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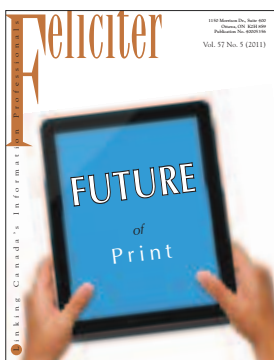
## Front Cover

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Cover Design: Beverly Bard



## Guest Editorial

by Robert Desmarais  
& Lyle Ford



## Future of Print

**Digital advocates have** much to cheer about. Touch-screen tablets are ubiquitous, e-book sales are on the rise, libraries are scanning their collections at a furious pace, young consumers are predisposed to using digital content, and new generations of digital devices are perpetually under development. With the current state of book publishing and the print industry in general, it is not hard to imagine why ever-increasing numbers of people predict the extinction of print.

Certainly we've been down this path before. George Orwell boldly predicted the paperless society in his dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), but when the 1980s actually arrived we were printing on paper in record quantities. While no one knows for certain the extent to which our digital revolution will displace the printed word, there is every reason to believe that print culture will continue to be transformed in new and exciting ways.

The articles we solicited for this issue on the future of print offer critical reflections on some consequences of the digital revolution, but they do not predict outcomes, since the future is obviously unknowable. Merrill Distad considers whether the printed book is really obsolete by calling our attention to several drawbacks of the e-book. Distad readily admits that there are real advantages to using e-books, but he offers us good reasons why old-fashioned books, with covers and printed leaves, are timeless and perfect expressions of technology.

Where the impact of the e-book revolution will be most profound for libraries and readers remains a mystery, but we do know it will continue to affect how annual library budgets are spent and the ways that books, in printed and electronic formats, are used and experienced. But there are other issues that are relevant, particularly to authors and publishers, as Rowland Lorimer maintains in his article.

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### *Guest Editorial continued from page 173*

He wants us to consider how library policies might threaten the financial interests of both authors and publishers. Perhaps the greatest threat comes, though, not from libraries but instead from the large-scale corporatization of the publishing world (a topic for another issue!).

The impact of electronic texts, and the way they are bought and used, informs Kristen Kruse's look at whether it is possible, or even advisable, to compare the usage of print and digital publications in libraries. After reviewing the literature on how library patrons use print and electronic collections, Kruse suggests that librarians ought to overlook differences and focus on similarities.

David Watt invites us to consider how the love of reading underlies any discussion about print technologies. Drawing a parallel between the writings of Johannes Trithemius, a 15th-century scribe, and Sven Birkerts, a 21st-century literary critic, Watt shows that both insist on slow, careful reading as vital to our well-being. Despite that shared insistence, these authors diverge on the question of printed books:

the monk gives validity to the role of manuscript copying over printed books as the proper vehicle for reading, while the critic praises printed books over electronic texts for the very same reason. Watt asks us, as we experience new formats, to pause and think about why we love reading books, and why we want others to do so too.

Like Watt, Nancy McCormack encourages us to think about books in their relation to the individual. Musing on traces left in library books, in the forms of makeshift book-marks and marginalia, McCormack praises the sense of connection with the past and with others that print books can foster. Doubtless, the research she describes might have been done more quickly with digitized versions of the books she searched, but that advantage would entail the loss of the intimate, personal responses she recounts.

We hope this special issue provides you with an opportunity to reflect on the centrality of print culture. The articles consider how technology affects writers, readers, publishers and librarians. These, and other, cohorts seem prepared to continue tracking and influencing how print is changing, and will change, over time. We should not be surprised to see the steady progress of the e-book revolution, with real changes to features like multimedia and portability, but the simplistic notion that most print will migrate to electronic dissemination is not a prediction we're prepared to make. It's a far more complicated situation. The old analogue world of print will live on in libraries – indeed, great research libraries enhance their distinctiveness with their special collections – but the e-book revolution will be far-reaching, and libraries will need to orient their activities toward new reading behaviours and user expectations. 🐼

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Strings and Grips ISBN: 978-0-9812114-1-1

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