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Pelikan's Antidisambiguation -- "DRM Done Right vs. New and Bright and Shiny"

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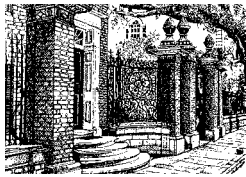
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Pelikan's Antidisambiguation — “DRM Done Right vs. New and Bright and Shiny”

by **Michael P. Pelikan** (Penn State) <mpp10@psu.edu>

I come to you today not to bury DRM but to praise it!

First — amazing as it may seem — I'd like to do a belated but very enthusiastic shout out to the **International Digital Publishing Forum** for bringing us the EPUB format, frequently mentioned in recent episodes of this column.

Among its many virtues are EPUB's support for reflowable text, meaning that as I change text sizes on my reader, the page can reflow and the line endings can cleanly re-wrap (assuming the source text for the digital edition hasn't retained hard hyphens at original edition word breaks). This clean reflowing alone would be enough for EPUB to surpass the Petrified Document Format (PDF) from **Adobe**, about whom, more later.

EPUB's greatest strength is in the packaging and presentation of structured text-centric documents. It handles tables of contents beautifully, as well as footnotes. As an open standard, it serves as a ready target format for document reformatting packages such as the oft-cited-here Calibre. Set it as the default output format in Calibre, and just about anything you throw at it, short of comic books (er, ahem, excuse me — I mean, graphic novels...) comes out “shovel ready.”

Perhaps EPUB's greatest virtue lies in its provision of a common platform for virtually the entire non-**Kindle** world. Every non-**Kindle** reader I can think of supports it. Right away this means that any non-**Kindle** reader can lay open the entire corpus of a couple of millennia of openly accessible writing — some of it very good indeed.

Now, as to **Adobe**: I griped in this column recently about the contortions my digital collection was put through when **Sony** decided to move their Reader Library's format of choice into EPUB. My pique, though understandable, has been forgotten, and all has been forgiven. **Sony** was right: this was the right move. Regarding their fellowship with **Adobe**, well, this seemed inexplicable at first. Why did I need to have the **Adobe** Digital Editions software installed on my computer alongside **Sony's** Reader Library? The benefit wasn't immediately apparent.

I've often spoken for some kind of marriage between a widely adopted open standard



for eBook content with a defensible, maybe even enlightened, approach to Digital Rights Management. Imagine, I once waxed poetic in some public talk, (was it at a long ago **Charleston Conference**? Maybe...), just imagine if you could borrow an eBook from a public library, have its lending period governed by DRM, and at the end of the lending period, simply let the digital object quietly expire on your device...

Well, I'm probably the last person connected with **Against the Grain** to understand it (wouldn't be the first time...), but that's exactly what **Adobe** has accomplished with Adobe Digital Editions. Our Local Public Library accesses a shared, consortial pool of digital book copies, leased through and managed by **OverDrive** (www.overdrive.com). On the strength of my Local Public Library login, I can search, browse, and download available copies of digital book editions. The lending

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period at my Local Public Library is fourteen days. Now the DRM **Rube Goldberg** machine kicks in. The copy of Adobe Digital Editions on your computer is authorized — that means registered — with **Adobe**. There's a login involved. Since the **Sony** eBook store sells eBooks protected by **Adobe** DRM, the **Sony** Reader Library software prompts for your **Adobe** password when first opened. Thus, you tie your **Sony** Reader Library Store account (your **Sony** login) to your **Adobe** login. This, in turn, permits a single sign-on to serve both masters. It all works without having to open both the **Sony** and the **Adobe** packages to complete a transaction or manage the collection.

This same linkage persists on the borrowed books side of things, as well. If you've already installed the **Sony** Reader Library software and the **Adobe** Digital Editions software, you need only log into the library's eBook service (again, managed by **OverDrive**), and you're good to go.

To the end user, the experience is very much like any online purchasing transaction: you search, browse, and select items to go into your "cart." When you're ready, you check out, and the items download. Look in your Reader collection, and voila — there are your borrowed books.

I realize that big time contracting and wheeling and dealing has happened to make this all possible. My purpose here, on the one hand, is to marvel at and celebrate this accomplishment from the perspective of an end user, and secondly, to point out as energetically as I can that the Age of the eBook did not begin with the **Kindle** nor under the New Empire of the **iPad**.

By the way, have you tried reading on an **iPad** yet? I mean really read? A colleague (who has had to endure blistering attacks alleging fanboyism for his origination of a purchase request for an **iPad** to evaluate) has made some of the most scathing comments I've yet seen about the Reading Experience on the new device.

A few days ago he circulated an iconic photograph he took of the **iPad** while waiting for a bus. The picture shows him, taking the picture of the **iPad** with his **iPhone**, perfectly reflected on the mirror-like screen of the **iPad** that he's holding. You can also juuuust make out, amidst the glare, in the background of the screen, some washed-out textual content, completely blown away by the shininess of the screen's surface. One wag who saw the photo commented to the effect of, "Wow! You even get a free giant **iPod Touch** with your six hundred dollar mirror!"

