

Cover Story

"I can draw two major conclusions from my...experiment with E-books in the biology classroom. First, students found E-books easy to use and beneficial. Every poll respondent recommended E-books, and all but one wanted other courses to offer an E-book option. Second, E-book problems that arose seem solvable in the near future."

The new E-book readers are proving tough to sell, and E-books are proving even tougher to produce. In 2000, leading E-book reader production company Gemstar-TV Guide International sold only 60,000 units, each priced between \$300 and \$700 dollars. Susan Kevorkian, a publishing industry analyst, predicts that E-book device sales worldwide will only hit 1.7 million by 2004, a sales figure which is considered by publishing industry experts to be low. In addition, the number of companies attempting to offer E-book text and devices is declining.

Are You Ready E-Books in t



Dr. Eric J. Simon

Poor sales of E-book reader devices has little to do with the poor sales of E-books, however. Sales of E-books are expected to generate just \$70 million in revenue during 2002. According to an article recently published in *Information Week*, "In a February 2002 presentation at the [Jupiter Research media forum] publishing execs gathered in New York and made it clear that the market for E-books is a nascent one that doesn't figure to mature any time soon....Larry Kirshbaum, chairman of Time Warner Trade Publishing, told attendees that the industry has underestimated the technical challenges involved and that even converting a digital file into an E-book format has proved more complex than anticipated."

Does the same gloomy forecast hold true for the use of E-books and E-book readers in the college classroom? Several textbook publishing companies, as well as some publishing industry analysts are actually bullish on the use of E-technology in college classrooms. Why? A study conducted at Fordham College may hold the answer.

In early 2001, Dr. Eric J. Simon, a biology professor at Fordham College, asked for volunteers in his biology class to try reading their books on Rocket E-book Readers, 22 students volunteered. At the end of the semester Dr. Simon surveyed his students about their experiences and preferences with E-books. Here are some of the questions and answers.

- Would you recommend using an E-book in college courses to a friend?
Percent Yes = 100

- Do you wish other courses offered an E-book option?
Percent Yes = 95
- Would an E-book option ever affect your selection of a course?
Percent Yes = 58
- If you knew that every one of 4 courses that you were taking next semester had the option of using an E-book, would you be willing to spend \$199, in addition to any textbook costs, to purchase one?
Percent Yes = 84

sumer-book sales.

Publishers give several reasons why E-textbooks will eventually be used in the college classroom. Perhaps the most important reason is that E-books can be easily updated and corrected. At the beginning of October 2000, the Association of American Publishers (AAP), an important trade asso-



Gemstar's REB 1100

Why For the Classroom?

by P.D. Lesko with reporting by Diane Calabrese

Dr. Simon also asked students what features the students used. The percent of students reporting using the features follows.

- Glossary lookup 65 Percent
- Bookmarking 55 Percent
- Highlighting 50 Percent
- Annotation 40 Percent

It is on the basis of other market research, as well as surveys like this one that publishers continue to promise E-books will enter and permeate the classroom. They offer staggering projections for E-textbook sales by the middle of this decade.

"I think the opportunity for general-interest fiction and nonfiction is more limited than a lot of publishers realize," says Robert Hertzberg, an analyst at Jupiter Research, recently quoted in a piece on E-books published in *Forbes*. "But the opportunity for textbooks and professional books will, over time, be substantial."

According to Jupiter Research, E-books will make up about 6.5 percent of college textbook sales by 2005, versus less than two percent of con-

ciation for the book industry, launched Accuracy e-line. A reader supplies information about a book and describes the potential error and where it appears at Accuracy e-line form. The AAP school division created the online correction form. Most of the 50 members of the school division are publishers. *The Journal of Geoscience Education*, published by the National Association of Geoscience Teachers runs a regular column titled "Misconceptions," which focuses on errors in textbooks. Add to this the fact that textbook publishers are regularly pilloried in the mainstream media over textbook errors, and over the time it takes to correct such errors in subsequent editions, and it's not difficult to understand why publishers seek E-book adoption much like Spaniards seeking El Dorado.

