

Chapter 33

The Future of the Printed Book

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ABSTRACT

The printed book was widely believed to be “dead” in the 1990s, but sales continue to remain brisk till today. Studies have shown that the advent of e-books will pose as a threat to the printed book; however, despite the increase in sales of e-books, readers still believe that printed books will never become extinct. This chapter aims to examine the various alternatives to the printed book, and explore the implications of the future for the book publishing industry and other players. The shift of physical books into digital content format has resulted in a significant change in perspectives of business models in the book publishing industry. In addition, as with any paradigmatic shift in technologies, there are implications and strategic reactions to the impact on the various affected players in an industry’s eco-system.

INTRODUCTION

The printed book was widely believed to be “dead” in the 1990s, but till today sales of printed books continue to remain brisk (Staley, 2003). However, the scenario of the end of the printed book is still a possibility in the future, with the increasing

usage of digitisation. The Internet allows for the choice of online versions and electronic books, with the benefit of updated versions and revisions to be easier and more cost-effective to implement (Publishing Industry Profile, 2009).

Book publishers are increasingly utilising the Internet as part of their business by diversifying their products to customers in other media formats,

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and reaching out to new target markets (Publishing Industry Profile, 2009). It is indeed more cost-effective to produce online versions of text or books, as information online can be shared by two or more people and used at the same time at the same costs. In fact, the cost to reproduce the same e-book for all readers is next to nothing, as opposed to the print version. Furthermore, digital technology can allow “artists, writers and other creators of content to maintain greater control of their work, and keep more of the proceeds from it” (Staley, 2003). Thus, with digitisation, making e-books cheaper and easier to reproduce and distribute simultaneously to all readers, will the future of printed books be at risk?

On the other hand, computers and other new technologies may boost the ability of book publishers to produce and distribute printed books, which ensures the future of printed books. According to Staley (2003), computers may change the production and distribution of printed books but they will have little effect on the physical appearance. With the print-on-demand technology, for example, although the written text is kept electronically, when a customer wants a copy, it can be printed and bound, and then shipped to the customer as a printed book. Staley (2003) believes that printed books will be part of the future; it would simply be “idle in electronic form until ready to be made material in the printed book form”. In addition, according to Staley (2003), if information remains an intellectual property, then “authors and publishers will continue to maintain control over this property via the best available technology: the printed book”.

This paper aims to examine the various alternatives of the printed book, and explore the implications of the future for the book publishing industry and other players. The first part will cover the literature review of the printed book’s alternatives. We will explore the shifts of the business models in the book publishing industry in the second part, followed by its impacts on the book

publishing eco system. The paper will conclude in whether there is a future for the printed book, or will it be replaced by its other alternatives.

BACKGROUND

Literature Review

Many people are still using books in print since centuries ago because they believe that the printed book is more traditional and convenient in terms of effectiveness in usage (Zahda, 2007). Ventura (2005) states that his “central point here is that we are using the electronic environment to find the books we want, but we will not replace books with electronic, digitized reading. It is uncomfortable to read from screen for any length of time”. Reading a printed book is more comfortable, convenient and sensual for readers.

Our daily lives started to change to become more digitized because of the advancement of Internet and computer technology. This has increased the diversity of many digital products available in the interactive digital media (IDM) market (Zahda, 2007). E-books are one aspect of these technologies and it can be defined as “text in digital form, or book converted into digital form, or digital reading material, or a book in a computer file format, or an electronic file of words and images displayed on a desktop, notebook computer, or portable device, or formatted for display on dedicated e-book readers” (Rao, 2003).

Oghojafor (2005) highlights that e-book publishing can help save money for both the authors and the consumers. From the perspective of the authors, they can correct any mistakes at any time without costs. Moreover, consumers can obtain any updates of the book and supplementary contents. E-books also have more attractive features such as images, animation, audio, video and hyperlinks than the printed books, and readers can zoom in and out of the e-book pages.

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