

Are Textbooks **OBSOLETE?**

An Education
in the Impact of
Electronic Textbooks



The University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh is pioneering a new process for delivering information electronically, funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The process will allow professors to create textbooks customized to individual courses and teaching styles. The move is being pursued to enhance quality and increase affordability of higher education; the move to electronic textbooks also supports the university's dedication to adopting sustainable practices.

Meredith College in Raleigh, N.C., has been testing different reading technology software for students for the past several years. The process has been headed by Jill Triana, coordinator of disability services, and Cheryl Todd, academic technology specialist. “This is the way that higher education is going,” says Triana. “In the next 10–20 years, I foresee e-textbooks will dominate the market.”

Marist College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., is a comprehensive liberal arts college known for its use of technology in and outside the classroom. Josh Baron, director of academic technology and e-learning, says: “I strongly believe that we will see a migration toward electronic content over the next 3–5 years given the power that comes with digital content that can be updated in real time.”

However, he adds that there are barriers to this adoption. These include finding the “killer app” that can best approximate the way humans are used to accessing information and overcoming the propensity of students—even younger ones—to gravitate toward the printed word. “Many studies are showing that students like electronic books and content, but ultimately insist on being able to print it out at some point,” he says.

Still, although evidence continues to suggest that students and consumers in general are not yet ready (if they ever will be) to entirely give up print as an information source, e-readers, e-technology, and e-textbooks are becoming increasingly common.

Cost is a major impetus behind this shift. The recession and student concerns about the cost of textbooks have been big drivers, according to Trevor James, faculty chair for business programs at Chicago's North Park University School of Adult Learning. James says that many courses have been adapted to provide students with online content rather than requiring them to purchase books. “Our focus is working with adults and graduate students; we're always consciously looking for ways to keep things affordable as our students come back,” he says.

In addition to cost, as consumers become more familiar with the options that technology provides in terms of personalized access to information and accessibility anytime, anywhere, there is growing demand for digital content from many factions.

Rik Kranenburg is president of the higher education, professional, and international group at McGraw-Hill Education. “There's a wholesale transition building steam around the



Chicago's North Park University School of Adult Learning is always looking for ways to make its program more affordable, and eBooks provide one way to lower student costs.

way content is distributed and then accessed by students and teachers, and there are multiple formats, multiple devices, [and] multiple distribution channels," says Kranenburg. "The combination of print and digital offerings does very impressive things; it opens up new opportunities to make instruction and study more effective, more efficient and more personalized," he says.

It's the transition that the publishing industry is well aware of. Iam Williams is director of custom learning solutions, higher education, at John Wiley & Sons, Inc. "We realize that the concept of reading a textbook cover to cover is all but dead at this point," says Williams. "By providing more-flexible access, we really deliver just the content that, at any point in time, somebody needs, without having all of this excess stuff that is not needed at that given time."

Schools across the country are looking at new ways to deliver content to their students. This is a major shift with predictable impacts on a number of key constituencies.

McGraw-Hill believes that offering a combination of print and digital opens up new opportunities to make instruction and study more effective, more efficient, and more personalized.

MULTIPLE IMPACTS

This shift from print to digital and the expectation of more-flexible dynamic content is impacting universities, publishers, students, and instructors in varied yet intersecting ways.

Adoption by universities ranges widely, notes Todd Eckler, EVP of print and publishing at North Plains Systems in Toronto. "What I'm hearing is that they don't know the best way of going about doing this. Some universities are drawing lines in the sand: 'As of this date, we will not be using any print materials.' But, when you dig underneath the hood, that position is overridden by some department levels. 'OK, you send it to me electronically, but I'm just going to print it out.'"

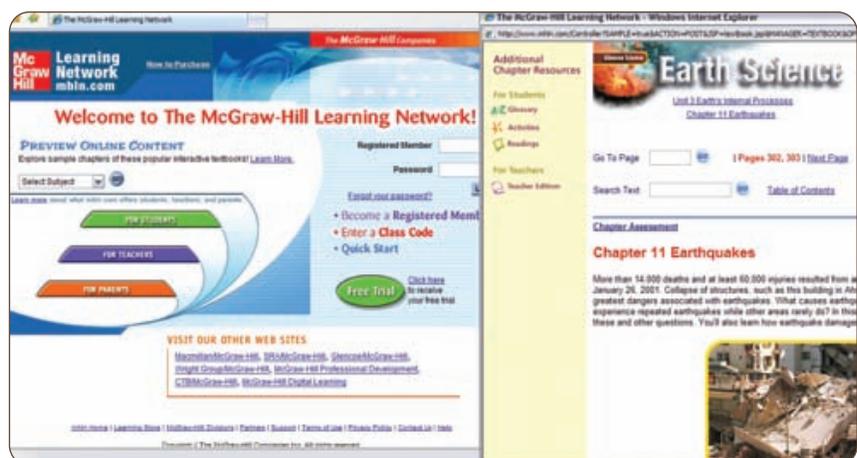
"Universities are getting pressure from the students and from the parents

in terms of costs, and they're looking for the publishers of the content to provide them some options and solutions to be able to solve that for them," says Eckler.

