# INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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## *Ebooks... which way to jump?*

In the editorial of the February 2000 issue of *DLib Magazine* our attention is drawn to a Microsoft advertisement which offers a timeline for the next twenty years in the publishing industry:

- by 2015 conversion of the entire Library of Congress to ebooks
- 2020 - 90% of all titles will be published in a digital version.

If these predictions are correct then it means that in the relatively near future the bulk of current and retrospective printed literature will be available in digital form.[1]

At this stage the industry is nowhere near establishing a common ebook format that will permit consumers to read any ebook on whatever device they happen to own. Industry has worked with the Open eBook Forum to try to develop a common file format, however competing firms continue to offer a variety of propriety formats: pocket PCs are limited to ebooks in Microsoft Reader format; Adobe Acrobat ebooks can be read on laptops and PCs, but not on handheld devices; and ebooks using particular reading devices may be limited to certain publishers.[2] Possibly it is too early in the development of ebooks to expect a common format to exist, and competition and experimentation could result in innovation

Maybe a variety of formats to satisfy different user requirements will be the eventual end result, but for librarians, mostly with reduced budgets and long memories of the potential impact of competing formats such as VHS/Beta and IBM/Apple, it would be prudent to keep abreast of the ebook debate

## *Some Websites for those interested in pursuing ebooks:*

*Cribsheet on Electronic Books (eBooks)*

http://www.rcls.org/ebookcrib.htm

A key site containing around fifty links, it is divided into five sections which encapsulate current developments and debate concerning ebooks – the technologies, the benefits, the

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[1] *DLib Magazine*, vol. 6, no. 2, February 2000

[2] Paul Hilts 2000, 'The Wait for an E-book Format, *Publishers Weekly*, vol 247, issue 45, p 55
http://web4.infotrac.galegroup.com

drawbacks, opportunities for libraries, and industry/overview sites. If you are interested in ebooks visit this site!

## *Open eBook Forum*

http://www.openebook.org

This is the site of the Open Electronic Book (OEB) Standards Initiative Authoring Group which aims to create and maintain standards to promote the successful adoption of electronic books. Members include publishers, hardware and software manufactures, authors and other interested parties. The website gives contact details for persons or companies interested in joining the OEBF and details about the OEBF mailing list. There are links to the draft Open eBook Publication Structure Specification and information about the latest forum meeting held in December 2000. The FAQs are particularly useful, especially for those requiring background information about ebooks.

## *Bibliofuture*

http://bibliofuture.homepage.com

A site about electronic book readers and libraries which has posted the Bibliofuture Library Standards. Standards aim to define the minimum features of an electronic book reader as well as the minimum rights of an electronic book user or owner to ensure there is the same level of access to information, functionality and privacy that was obtainable from hardcopy books

## *NetLibrary*

http://www.netlibrary.com

NetLibrary launched its virtual Library Solution in April 2000 and since then has sold ebook collections and content management services to libraries and corporations worldwide. Netlibrary's digital rights management infrastructure has been adopted by hundreds of publishers of academic, reference and scholarly textbooks. This currently includes 101 law titles. NetLibrary develops, archives, hosts and securely distributes ebooks through university, public and corporate libraries, readable on a variety of platforms

## *Gemstar*

http://www.ebook-gemstar.com

Another large distributor and developer is the Gemstar International Group which has taken over two ebook pioneers, SoftBook Press and Rocket eBook, and then merged with Thomson Multimedia to jointly pursue the digital electronic book market worldwide. The new eBook readers, which claim to be handier, lighter and able to store more text, are aimed at the popular market. The security offered by Gemstar's dedicated device is appealing to publishers who despite the potential large audience numbers offered by less secure open devices, appear to prefer a medium which protects copyright and authors' interests.

## Discussion Lists

Join some of these discussion lists to keep up with developments in ebooks:

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