

E-BOOKS: An Evolving Academic Technology

What?

E-books, or electronic books, are a new methodology and format for publishing the traditional content of printed books and transforming that content from passive print and illustrations into multimedia interactive content. A good explanation of e-books and their current market options can be found at <http://www.sls.lib.il.us/infotech/presentations/ebooks.html> as an Internet available Power Point presentation from the University of Illinois. Complete information on the Open eBook standards is available at <http://www.openebook.org>. A useful site for tracking the commercial market is found at <http://www.ebooknet.com>.

As with any newer technology, initial implementations involve proprietary approaches, in this case relative to standards for the digital book format. A standard has now been developed but it is not widely used by existing e-book vendors.

The term e-book applies to several different aspects of the technology.

- E-book data files format
- E-book content manipulation software
- E-book viewer and download software
- E-book reader equipment

When?

E-books are currently available and the coalition of publishers and Internet providers is expanding at a rapid rate. Microsoft, Barnes & Noble, Amazon, NetLibrary, IT Knowledge have all joined the market. One interesting partnership can be examined at <http://www.bookface.com>. CNET <http://www.cnet.com> provides a constant source of information on the developing standards and market.

Where?

Traditional print publishers, universities, and individual authors are publishing e-books. They are being cataloged and the citations become entries in Web based online catalogs. The catalog records contain URL links to the full e-book content. Publishers offer Web sites where e-books may be read online, "borrowed" from the library or purchased and downloaded to the PC or e-book reader owned by the customer. E-books become part of the content of online courses and library electronic reserves systems.

Why?

E-books will affect many areas of a college or university. They are used both in their digital format and as printed text with the cost of printing transferring from the publisher to the purchaser via his printer and paper.

Libraries can license or purchase vast libraries in e-book format. Visit <http://www.netlibrary.com/>

Inexpensive software allows individuals to transform digital manuscripts into e-book format for the WWW. <http://www.e-ditorial.com/tour/ebooks.html>

E-book readers, personal communication devices, and PCs will provide access to books and textbooks that have been checked out of an e-book library, purchased from an e-book vendor or licensed for use for a period of time. These actions will change the nature of the campus bookstore, the library, textbook sales, resale and ownership.

While the basic e-book is a digital page turning experience, the nature of the "book" is transformed by interactive, multimedia content that cannot be achieved in print format. Additionally, e-book content integrated with course management software provides individual student tracking and assessment. The e-book owner is also provided with notation software to customize the learning experience. The e-book can be taken into the classroom and used interactively with the classroom experience thereby changing the nature of note taking and instruction.

The nature of publishing is transformed by the attributes of an e-book. Editorial corrections can be transmitted at will to current e-book owners and libraries. The facilities and distribution channels required for print book production are gone and changed to servers on networks. The nature of ownership shifts from a physical object to a digital file housed on a personal storage and reading device. The file can be "rented" through a time stamp that renders the file useless at expiration. Should a professor wish to use only a small portion of a text, specialized versions of an e-book can be easily compiled and licensed based on only the desired sections. E-book attributes can lead to "micro" customized publishing thereby changing the traditional concept of "editions."

E-books also affect the nature and requirements for archiving content. Libraries have been archival storage facilities for commercially published books. With the advent of licensed vs. purchased content, questions arise related to archiving content once the profitability of providing the title via commercial server has passed. Add to this the potential role of the university as publisher given that printing and distribution facilities are no longer needed. An Internet server

capable of providing access to an e-book could be the desktop PC of the authoring faculty member. Ownership of intellectual content and responsibility for its access continuity no longer require the staff and facilities of commercial publishers but may transfer to the university employing the author. How do these responsibilities change when the author changes employment? How does such publishing relate to the tenure process? What role is given to the university library or bookstore? How is compensation derived for the author, the university providing reliable access, or the bookstore or library that determines the quantity of access?

E-books may represent the basis for a total redefinition of the nature of a “book” and the organizational structures that maintain and distribute its content. E-books will also redefine the content and instructional use of that content. The URL of a Website is included in the text of an E-book thereby making that Website an essential element of the book.

Clearly universities must examine the potential of e-book publication and determine their role in the creation and access provision to the content, as well as the campus services that will change because of e-book availability.

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