Eryn Brown, in her article titled "Who's Afraid of E-books" published last February in *Forbes* magazine writes: "It makes sense to take textbooks digital. Today's universities are almost totally wired. Distributing editorial content electronically is far cheaper than manufacturing a book and carting it to distributors. According to the National Association of College Stores, printing, warehousing, and delivering a college textbook eat up about one-third of the revenue the book ultimately generates. Delivering material to computers (education publishers are taking a wait-and-see approach to handheld readers) cuts expensive



Gemstar's REB 1200

inventories. It also simplifies making updates and corrections.”

But just as the conquistadors encountered bumps in the road to El Dorado, there are obstacles in the path to E-textbook adoption. They begin with the initial cost attached to the purchase of an E-book reader. Weighing 19 ounces, the REB1100 is about the size of a paperback book and is priced at \$299. The REB1200, about the size of a hardback book, weighs 33 ounces and costs a hefty \$699. Critics say that price is too high for a single-purpose, mass-market device. Dan O'Brien, senior analyst for Forrester Research, a company which specializes in the technology marketplace, said, “We think there will be some novelty interest, but they're priced very high for quick consumer uptake and don't really deliver the goods in terms of readability, selection of content and ease of use.”

Gemstar-TV Guide International and Thomson Learning are trying to tap the mainstream audience through a nationwide advertising and marketing campaign. Oprah Winfrey has promoted Gemstar's REB1100 on her television show. She gave away 350 devices to the audience. To date, conversely, none of the major college textbook publishers has launched an E-textbook adoption/purchase mar-

Thus, it appears that college students are ready and willing to shoulder the cost of the new E-book technology. However, the technology behind both the hardware and software remains problematic.

keting campaign aimed at college faculty and/or students.

However, the higher education marketplace is certainly a niche that already supports—even mandates in some cases—that students purchase high-priced supplemental products and materials. The state of Massachusetts, for example, is moving ahead with a plan that requires all public-college stu-

dents to own laptop computers. It would be a small step to include E-book reader devices in similar state- or college-wide information-technology plans and initiatives.

According to the survey conducted by Fordham biology professor Eric Simon referred to earlier in this article, 84 percent of the students surveyed responded that they would be willing to spend \$199 for E-books *in addition* to money spent for printed textbooks. Furthermore, in a 1998 study conducted by Dr. Stanley Wearden, an associate professor of journalism at Kent State University in Ohio, found that “the 276 students in our sample would be willing to spend, on average, about \$600 for a portable electronic device for reading books. When compared to a new textbook costing \$40, they would be willing to spend, on average, up to \$45 for an electronic version of the text, provided it had the right features.

Freebies in the Land of Electronic Books

THERE ARE FANTASTIC opportunities to use E-books without charge. Bartleby.com (www.bartleby.com) offers reference standards such as the King James Bible and Gray's Anatomy. Search them without cost. Fast full-text searching is an exciting benefit of E-books. No paper concordance can match the rapid path to specific lines of text.

Bartleby.com recently added the complete 70 volumes of the Harvard Classics and the Harvard Classics Shelf of Fiction. Search for a passage in *A Sentimental Journey* (Laurence Sterne) or *Fruits of Solitude* (William Penn). The site brings a wealth of research resources within reach of anyone with access to the Internet.

A commercial site, Bartleby.com, knows some readers will want what it calls a “physical book.” It makes it easy for buyers to purchase through links to Amazon.com and Alibris.

Many university libraries also offer electronic versions of books at their web sites. University of Texas has more than 34,000 volumes available (www.lib.utexas.edu/books/etext.html). But individuals without a tie to the university can forget about getting past the welcome screen. Still, the message is clear. Find out what your institutional or municipal libraries provide electronically, and do not be deterred by barriers in other places.

At the Chawton House Library web site (www.chawton.org) readers can find electronic versions of books by Jane Austen's predecessors and contemporaries, such as Francis Jacson's *Isabella* and Harriette Wilson's *Paris Lions* and *London Tigers*. The “Novels on Line” portion of the Chawton site genuinely merits the mark of marvelous. Novels can be downloaded in HTML, Word document or PDF format, the visitor's choice. The visitor also gets a hint of the look and feel of the original book because the covers and first pages are reproduced. The site is free to all comers.-- *Diane Calabrese*

What Makes an E-Book Tick?

