Libraries Experience e-book Shortage

What do you want in your stocking Christmas morning? If you are hoping for a Kindle or any other e-reader, you may have to wait in a very long line to borrow an e-book from the Fresno County Public Library. While the easiest thing would be to download the latest and greatest from the Library, you will find you are in fierce competition with your fellow county residents. The reason: a new Scrooge has arrived on the block… publishers who have unilaterally stopped selling e-books to libraries. With no explanation and no justification.

Publishers have decided that e-books in libraries are a threat, so they are either not selling e-books to libraries at all or they sell them at 100 to 300 percent higher than list prices, and often with unreasonable usage restrictions. Currently, only two of the six major publishers, HarperCollins Publishers and Random House Inc., sell to libraries at all.

In Fresno County voters just renewed Measure B, our sales tax funding of 1/8 of one cent, which means the Library can keep current with technological trends, such as e-books, downloads for digital music, movies, etc., and this means customers can continue to enjoy state-of-the-art programs and services. However, publishers refuse to sell e-books to libraries, including Fresno County, so the Library cannot meet your needs. This is discriminatory and confusing because after all, an e-book is no different than a regular book; it is just a different format, like a book on CD or a paperback versus hardback.

Fresno County Public Library does offer e-books and has done so for two years now. But now publishers are preventing the library from offering what is available on the open market, especially best-sellers. Libraries expect to pay the same fair market value as any other customer, not face this unfounded treatment. Did you know that for the blockbuster Shades of Grey, the Library paid approximately $48 per copy for the e-book, whereas you can buy the e-book through Amazon for $9.99?

Publishing is not just another industry. It has special significance to society. Fresno County Public Library complements and, in fact, actively supports publishers and authors by promoting literacy and seeking to spread the lifelong love of reading and learning. We do this by selecting locally relevant materials; through author readings; classes on downloading library e-books; book clubs for all ages; recommendations for future reading; and, other collaborations with authors and publishers and local booksellers.

Libraries also focus on developing the next generations of readers. For example, Fresno County's Summer Reading Program, our annual signature event, is all about

County of Fresno
Fresno County Public Library
Laurel Prysiazny, County Librarian

growing readers.

America's libraries are the "people's university," providing access to reading materials and educational opportunities for the millions who want to read and learn but cannot afford to buy the books they need. To deny library users access to e-books—which libraries are eager to purchase on the community's behalf—is unconscionable.

Libraries have a long-standing relationship with publishers, one that is now troubled and strained. It is frustrating to see publishers banning libraries and their customers this way, especially in a competitive free market system. When was the last time you were turned away at the cash register and told your money wasn't good enough? This is now happening to libraries. And these are the very companies that have sold materials to libraries for hundreds of years.

If this issue troubles you, **consider taking action**. **Write your favorite authors** and let them know you discovered them at your library. Or let them know that you were disappointed you weren't able to find their e-books in your library's online catalog. Or simply let them know how much you value your library and why it's so important to be able to fill our digital bookshelves. Or **write the publishers** using one or more of these sample letters/emails.

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