Frank Lyman is a spokesperson with CourseSmart, in San Mateo, Calif., a digital resources and etextbook provider, formed as a new venture by six higher education textbook publishers. He says he doesn't see a total transition to etextbooks anytime soon. "I don't think that will happen very quickly," he says. "I think [traditional and etextbooks] will live side by side for a long time."

James agrees, noting that it is an emerging process similar to the process of moving courses online. "Now, the next stage is what do we do with these textbooks? Returning adult students as well as traditional college-age students are more immersed with electronic media. I think it's going to be a conversion that's going to be ongoing." However, he adds, "I think the schools that adapt earlier are going to have an edge in the marketplace."

Publishers are being forced to consider new models of delivering content, and some are further along than others. The



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CourseSmart www.coursesmart.com	McGraw-Hill Education www.mheducation.com
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difficulty for all is developing the ability to turn static content into flexible content.

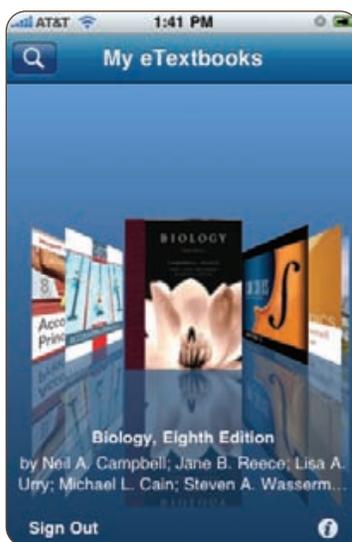
“The challenge is knowing how it’s all going to take shape,” says Kranenburg. “How many different device manufacturers are out there right now [making] ebook devices? How many different formats are out there? How many different kinds of ebooks are people experimenting with? There are so many different forms that this could take and also so many different distribution models that could apply.” Still, he says, “It’s exciting.”

“It’s a test of a different business model for publishers, but it really doesn’t change the fact that publishers are in the business of creating really valuable content that provides a world-class educational experience,” says Lyman.

They are aided in the process by a newfound ability to connect directly with the end users of their products—the students—points out Susan Spilka, Wiley’s corporate communications director. “I think the ability to communicate directly with students, the end users of our content, has really been revolutionary. We can do a lot of outreach and research.”

Students, the ultimate end users, are clearly a key constituency, and the impacts on them are significant. The cost of textbooks is an obvious concern for students, and etextbooks help to address this, says Williams. “We realize, as a publisher, the high cost of these materials to students and the electronic format certainly allows us to reduce the overall cost of our content offerings to the market.”

Ease of access is also a boon for students who have access to content anytime, anywhere, says Lyman. “One of the great benefits is that they don’t have to lug around print textbooks,” he says. “This better matches the way they study



and access all of their media, so it becomes a better experience.”

And the pedagogical experts say electronic delivery can improve learning. “One of the great things about electronic delivery online is that it allows us to change the pedagogy that we can deliver content in to adapt to different learning styles,” says Williams. “So, if you’re a visual learner, there’s a lot more interesting visual things we can present in the electronic format that we couldn’t with a traditional textbook.” This can also apply to enhancing the experience with audio and video.

Gregory St. John, VP of web publishing technology at Wiley, says, “Students are some of our best advocates.” Feedback from students collected by Wiley over the past 3 years indicates that 97% of students felt the online resources were easy to use, 88% said that it improved their understanding, and 84% would recommend it to instructors, he says.

While there are still students who prefer to access textbooks the traditional way, Eckler notes that this group is likely to diminish over time. “The natural progression is that those power users are going to be the larger population as they’re growing up.” Preschool children are already becoming comfortable with accessing and using online content—as they grow up, says Eckler, “this is going to be the norm.”

CourseSmart, a provider of subscription etextbooks for college students, makes its 7,000-plus titles accessible on Apple Inc.’s iPhone and iPod touch.