FOR MORE INFORMATION about the technology that makes E-books possible—in all their forms—the E-books.org (<http://E-books.org>) Web site, a non-commercial product of Kent State University (Ohio) Institute for Cyberinformation and FX Palo Alto Laboratory, Inc., provides a good starting point. The ambitious agenda of TeleRead (www.teleread.org), an organization that emphasizes its nonpartisan nature, sees electronic books as a way to accomplish many things. Most of all, it wants to foster more reading among those least able to afford books. Essentially, the organization would like to see low cost access to digital libraries with E-book reading devices that cost as little as \$50.—*Diane Calabrese*

When compared to a used textbook with a cost of \$24, students would be willing, on average, to spend up to \$26 to 'lease' the same version in electronic form for one semester, provided it had the right features."

Thus, it appears that college students are ready and willing to shoulder the cost of the new E-book technology. However, the technology behind both the hardware and software remains problematic. To begin with, standardization of file format for E-books remains elusive. Yet another bump in the road to widespread E-book adoption in the college classroom is the rapidly evolving E-book reader device technology. Anyone who can remember eight-track tapes, or at least cassettes, should be skeptical about the immutability of "standardized" devices. This will mean that those who invest in E-books and E-book reader devices should expect the added expense and inconvenience of keeping up with E-book reader hardware and software upgrades.

There are, of course, device-independent E-books, as well. Might this be the answer for the already wired college student, faculty member and classroom? Device-independent E-books are often Web-based. One major advantage is that such E-books can also be published on CD-ROMs, DVDs, or other "portable" formats. The main drawback is that behind any Web-based technology there may be a struggling Web-based business. For instance, one major E-book vendor of device-independent E-books was netLibrary, which until its recent bankruptcy in November 2001, courted the academic library market as one of its core clientele. The final closing on the sale of netLibrary's eBook Division and its MetaText eTextbook Division assets to Online Computer Library Center took place in February of 2002. For the foreseeable future, E-book users in the classroom have a choice between de-

vice-dependent and device-independent E-books.

Finally, there is the fact that people like the feel of books. Readers have coveted and paid a premium for printed books since the invention of the printing press. Do textbook publishers really want to eliminate the printed textbook? The answer may be found in current E-book pricing strategies. For the moment, E-books typically retail for a mere 10-15 percent less than the cost of a new textbook. Thus, the average E-book is priced well above the cost of the average used textbook. As long as this pricing strategy remains in effect, publishers

are making a clear statement that E-books are meant to supplement printed texts, not to supplant them.

Despite all of these bumps in the road, promotion and production of E-books, in all forms, proceed. What can the faculty member expect over the course of the next two to three years with respect to the integration of E-books in the classroom? Dr. Simon from Fordham puts it best in a piece he wrote about his study for *Syllabus* magazine in December of 2001:

"I can draw two major conclusions from my...experiment with E-books in the biology classroom. First, students found E-books easy to use and beneficial. Every poll respondent recommended E-books, and all but one wanted other courses to offer an E-book option. Second, E-book problems that arose seem solvable in the near future. For example, the poor quality of visuals can be improved by the use of more recent hardware. If E-books are to gain a foothold as a standard educational tool, though, prices for color E-book reader models will have to drop.

"...The biggest hurdle to the widespread use of E-books in the classroom is the lack of available E-titles from textbook publishers. A chicken-and-egg paradox is evident: Publishers hesitate to introduce more titles until E-books are widely used, but widespread use remains unlikely with so few titles available. For now, courses that utilize public content, whether in the public domain or instructor-written, can make up for insufficient commercial publications.

"Once this final software piece of the E-book puzzle is in place, college students [and faculty] may enjoy a future where versatile and convenient E-reading devices replace [or supplement] the cumbersome burden of texts that currently weigh down their backpacks."