

February 1994

Electronic Publishing: Not Just Digitized Print

Tony Leisner
Dawsons

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Leisner, Tony (1994) "Electronic Publishing: Not Just Digitized Print," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 17.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.1508>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Once Upon a Browse— Electronic Publishing: Not Just Digitized Print

by Tony Leisner (Dawsons)

*Will our grandchildren learn to read
Dick and Jane — oops, Archie and
Veronica — over the internet? — Yr. Ed.*

Traditional print publishing is such a broad field that most of the people employed in it know only their own area and have little understanding of the whole industry. Magazine people know little about books and vice versa. Books take a long time to bring to fruition whereas magazines have short schedules. Journals are more like books than magazines but have an entirely different audience and purpose. Newspapers have another urgency altogether and some articles and series take weeks to develop with daily news running up against minute by minute deadlines. Because of the varied time frameworks involved in publication the industry has adopted electronic tools according to their time pressures. At the forefront have been the newspapers. Reporters create their stories online and the newspaper is actually produced from the reporter's words, text, editorial skill (or lack thereof) and is directly downloaded and set electronically from the terminal with none of the traditional typeset and no paper until the final newspaper is actually printed. In many cases the articles included are directly loaded from wire services and satellite links, again with no paper in between the story and the final product. So, even though the end product is printed, the process is nearly entirely electronic. In the case of some national newspapers there will be a blend of local, national and international stories that will differ from city to city and country to country. This is no different than books with several editions accept that the newspaper might not be easily identified as having several variants. In the case of several editions of a newspaper it helps to remember that the paper itself is just a byproduct and not the product itself. The real product is the database from which the paper was compiled for print. It is the database that

will be the archive from which CD-ROM's, online search systems and documents will be extracted.

In order to understand the implications of electronic publishing we will have to ignore many of our old understandings of publishing and print. While it is true that many of the current electronic publications are so-called page turners, that is you view them a page at a time, this isn't the natural output of electronic publishing. True electronic publishing has no such structure. It is machine access driven and "labels" for finding things are driven by the functions and search systems needed to locate and link various components of the publication content. This means that pages, such as you might be used to locating through a conventional book index, are no longer relevant. Some publishers are putting page numbers in to accommodate our old reading habits but this will change.

This also means that we will have to learn new ways of "browsing" and that not all publications will be successful as electronic publications. There is still a huge market for portability. The ability to carry your reading material to bed, on the plane or to your favorite reading room will still dominate the market for most publishers for a long time to come. Someone has said that the warming effect of the batteries in their laptop while reading in bed was perhaps the only positive attribute of an electronic book. However, for researchers, there is nothing better than the ability to search through a lengthy publication or entire database for a word or phrase that might not have ever been indexed in a print product. Once found, the article or content can be printed on demand, loaded to a file or another database and then be combined with a totally new document and no printed intervention.

What does this mean to acquisition people? Actually nothing new. When you buy a print directory you know that for all practical purposes it has to be out of date by the time you put it on the shelves.



Books In Print from Bowker is just such a case. The CD-ROM version is better since it is more up to date and an online access is best of all. True, the online version is constantly in flux, with new additions and deletions daily, but that currency of information is just what you are paying for. Other publications have and will continue to have this element of up to date timeliness which will result in a fluid database constantly in revision. This is just another instance of electronic publications not being comparable to print. This just reinforces the driving mechanism behind electronic publishing and that will be peoples' willingness to pay for time sensitive information and their ability to adjust to the difficulties of evaluating and acquiring publications with change as their only constant. Companies like General Motors with parts and training manuals that change so often that print isn't possible are the leaders in electronic publishing. Most of what is being produced today for the general public has a long uphill battle to gain readers with changed habits sufficient to create a real market. Acquisitions librarians will be better off focusing on acquiring electronic versions of those publications where change is an attribute not a liability.

Tony Leisner is Special Assistant to the CEO of Dawson Group which owns Quality Books and Dawson Subscription Service in the USA. Leisner is also Head of the Dawson Strategic Planning Group for Europe. ☞