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The printed, hand-held book will probably never go out of style. However, there are now more and more ways to receive a book, thanks to ever-changing technology.

Over a year ago, the Lied Imperial Public Library received the software "Overdrive" to allow patrons to download audio books to their personal computers, and then on to devices such as MP3, iPod and WMA for their listening pleasure.

Library Director Beth Falla said the software costs \$500, which included training for employees. The library pays an additional \$500 per year to purchase access to the book titles. The program is administered through the Nebraska Library Commission.

The \$500 annual fee is charged based upon a community's population. Many libraries across the state are participating in the program.

The more libraries that participate, the more titles are available, Falla said. There are thousands that may be accessed now.

Three librarians work voluntarily to choose the titles for the Commission. They include fiction, classics and books for every age group.

Here's how it works. A patron must have a library card, but doesn't even need to enter the library to receive the program. Falla said if people have trouble accessing the program, they may receive help over the telephone.

A patron goes to the library's web site, www.imperiallibrary.org. They click on the icon "download audio books," which takes them to the Nebraska Overdrive Libraries website.

Easy instructions let the patron download Overdrive Media Console to their personal computer. The patron may then search for book titles and choose up to four books.

The patron then logs in under the Lied Imperial Public Library, uses their library card bar code and selects the books.

It's just like shopping online, Falla said. You add books to your shopping cart.

When searching for titles, the patron is told which personal device the book is compatible with.

Since the participating libraries share book titles, but don't own them, some titles may be "checked out." The patron is then put on a waiting list.

The patron has two days to access the book on hold, or it is then turned over to the next waiting person. An e-mail is sent to the person waiting for the book title, telling them it's available for downloading.

The patron then downloads the book or books to a personal computer. They then have the choice of listening to it on their computer, or loading it onto an MP3, WMA or iPod device.

After seven days the book is erased from the computer's memory, but if the book is on a device, the patron may keep it indefinitely, Falla noted.

The library board recently voted to purchase more "copies" of certain titles. That's because they may be really popular and have too many "holds" placed on them, Falla said.

The library isn't purchasing any more books on tapes, and is purchasing very few books on CD anymore.

Falla said many people have embraced the Overdrive program over the past 14 months. Farmers in tractors or trucks, commuters to other towns and college students away from Imperial especially have taken to the program, she said.

"It's good. I'm trying to teach some of the older people" about Overdrive, she added.

Looking toward the future, e-books may become a possibility. There are about four companies such as Kindle offering e-books at present. However, they don't share capabilities, retaining their own titles for their own e-book devices.

If the companies ever share capabilities, Falla said libraries will be very interested in offering e-books to patrons. Then people may read the book in page format on their personal computers.