InformationToday

The Newspaper for Users and Producers of Electronic Information Services | www.infotoday.com

News Briefs

Turning a New Page in Ebooks

by MARJI MCCLURE

There's no question that ebooks have been an interesting part of the publishing industry for several years now, and no one knows for sure what place in history these electronic innovations will hold—or if they will just become history.

Over the years, some publishers—especially those in the STM and IT sectors—have had success with ebook programs geared toward a scientific audience that values the searchability of electronic books. But that same success has eluded publishers who
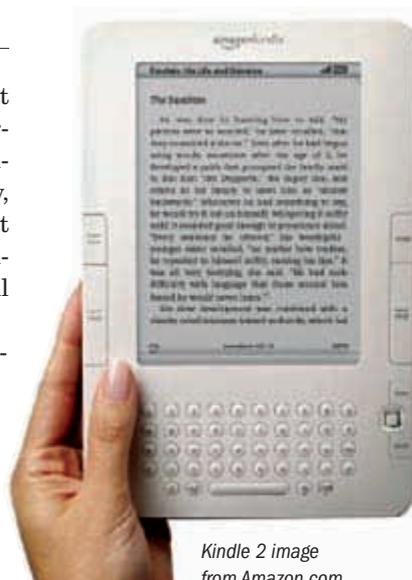
Kindle 2 image from Amazon.com

target both professional audiences and consumers. This customer base, at least until now, has seemed rather hesitant to read a favorite novel or even a business book on an electronic device.

However, Amazon brought renewed attention to ebooks, especially in the consumer market, with its 2007 launch of the Amazon Kindle and, most recently, the February release of the Amazon Kindle 2. The newest Kindle features new functionality, such as the ability to turn pages quicker and a longer battery life.

Amazon then added to the ebook buzz with the launch of its iPhone and iPod touch applications for the Kindle. Users can download the applications for free from Apple's App Store and gain access to more than 240,000 books.

Moving Mainstream

This recent news about the Kindle (and the new iPhone application) may signify that ebooks are moving

Thomas Publishing Takes a Digital Spin

by BILL GREENWOOD

The name Thomas Publishing has been on the lips of engineers and purchasing agents for more than 100 years, thanks to the *Thomas Register of American Manufacturers*, a sort of Yellow Pages for industrial companies seeking bearings, motors, valves, and other parts. Now the company is working to maintain its stature in an increasingly online world.

"We continually invest in research to really understand our marketplace on both the buying side as well as the selling side," says Linda Rigano, executive director of strategic services at Thomas-Net, a division of Thomas Publishing Co. "We understood, from the kinds of research, that that's where people are going. They're going online."

Securing the Mobile Landscape

by PHILLIP BRITT

As the work force becomes more mobile, security becomes a more critical issue from a corporate perspective.

While an increasing number of handheld devices have computer-like capabilities, including internet access and email, the main device to secure is still the laptop, according to John Pescatore, vice president and analyst for Gartner, Inc.

BlackBerries, PDAs, and computer-capable mobile phones (including the popular iPhone) all have different operating systems, so it's

Inside

Check out the highlights from the latest conferences beginning on page 24.

Turning a New Page in Ebooks

The Amazon Kindle 2 is whisper-thin and lightweight.

into the mainstream, which is great news for publishers that want to get their content into the hands of as many users as possible.

But what is even more encouraging is that the Kindle could signify a bright future for ebooks, according to John Blossom, president and senior analyst of Shore Communications, Inc. "This is certainly the beginning of the mass market era for ebooks," he says. "When I say 'this,' I am saying the introduction of the Kindle into iPhones. It takes it out of a pond of a half million Kindle users to about 13 million iPhone users as a potential audience."

Overall, these latest happenings may have given both the publishing and library communities the solid foundation they need to build ebooks into a long-term growth business. This time, the ebook resurgence could be a viable and profitable long-term proposition for the publishing and library sectors.

"Publishers have to love what's happening with ebooks on Kindle because you can charge $10 or $15 for a Kindle title and essentially it falls to the bottom line," says Blossom. "There's no inventory risk. Publishers are beginning to appreciate the idea that ebooks can take some of the risk out of publishing; that you don't necessarily have to go to gigantic print runs to get gigantic market penetration as ebooks take off."

Rich Rosy, vice president and general manager of institutional solutions for Ingram Digital, says his company has seen a renewed interest and acceptance of ebooks from both the publishing and library communities. "Publishers have accepted the e-trend and they're putting the majority of their content, if not all of it, as a digital file to different providers, such as Ingram," he says. "They're putting the front list out, which they had been hesitant to do, and they're changing their production cycles to actually develop the digital content first and then they're sending it to the printer and/or the digital provider."

Rosy says that the change in mind-set has mainly occurred during the last 6 or 7 months. "There is more of a conscious effort and plan to make their content available digitally. It's becoming more of 'we've got our strategy now.'"

