an overview of copyright law (admittedly US law); user behaviour in the digital environment; and a focused look at electronic books, electronic journals and digital textbooks. In particular the author concentrates on digital rights management, how librarians can use electronic content and emerging teaching technologies.

In Optimizing academic library services in the digital milieu Brendan Ryan looks at best practices and strategies for academic libraries to use digital devices (and allow users to use them too). By digital devices he means tablets, e-readers, smartphones and similar. Those already employed in academic libraries, and in the electronic resources areas in particular, will be familiar with platform updates from publishers who also seek to keep abreast of rapid technological changes. This book aims to help academic libraries and their clients stay current. Although Ryan at times mentions specific brands and technologies (Kindle, for example), he sets the book out clearly enough so that the principles behind individual technologies are under discussion, rather than the most detailed instructions that can always be found in more up-to-date places than a print book. Besides, the principle is the point: Ryan provides a detailed overview.

Part 2, simply labelled ‘Formats’, is technical but written in clear and understandable language for the layperson. It is technical because, as well as describing the different types of file formats, it addresses topics such as creating e-books and how digital rights management comes into the mix, starting with the browser stack which ‘is made by combining HTML, CSS, and JavaScript and comprises the architecture that renders nearly all electronic content’. Of particular interest to this reviewer is the basis this chapter provides to understand ‘soft-use measures’ of frustrating technological protection such as chunking books into individual chapters.

Part 3 looks at publishing support and partnerships for electronic documents, a direction that many, including Ryan, suggest is a saving grace for academic libraries.

While this book is recommended for academic libraries, the second part about formats is useful for anyone who helps clients come to grips with using library materials on their own digital devices.

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