

Not Everyone Likes The Internet Archive

You've probably heard of the Internet Archive, but if you are not familiar with it, it is one of the world's largest and busiest websites. Currently ranked 173 by Alexa over the past 90 days, this figure is almost certainly an underestimate.



Broadly speaking, the Internet Archive has two functions: it archives webpages; and is used as a repository by institutions, other archivists, ordinary members of the public, and on its own account. The brainchild of Brewster Kahle, it was set up in 1996 with the goal of archiving every page on the Internet. Well, sort of. Even before the advent of social media when relatively few of us were on-line, archiving every single page of every single website was a Herculean task. Subscription only websites and password protected areas were off limits, and there are protocols that determine which pages, directories and sites may not be archived. This varies. Awhile ago, the London *Daily Mail* [website](#) wasn't being archived, nor was Facebook. The *Find-A-Grave* website is currently off limits to the Internet Archive's WayBack Machine but not to the unrelated [Archive.Is](#).

The [Wayback Machine](#) can be used by anyone, so don't be shy about archiving webpages, especially those you might return to a few years down the line only to find they have disappeared or been totally rewritten.

While archiving webpages is generally considered non-controversial, the Internet Archive has recently fallen foul of a number of publishers for "helping out" bookworms during the worldwide lockdown by setting up the National Emergency Library. Its 446 billion plus webpages include everything from full length feature films, live concerts, sheet music, software, TV programmes and video games to ancient manuscripts in many languages, magazines, newspapers, and books. With old books that

are out of copyright or official publications, there are no legal problems. Even books that are in copyright are unlikely to cause problems unless they have also been published as eBooks, as most are today. Indeed, some may be available only as eBooks.

The creation of the National Emergency Library was announced in [a blog post of March 24](#). All this actually entailed was the suspension of waiting lists for eBooks. Here it gets a bit complicated, but many regular libraries have long offered their members free access to subscription databases such as *NewsBank*; eBooks can also be “borrowed”, but there are restrictions on the number of readers who may access a particular eBook at a particular time.

The creation of the National Emergency Library to get round these restrictions as a temporary measure in a global crisis may have sounded like a good thing to students and others, but to Hachette, HarperCollins, John Wiley and Penguin Random House it sounded like lost profits. Here is their [53 page writ](#) complete with colour illustrations filed June 1 in the Southern District of New York.

The loaded language of this document is a wonder to behold, but although it led to the closure of the NEL, it is unlikely to unduly worry the Internet Archive. These publishers are also being incredibly short-sighted, because like everyone else they appear to have overlooked a better solution to any undoubtedly small dent in their profits caused by the NEL or the Internet Archive generally. Namely, they should lobby governments to pay for book loans out of [newly created debt-free money](#). The coronavirus lockdown has seen governments worldwide conjuring up money [out of thin air](#) to keep their citizens afloat when their livelihoods have sunk, and look, there is no hyper-inflation and the sky hasn't fallen.

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