A stronger movement in support of ebooks is also reflected in a change of business strategy by Ingram's library customers, according to Rosy. He says that in the past, libraries purchased ebooks with grant money as part of a pilot program, but funding the electronic titles was never part of the libraries'

Sharper Display of Images and Photos
Kindle's high-resolution screen now boasts 16 shades of gray, so images and photos are sharper and clearer than ever.

Read in Sunlight with No Glare
Kindle's screen reflects light like ordinary paper and uses no backlighting, eliminating the glare associated with other electronic displays. As a result, Kindle can be read easily in bright sunlight as in your living room.

Adjustable Text Size
Because one size doesn't fit all, you can increase the text size of your favorite book or periodical with the push of a button. If your eyes tire, simply increase the font size and continue reading comfortably. Kindle has six adjustable font sizes to suit your reading preference. Now every book in your library can be large print.

Read-to-Me Feature
With the new text-to-speech feature, Kindle can read every newspaper, magazine, blog and book out loud to you, unless the book is disabled by the rights holder. You can switch back and forth between reading and listening, and your spot is automatically saved. Pages automatically turn while the content is being read, so you can listen hands-free. You can choose from both male and female voices which can be sped up or slowed down to suit your preference. In the middle of a great book or article but have to jump in the car? Simply turn on Text-to-Speech and listen on the go.

Improved Newspaper Experience
Using Kindle's new 5-way controller, you can quickly flip between articles, making it faster and easier to browse and read the morning paper. Want to remember the newspaper or magazine article you just read? Clip and save entire articles for later reading with a single click.

Faster Page Turns
Pages now turn 20% faster on average.

Sharper display with 16 shades of gray

Amazon Kindle 2 users can keep up with the news from The New York Times *and clip articles to read later.*

overall budgets. "Libraries now have an electronic budget, besides journals, and they're also looking at it as part of their collection strategy," he says.

Libraries may be more comfortable making such commitments since publishers seem to be doing the same. When speaking with customers, Rosy says conversations surrounding ebooks today are different than they were in recent years. "It isn't as much anymore, 'should we do this?'" he says. "It's really now 'how are we going to do this to maximize its effectiveness in our institution and/or in our publishing house?'"

Technological Effectiveness

The Amazon Kindle and other similar devices have given publishers a viable platform on which to provide their ebook content, and users may be intrigued by the prospect of testing the waters with such gadgets. But if and until we get to the point where a large segment of the population owns these devices—and at a price of $359 for the Kindle 2, that could take awhile—industry watchers agree that making ebooks accessible via a wide range of formats may be a more effective strategy.

"The technology needs to be there to give publishers con-

trol," something that publishers wanted, says Abe Dane, president and COO of Tizra, Inc., a company that helps organizations get their content online. Dane says Tizra's model enables publishers to provide access to various pieces of ebook content (from a completed text to a single chapter or page) via a web platform instead of a proprietary channel, such as an electronic reader device. Tizra's technology is accessible on any device that has a web browser, so users can read ebooks on anything from a desktop computer to a mobile phone, he says.

"The important thing is the [delivery] channel, and that people can use the hardware that they already have," says Dane. "My feeling is the web is a pretty good standard. It has been adopted rapidly and [allows users] to work the way they're used to." He says researchers have been comfortable researching online publications for several years, but that doesn't mean publishers who focus on this segment have been resting on their laurels.

Expansion in Established Sectors

Both Springer, with its SpringerLink platform, and O'Reilly Media, with Safari Books Online, have enjoyed success with their ebook of-

ferings in recent years, especially since their customer bases include researchers and professionals who are technologically savvy and recognize the value of the search capabilities electronic publications afford. Both companies remain committed to their ebook initiatives and continue to grow this segment of their businesses.

Springer, a global scientific publisher, launched its program in 2006 with 10,000 titles; there are now more than 30,000, and the company is adding about 5,000 each year, according to George Scotti, director of channel marketing for Springer. In 2008, Springer had 130 million full-text downloads for ebooks and ejournals combined. "We're finding that about 25% of our usage is now coming from ebooks, even though we have far less ebook titles than journal titles," he says. "Ten percent of our existing customers are subscribing to ebooks."

Springer's ebooks are available as PDFs and can be uploaded to electronic readers in the marketplace. Springer also has a relationship with Amazon Kindle with roughly 20,000 to 25,000 titles available, says Scotti. He says professionals other than researchers may be attracted to titles on Kindle.

Amazon brought renewed attention to ebooks ... with its 2007 launch of the Amazon Kindle. ...

