

# E-book

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(Redirected from Ebooks)

An **e-book** (for *electronic book*; also *eBook*, *ecoBook*) is the digital media equivalent of a conventional printed book. Such documents are either read on personal computers, or on dedicated hardware devices known as *e-book readers* or *e-book devices*.

An e-book is a specialised type of e-text.

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A user viewing an electronic page on an eBook reading device

## Formats

A writer or publisher has many options when it comes to choosing a file format for production. While the average end-user might arguably simply want to read books, every format has its proponents and champions, and debates over "which format is best" can become intense.

## Advantages

Text can be searched automatically, and cross-referenced using hyperlinks. This makes e-books an excellent choice of format for works that benefit from search and cross-reference capabilities, such as dictionaries, reference works, and certain kinds of textbooks.

Less physical space is required to store e-books. Hundreds (or thousands) may be carried together on one device. Approximately 500 average e-books can be stored on one CD (equivalent to several shelves of print books). Because they take up little space, e-books can be offered indefinitely, with no 'out of print' date, allowing authors to continue to earn royalties indefinitely (copyright law permitting) and allowing readers to find older works by favorite authors.

Readers who have difficulty reading conventional books can benefit from the adjustment of text size and font face. Text-to-speech software can be used to automatically convert e-books to spoken books. In addition, e-books may be read in low light or even total darkness, with a back-lit device.

An ebook can be much more comfortable to hold because it does not need to be held open like a paperback. It can also be set down and read hands-free.

Since there is only one page, there are no problems with the text near the interior margin being obscured or shadowed by another page (as can happen with a paperback). This makes the book easier to see from a variety of angles. The lack of a flexible joint between a book's pages also allows the book to be positioned on its side.

It costs almost nothing to replicate an e-book. Copies can be made instantly and in as great a quantity as desired. This makes it easy to retain backups and difficult to eliminate works once they have been distributed. E-books can be published by independent publishing houses, which can lead to greater editorial and authorial freedom and more room for experimentation. From the publisher's point of view, the ease of distributing e-books means that they can be used to stimulate higher sales of printed copies of books.<sup>[1]</sup>

With Internet access becoming ubiquitous in industrial nations, the ease of distributing e-books is a considerable advantage. E-books cost little to transfer, and such an operation occurs quickly. Readers can begin reading as soon as the download completes, or sooner, depending on the e-book formats' capabilities, without the need to visit a bookstore.

Errors in texts may be easily and quickly corrected, and may even be pushed to users to update their copies of works in-place, rather than requiring a separate errata.

Replicating e-books does not consume the paper, ink, and other resources that are used to produce normal books. E-books do not have to be replaced as a result wear and tear because there is little risk of damage, vandalism, or degradation to their pages.

## Disadvantages

An e-book requires an electronic device to display it. Many e-book formats require special software to display them, which may not be freely available or compatible with a reader's existing computing device. As an e-book is dependent on equipment to be read, it can be affected by faults in external hardware or software, such as hard disk drive failure.

Digital rights management techniques may be used to restrict what the user may do with an e-book. For instance, it may not be possible to transfer ownership of an e-book to another person, though such a transaction is common with physical books. Some can phone home to track readers and reading habits, or restrict printing. This includes restricting the copying and distribution of works in the public domain through the use of "click-wrap" licensing, effectively limiting the rights of the public to freely distribute, sell or use texts in the public domain.

Unfortunately most e-book publishers do not warn their customers about the possible consequences of the Digital rights management scheme on their books. Generally they do discuss the fact that Digital rights management is meant to prevent copying of the e-book. However in many cases it is also possible that Digital rights management will result in the complete denial of access by the purchaser to the e-book. With some formats of DRM, the e-book is tied to a specific computer or device. In these cases the DRM will usually let the purchaser move the book a limited number of times, after which they cannot use it on any additional devices. If the purchaser upgrades or

replaces their devices, which they will do over time, eventually they will lose access to their purchase. Some forms of Digital rights management depend on the existence of online services to authenticate the purchasers. If the company that provides the service goes out of business or decides to stop providing the service, the purchaser will no longer be able to access the e-book.

With Digital rights management, it is more apt to consider the exchange of money for commodity to be a rental or lease rather than a purchase. The restricted book comes with a number of restrictions, and eventually access to the purchase can be removed by a number of different parties involved. These include the publisher of the book, the publisher of the DRM scheme, and the publisher of the reader software. These are all things that are significantly different from the realm of experiences anyone has had with a physical copy of the book.

Current e-book devices still offer a lesser reading experience than physical books. Screen resolution and contrast is much lower than paper, and it may not be possible to view such devices in bright sunlight. Many readers prefer paper and print to a computer screen.

From a publisher's point of view, e-books can in some cases be hacked, or disseminated without approval from the author or publisher. The ease with which an electronic document may be copied means that a single unprotected document may be used to replicate an unlimited number of perfect copies.

## Production

Some e-books are produced simultaneously with the production of a printed format, as described in electronic publishing, though in many instances they may not be put on sale until later. Often, e-books are produced from pre-existing hard-copy books, generally by document scanning, sometimes with the use of robotic book scanners, having the technology to quickly scan books without damaging the original print edition. Scanning a book produces an image file, which must then be converted into text format by an OCR program.<sup>[2]</sup> Occasionally, as in some e-text projects, a book may be produced by re-entering the text from a keyboard.

As a newer development, sometimes only the electronic version of a book is produced by the publisher. Usually, it is possible to convert electronic book to a printed book by short-run printing.

E-book publishing as an industry is growing in the double digits yearly, according to the quarterly reports put out by IDPF. Among the first Internet-only publishers of new e-books were Boson Books, Hard Shell Word Factory and Online Originals, all founded in the mid-1990s. Each pioneered different aspects of what has since become common practice amongst e-book publishers, e.g. the support of multiple formats including PDFs, the payment of much higher royalty rates than conventional publishers, and the online presentation of free samples. Hard Shell Word Factory set the first professional standards for commercial e-books and pioneered author-friendly contracts. Online Originals was the first e-book publisher to win mainstream book reviews (in *The Times*) and a nomination for a major literary prize (the Booker Prize).

Since the late 1990s, the many newcomers to e-book publishing have included most major print publishers. At the same time, many established e-publishers started to offer print versions of some of their titles. Thus the line between the two is fast blurring.

There are some parts of the industry where there are particularly notable leading firms. In the general field of science-fiction and fantasy, Baen Books, an American publishing company established in 1983 by science fiction publishing industry long-timer Jim Baen (1943-2006) has a well-established position. It is a science fiction and fantasy publishing house that specializes in space opera/military science fiction and fantasy (though it does not

restrict itself to these subgenres). It is notable for releasing books without DRM in a variety of formats, before hard-copy publication, and pre-releasing ebooks in parts before the hard-copy release. Many older titles are available for free, especially the first book in a series.

E-books have their own bestseller lists, including those compiled by IDPF and Fictionwise. They even have two yearly awards for excellence in e-books. The longest-standing and most inclusive of these is the EPPIE award, given by EPIC since 2000. The other is the Dream Realm Award, first awarded to speculative fiction e-books in 2002.

## See also

- Blook
- Digital library
- List of digital library projects
- List of e-book readers
- Elibrary
- Expanded Books
- Networked book
- Webserial
- OpenReader Consortium
- Project Gutenberg
- OpenBerg

## External Links

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* manybooks (http://manybooks.net) - free ebooks for your PDA, iPod, or ebook reader
* Best Places to Get Free Books (http://www.friedbeef.com/2007/04/09/best-places-to-get-free-books-the-ultimate-guide/) - list of free ebook sites
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