# Kobo ebook reader - a love/hate relationship

May 21, 2010 / Gavin Jackson

ebook gadgets kobo review

Two days ago I purchased a Kobo eBook reader from Borders (Canberra, Australia). It cost AU$199. It is crazy cheap, the eInk diaply is amazing, it has a lot of technical flaws and I love it.

The reader comes with a USB cable and a quick start guide - that's about it really. The device is about the same size as a standard paperback novel (maybe a bit larger), and less than 1cm thick.

It has an SD card slot (non-HC) for loading additional books (beyond the 1GB internal storage). The unit has a nice, solid feel to it - buttons are rock solid and it has a comfortable rubber back.

Navigation is done using the blue button on the lower right of the unit (it is not a touch screen). It comes with 100 eBooks pre-loaded (so you can start playing with it as soon as you buy it), these are classic eBooks from the Gutenbourg project - titles that are outside of copyright.

I still can't find a way to remove them from my device, however. The online store is optional - you can load ePub files and PDF files directly onto the internal storage and optional SD card.

A nice touch is that the device mounts both of these for you when connected by the provided USB cable. Having said that the borders application (that comes in Windows and Mac OSX flavours), provides an ITMS-like interface that allows you to browse and purchase books online (and sync with the Kobo reader).

It does not provide a facility for managing non-borders purchased books (which I think is limiting). The software also allows you to read your purchased books on your computer screen.

There is also an iPhone application that allows you to purchase and read titles on your iPhone (search for "borders" in the app store, it is a free download).

What makes this really cool is that it will sync your purchased books onto each platform - so in a way this is like Steam for eBooks. eBook prices seem (on average) quite reasonable - I purchased a number of novels and business books and only paid between $7-$12 for the privilege.

Popular new releases appear to cost a bit more however (about $20-$26), and technical computing eBooks start looking quite expensive ($50-$60).

I was unable to load technical eBooks that I purchased from Manning and O'Reilly - I'm not sure if this is a defect with the device, or a problem with the way that these publishers have created their ePub documents.

The Kobo technical support was less than helpful (they seemed to think that the only way you can load books is via their software - which is wrong).

PDF documents load and render well, however if you are going to read these documents for a sustained period of time you will want to zoom in and rotate the document into a landscape mode.

The software allows you to do this, however the panning function should be smarter in how it paginates the document - page refreshes take 2-3 seconds and the pan operation moves the document a few lines. This is a deal-breaker for me, making pdf viewing on the device too painful.

That's a lot of negative stuff, however it is very cheap, you can access your purchased books on a number of devices (including the iPad) and the eInk display is beautiful.

I find the display perfect for reading novels before I go to bed, and battery life is nothing short of stunning (7000 page turns or two weeks before a recharge). I was disappointed to find that there was a lack of search and you are limited to one bookmark per book.

Hopefully many of the software related problems will be fixed in firmware updates to the device - it feels that it has been rushed to market.

Due to the technical flaws in the device I was tempted to sell it and purchase something else - however, I don't think there is much on the eBook market to beat it - particularly at this price range.

The general lack of features I feel is good - it allows me to focus on one thing - reading. The quality of the eInk dispay and the awesome battery life means that this gadget is a keeper.

The good:

- Beautiful e-ink screen
- SD card slot
- Price
- Lack of features to distract you
- Good online store, range of authors (including Australian)
- Battery Life

The bad:

- Bluetooth sync only works with Blackberry (you would think it would work with the iPhone).
- Slow ...
- Limited file support
- Does not seem to support ePub documents produced by Manning and O'Reilly
- Lack of features to distract you
- Hard to navigate when reading A4 PDF files (this is where the iPad touch screen interface would come in handy).
- No search
- One bookmark per book
- Customer support (or lack of)

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