Safari Books Online is a subscription reference library that launched in 2001 as a joint venture between O'Reilly Media and Pearson, an educational publisher. Targeted to an audience of developers and IT professionals, the online library contains books, rough cuts, short cuts, articles, and videos. The collection totals more than 8,000 pieces of content, available online as PDF downloads ranging from individual chapters to entire books. (O'Reilly and Pearson also sell ebooks separately.)

In February, Safari Books Online announced a new website (m.safaribooks online.com) where users with mobile phones (from the iPhone to Nokia, BlackBerry, and Windows Mobile devices) can access the publisher's content wherever and whenever they want it. "In our most recent survey, 81% of our customers said they use mobile devices to reference books and other kinds of personal relevant content," says Jeff Patterson, CEO of Safari Books Online. "If you think of the audience we serve, these are people who are most likely to use these mediums to access content. We're talking developers, network administrators. It stands to reason they would be among the early adopters."

Patterson says, "For people who are very conscious of how they spend their

Safari Books Online is beginning to offer its ebook content on mobile devices.

time, this gives you the opportunity to commute and have access to this content; to stand in line at the bank and have access to this content. All these things are ways in which electronic technology enables people to have the benefit of access to a broad variety of content and have the flexibility to read it online and offline."

Amazon.com offers a range of ebook subjects, from information technology to dog training.

The Sony Reader is available in a few colors and with variable service plans.

Springer features an option for readers to sample a selection of ebooks on its Free Reads page.

According to Patterson, one reason why ebooks are becoming increasingly popular is that the technology for viewing content continues to improve on everything from desktops to mobile devices.

Technological improvements are likely to lead to increased interest in and adoption of ebooks. Scotti says the SpringerLink platform will be relaunched this year with new functionality, including semantic linking ("If you like this, you will also like …") and a "look inside" feature that lets users take a peek inside a publication before they decide to download it.

Springer is also launching the My-Copy program, a print-on-demand feature powered by SpringerLink. If a library or institution subscribes to the database, its users can request their own copies, which can be produced via print on demand for less than $30. The average price of a Springer print book is about $100 to $150.
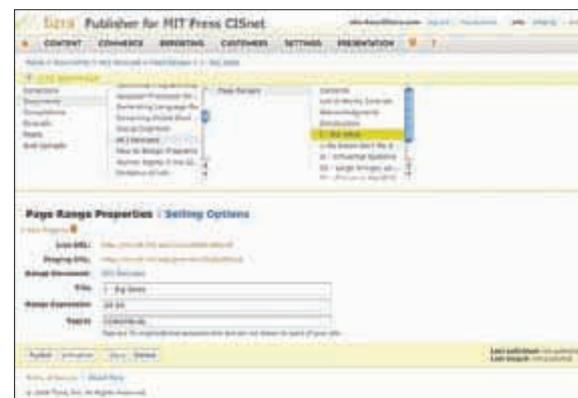
Increased Usage

Technology and accessibility have combined to become what could be the winning formula for ebook success, according to Patterson. "Until the last year, the reading experience [on an ebook reader] wasn't very good and the buying experience was worse," he says. "I think things have come a long way—I would point to the Amazon Kindle and the Apple iPhone." Both are undoubtedly helping to increase adoption, he says.

> *While the growth of ebooks is now moving in the right direction, … that movement may not be as rapid as some expect.*

"The usage [of ebooks] continues to grow to the point where it's no longer 'is the usage there?'" says Rosy. "It's now, 'let's talk about how this content is being used.' That's the next phase of this transition. Are the users getting what they need? How is it being used? The first step was 'is it really being used? Do I want to invest if it's not being used?' That has passed now."

Yet Rosy cautions that while the growth of ebooks is now moving in the right direction as more and more library patrons use ebooks, that movement may not be as rapid as some expect. "Is it going to be skyrocketing? I don't think so," he says. "I think it's going to be a gradual increase because we're talking about a conservative

Tizra, Inc. offers publishers control over their ebook content, from packaging it to selling it.

group and they need to make sure every dollar they spend is maximized."

In addition to an increase in usage, a creative increase in the functionality of ebooks will most likely also be on the horizon. Blossom says using ebooks to create a true multimedia experience (complete with video clips) has not yet been fully explored. "Nobody's yet quite ventured into what an ebook might be at the intersection of web technology and traditional book technology as it will probably be done in the future," he says. "We will see where that leads."

One path could be that of another fairly recent technological advance: social media. "One of the gaps in ebooks is the ability to share, the ability to build community around it," says Blossom, adding that there is potential to build communities and events around ebooks much like traditional book clubs have done for years. "The future of ebooks will be better integration of web technologies and more capabilities to share and collaborate and build insight and enthusiasm through other people who are reading the book," he says. "I think the ebook industry will be very exciting a few years from now as we begin to get into the sharing, the collaboration and integration capabilities of these books."

Marji McClure is a freelance writer based in Connecticut. Send your comments about this article to itletters@info today.com.