Instructors, of course, represent a different demographic. For example, many current instructors did not grow up with technology and are, consequently, not as comfortable making this shift. “Some of our older professors have always taught from books and [would] like to continue to teach from books,” says James. “Some of the younger faculty are much easier adopters; they’re used to this technology.” The same is true of students: Some enjoy being able to read and learn online; others like marking up and having a hard copy available. “Making notes in the margin is still something that people feel comfortable with. ... Do you like to cozy up to the fire with a book or your laptop? It’s a personal preference,” says James.

However, James points out that there are definite benefits for instructors. “One of the advantages from a professor’s standpoint is that all of the new revisions are so much easier to implement,” he says. There are no worries, for instance, that students will inadvertently get an old edition. “You just download, and it’s there.” Etextbooks also enhance interaction, he points out. “You’re going to be able to have Excel budgets, PowerPoints, videos, and links embedded right into the text, allowing a much more in-depth academic experience.”

In addition, notes St. John, the ability to provide workflow tools for both students and professors helps to save time for both groups and improves the teaching results. Williams agrees. “Knowing that if you’re in a big lecture with 500 students, these tools can help you really identify who’s getting it and who’s not very quickly. That’s very powerful, and they see that,” he says.

Instructors represent one significant barrier to widespread adoption of

etextbooks. Not, however, the only barrier.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

Lyman notes that the approach at most schools seems to be making instructors aware of e-options and allowing them to make a choice. “In my mind this is the best way for institutions to handle it right now,” he says.

It is a change that will likely come over time, not unlike other transitions, Williams points out. Reel-to-reel films and slide projectors, for instance, have become virtually obsolete with the advent of PowerPoint and access to online media.

As Kranenburg noted, though, the multiplicity of various formats and options presents some challenges. “We have to really look at what device they’re going to actually use to consume this content,” says Eckler. “The fact that you’ve got Kindles out there doesn’t mean that every student in every university should have a Kindle.”

Existing print textbooks, he says, are laid out in a two-page format designed to lay open so that both pages are visible and easily scanned, back and forth. When accessed in other forms, obvious design and layout issues emerge.

“What’s going to make all of this click is the publisher that is first to market with a flexible solution that can provide a platform for the best of both worlds,” says Eckler. “If there isn’t a platform for that, the system is just going to plod along.” But, he adds, “The good news is that the publishers we’re working with are heavily vested in finding these solutions.” The ultimate goal, he says, is “flexibility combined with control.”

And that, it appears, is what the future holds—not just for textbooks but for general consumer content as well.



Wiley Custom Select gives instructors the freedom to build course materials exactly the way they want them, as well as the ability to provide students with a cost-efficient alternative to traditional texts.

Similarly, Wiley’s Dummies.com site offers free how-to information. “It’s less about selling books than about giving people a way to figure out how to do something; re-imagining the dummy experience for an online marketplace,” he says.

Both of these sites, he says, are designed to be brand-building sites. The added benefits are that the sites help to sell more print books and

drive traffic to build online advertising, “a component of our revised mission.”

Yet despite this march toward digital, few believe that print will ever entirely go away. “Certainly, people will still want and need books,” says Kranenburg. However, he adds, “I think there are increasing signs that print on demand will become much more popular and economical.” Ultimately, he says, there will be a lot more choices for consumers of information. And that’s a good thing.

Publishers are thinking about, and experimenting with, new ways to deliver content and new business models that bring value and benefit in innovative ways. Schools continue to respond to the changing needs of students who are increasingly comfortable with technology. What will the future hold? Who knows? But one thing is certain: These innovations are likely to continue to improve the textbook experience and information of all kinds. **■**

THE FUTURE

“The key to all of this is the relationship between the publishers of content and the recipients of the content,” says Eckler. What publishers are concerned about, he says, is that “if they spend money to create premium content, [they want to be sure] that they’re being adequately paid and compensated for that, balanced with the need of the next generation of students wanting access to all information at all times at the lower cost—in other words, free.”

This same challenge exists outside the world of textbook publishing as well, of course—as the newspaper and magazine industry can attest. Still, the “train has left the station” as they say, and there is no turning back now. Textbooks may be just the beginning of the ebook evolution. Wiley is already experimenting with this format in other divisions such as professional and trade.

“We put virtually all of our frontlist on Amazon Kindle and through other ebook channels,” says St. John. “We have more than 9,000 Wiley books available for Amazon Kindle.” In addition, other lines are being offered online, with content sometimes available at no cost. “You can go onto our Frommers.com website, and a lot of the material is free,” says St. John.

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