Truthfully, one thing the **iPad** simply is not designed to do is to disappear in your hands the way a good book, or for that matter, a good eBook reader, so beautifully does. The designers don't want to let you forget that you're using it — indeed, they want to remind you at every possible juncture. They probably thought users would get a kick out of seeing themselves reflected in the **iPad** screen using the **iPad**.

But back to the marketing commentary: I don't expect that there will be a version of the **Adobe** Digital Library software or the **iPad** anytime soon, given the depth and sheer bitterness of the bile that has emerged between **Apple** and **Adobe** over the virtues of each other's banner products. Similarly, unless **Amazon** is getting ready to admit that there's a world beyond **Whispernet**, don't expect to see the **Kindle** play ball in this arena, either. If either come to the table, you'll have to be prepared to play on their terms or be left out of the game.

So here's the question of the month: why would anybody with a brain do anything except buy either a **Kindle** or an **iPad** — or both? What in the world can possibly go up against the world's biggest online book retailer or the manufacturer of the world's shiniest lifestyle product line?

The answer is hidden behind the words, "or both." Y'see, what **Amazon** and **Apple** are both trying to do is to lock you, and as much of the private parts of your information as you'll permit them, into their own voracious, all-consuming, all-gratifying content streams. Given the fact that information

about use patterns is, by far, the most valuable commodity transacted on the Internet, my question is this: why are these guys charging us for the privilege of giving them the right to collect hyper-detailed information about our browsing, reading, listening, viewing, shopping, and purchasing behaviors?

Forgive me, but I disagree with the widely held idea that privacy is dead. If privacy were dead, we wouldn't have to click through ginormous screens of tortuous licensing language so we could start using all this great stuff. All that legal gobbledygook is there precisely because we have to give these guys explicit permission to follow whatever it is they want to follow about our behavior patterns — they just want to make it as painful as possible actually to read the license and as painless as possible to click through it and say, "Whatever. Just let me join the club!"

So even though I know that the **Sony** folks and the **Adobe** folks are probably just as voracious as the good folks at **Amazon** and at **Apple**, I'm kind of glad that for the time being I can "borrow" bestsellers through my Local Public Library, download them to my computer, and enjoy them on my current eBook reader of choice — currently the most prosaic of them all: the humble **Sony Reader PRS-300 Pocket Edition**.

Imagine. **Sony** and **Adobe** will gladly let me buy or borrow licensed content under their auspices — but, tethered to my computer, the non-wireless eBook readers of the world — and there are many — will let me combine purchased and borrowed content seamlessly with open digital content I've collated and transformed using well-supported open-source tools.

Some of these digital objects have been in my possession for many years now. My **Project Gutenberg** edition of *Moby Dick* is as well-worn, familiar, and comfortable as my **Penguin Classics** edition. If **Father Mapple** doesn't shiver your timbers as he takes you through **Jonah**, you're not paying attention — and forgive me, **Dr. McLuhan**, but the medium here is not the message. 🍄

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Charleston Conference supporter! As we know, she comes to **ECU** from **Valdosta State University**, where she was Professor in the Master of Library and Information Science Program. **Elaine** holds a PhD in College Teaching from the **University of Florida**, an **ALA**-accredited Masters degree from **Florida State University**, and an MFA in Music History, Literature, and Criticism from the **University of Florida**.

Speaking of changing jobs, **Jack Fisher** resigned from **Valdosta State** as of March 31. His email still works, though, because he will be teaching a class for the library school program in the summer term. **Jack** says that

he and **Elaine** are both hoping to continue their work with the **Charleston Conference!** Whew!

Talking of Library School bam-zowie types, **Heidi Hoerman** has left the classroom to form **Heidi Hoerman LLC Information Services** (www.heidihoerman.com), providing contract book indexing, grant writing, cookbook and recipe editing, and the like. **Heidi** has taught indexing and overseen student index projects for the last fifteen years and she says she is looking forward to putting her indexing skills to work! Referrals are welcome!
www.heidihoerman.com

And the wonderful **Leonard DiSanto** <ldisanto@hwwilson.com> has moved from Atlanta to Anderson, SC. He says that he loves the SC upstate. Bet it's definitely different

from Atlanta! And **Leah Hinds**, my right-hand woman for the **Charleston Conference** and **ATG** is in Anderson too! Great minds!

Did you know that **Ginny Gilbert** <gashgil@gmail.com> has retired from **Duke**? But not to worry, **Ginny** is going to be a **2010 Charleston Conference Mentor!** Thank you, **Ginny!**

Was talking to I-wish-I-had-her-energy **Julie Arnheim** recently. Instead of the **Charleston Conference** last year, she went to a **Scopus advisory board meeting** in Cape Town (what a gorgeous place, can't blame her for that!). Then son, **Richard**, joined **Julie** for a **Botswana safari** for six days (sounds better and better!). **Robert** has graduated from the **College of Charleston** (math) and has moved to Indianapolis. Daughter

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