

November 2013

Innovations Affecting Us - Ebooks: The Next Generation

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Recommended Citation

Luther, Judy (1998) "Innovations Affecting Us - Ebooks: The Next Generation," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 10: Iss. 6, Article 16.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3042>

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Innovations Affecting Us — Ebooks—The Next Generation

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Please note — We are looking for a second column editor for *Innovations Affecting Us*. If any of you out there are interested, please contact Katina <strauchk@cofc.edu> or Norm <normd@providence.edu>. — KS



The new generation of ebooks have arrived with the introduction of the **Rocket e-Book** (www.nuvomedia.com) which was launched at **Barnes & Noble** in NYC in October and appears in the current **Levenger** catalog for serious readers. Three additional handheld devices, **Softbook** (www.softbook.com), **Librius** (www.librius.com), and **Everybook** (www.everybk.com) are scheduled to be released in the next few months. In addition the popular **Palm Pilot** (www.peanut.press.com) organizer supports book reading.

For those who remember early readers such as **Dynabooks**, what can we expect from this next round? Prior editions have come and gone and were not successful. What makes this next round different? The manufacturers have cleared several hurdles and still have more to go. My guess is we'll start seeing these on trains and planes among the early adopters.

The technology has progressed for these handheld devices and some of the attractive features include sufficient memory to carry multiple books in one small volume, a backlit screen for reading in low light conditions, the ability to enlarge the print for easier reading and incorporate an electronic dictionary. Designed in a portrait format, some with leather covers, these "books" allow the users to "page" through one screen by clicking to "turn the page" rather than scrolling.

To insure security for the publishers and avoid the piracy found in the music industry, each title is downloaded in a proprietary format (except **Everybook** which

uses PDF) either directly to the device or using the modem in a PC but the book can only be viewed on handheld devices. Manufacturers are partnering with publishers such as **Random House**, **Simon & Schuster**, and **Harper Collins** to provide current books for leisure reading.

Publishers are motivated by savings which amount to 40-60% of the price of a book which normally covers the cost of printing, shipping, handling and returns which run as high as 35%. An added benefit of the electronic environment is the ability to "print" only one copy and not have out-of-print titles.

A new distribution channel

At the recent ebook conference sponsored by the **National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)**, held in Gaithersburg, Maryland, in early October 1998, **Microsoft** invited the device manufacturers to participate in the development of an open ebook standard for both file format and transmission. Currently each device uses a proprietary format and ideally every book should be readable on any device. Drawing an analogy to the video industry, no one wants to be the next Betamax. Lack of compatibility will affect sales and limit widespread adoption.

Softbook and **Everybook** are targeting the professional market and are planning to load material which needs to be updated frequently (such as **Financial Standards Boards**, **FASB** updates) or heavy legal and medical manuals which are unwieldy in print form. These devices will have success within niche markets where the applications make sense.

Peanut Press was founded in 1998 to convert publishers' files into their proprietary format for viewing on the **Palm Pilot**. I find it interesting that they are using a different ISBN number and functioning

as a publishing distributor. The screens on the Palm Pilots are not designed for images so the files must be text only.

What's drawing so much attention is the introduction of the handheld devices—and rightly so—as that will determine the reader's experience. However, ebooks on CD-ROMs have been published for years by companies such as **Modern Age Books** whose President **Chris Pooley** was at **SilverPlatter** in the early years. Their titles include technology guides which can be read on a PC and don't require a handheld device.

Outlook

With enhanced technology and a growing number of publishers involved, there still needs to be a critical mass of titles, (est. 10,000) which is the size of a small bookstore. What's next? Interoperability for both the software and hardware. The major limitation from my perspective is the inability for the content to be accessible via my PC.

Software in development at **Xerox Parc** will enable the reader to search and locate passages they have highlighted from different sources and then link directly to the entire article. This essentially solves the

"This essentially solves the problem of information overload by enabling the user to search highlighted texts and answer the question 'where did I read this?'"

problem of information overload by enabling the user to search highlighted texts and answer the question "where did I read this?" Imagine the boon that such an increase in functionality would deliver. Assuming I could get my professional reading online, I'd be standing in line to buy one!

The other drawback is that this is another device to carry. Although appealing in terms of readability, how much do we want to carry around—a laptop, a cell phone and a reader? Why not optimize the laptop by allowing the reader to discon-

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International Dateline
from page 72

was that the traditional distribution chain in serials publishing had had the effect of keeping publishers, agents, libraries and readers/authors in isolation from each other. The processes of evaluating and deploying electronic journals requires all parties in the chain to have a much greater understanding of the other environments. To date this has not happened, and it was clear from the meeting that this was to the overall detriment of the level of service being provided to the ultimate user of the information, the reader, who also needed considerable support and training. The way forward in the corporate sector may be for individual industry sectors to start to develop some generic guidelines for licensing agreements, along the lines of the pharmaceutical industry, but there are also issues here of resourcing these initiatives.

If nothing else, publishers left the meeting recognising that there was much still to be done, librarians were recognising that everyone else had the same problems, and subscription agents were working out how to take advantage of the situation. 🐼

On the Road
from page 82

we New Englander's say when we see an alligator on the golf course.) We are used to finding cows, moose, deer, foxes, bears, and squirrels, but I have never run into an alligator!

I probably won't see another alligator this year, especially since we've already seen snow. But, I do look forward to next year's conference and a reunion with the "ATG" Alligator that I met this year on the seventh hole. 🐼

Adventures in Librarianship
from page 83

"Yes I know. It's out of stock with the ven ..."
"Atlas of the Birds of Peru."
"Yeah, it's out ..."
"Not in Spanish, in English."
"The vendor doesn't have it."
"Yes. We don't have it either. That's why I ordered it."

Every word a land mine, so as I write this I pray you will understand, that I haven't done anything humiliating with the language, anything that future generations of Krafts will have to carry with them, their heads hung low. You measure your audience. You chose your words. But every act of communication presents a million possibilities, a million opportunities for misstep. If I have tripped, will you forgive me?

"Ned? This is Carlos. Are you still there?" 🐼

And They Were There
from page 62

ing quarters in separate buildings. Among other things, they share staff development activities. With every gain there may be an expense, but for now they are satisfied with the way things are going.

Final panelist was **Ann Palkovich**, Deputy Director, Department of Instructional Improvement and Instructional Technology (also Anthropology Instructor), **George Mason University**. George Mason presents another model. They have created a triumvirate, which includes the computing center, library technology, and instructional technology services. All this is directed by the non-academic campus administrator for information technology. Ann's speech was very positive and energetic. She feels that the merger has eliminated redundant services and brought about better communication. At this time, she also feels that the model is working well and the departments are meeting their goal of providing as much information as possible to as many as possible as quickly as possible. 🐼



Innovations
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nect the screen and hold it in portrait view as a lightweight reader?

Initially the novelty will appeal to those who are gadget oriented. It will take a year or two to amass a sufficiently large number of titles to attract readers. The standards

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issues that will enable any book to be read on any machine once you've bought it also need to be resolved. For the readers to go mainstream, however, they will need to deliver some increased level of functionality that enables us to more easily manage the rapidly growing amounts of information in our lives. 🐼

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