



Kindleville

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Francis Hamit: An Author's Point of View

Author Francis Hamit emailed me recently about a major frustration he recently ran into with Amazon. Although Amazon generally offers a terrific customer service experience, Francis' story sheds light on the challenges faced by authors and other content providers. I asked him to write a guest post about his experience and here's what he had to say:

I've pulled the Kindle edition of my novel "The Shenandoah Spy". Although it was priced at six dollars less than the print version, it sold less than one percent as well as that edition. I saw a post from another author who said he was selling thousands of copies of the Kindle editions of his novels, but at a much lower price. I thought that perhaps if I dropped the price, sales would improve.

One of the problems with distributing your work on Kindle is that Amazon.com makes thousands of public domain classics available at 99 cents each. Forget about your contemporaries, you're competing with Dickens and Trollope and the like, and they have the price advantage. If you have a print edition at \$18.95, you don't want to compete with yourself by going too low on the e-book edition. There is a previous serialized version of this novel, in 14 parts, still available on Amazon Shorts. I decided to lower the price to match at \$6.99.

I also noticed that the text-to-speech version had been enabled. This is something that was not part of Kindle when I uploaded the file last year, and something that I have already said I will not permit in a letter to the 'Los Angeles Times' earlier this year. But without notice or permission, there it was. My concern again reached back to that "competing with myself" thing. I'm currently negotiating with another publisher for audiobook rights. If there is a text-to-speech feature enabled for the Kindle version, then that will have a negative impact on the sales of an audiobook version that sells between thirty and fifty dollars a copy. And the Kindle sales to date have been, well, pathetic. Less than one copy per month.

But it's not the reality but the perception that cheapens your brand in the marketplace. Amazon plays power games with vendors like myself. They induced about 400 authors to participate in the Amazon Shorts program and failed to promote the site even within their own pages. (A

search for that term will more likely produce links to underwear.) They created quite an uproar over print-on-demand books, threatening to not distribute any that were not bought from their in-house provider. That left me with interesting choices: create separate editions for Ingram and Amazon with different ISBN numbers or lose significant parts of our distribution. Or, as we ultimately did, get a smaller distributor like Pathway Book Service to provide the book to all comers. That meant an offset print run and greater total cost, but more margin per unit.

When I objected to the text-to-speech feature on the Kindle edition I got this in reply:

Hello from Amazon DTP.

I see that you've entered the new price for your book, however, it is not updated on our website, as your book was not re-published after changing the price. Please note that your new changes will not be updated on our website, until it is saved and published again. Also, note that whenever any book is published / re-published with new changes, it has to go through the review process by our kindle operations team, it takes up to 5 business days for the review to be completed.

Please note that at this time we are not supporting the feature to manage Text-to-Speech (TTS) settings through Amazon's Digital Text Platform (DTP), by default all the books are published with TTS enabled, we are unable to turn it off. We will continue to evaluate options for adding this to DTP customers in the future. If you still have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us at ntp-feedback@amazon.com.

Thanks for using Amazon DTP.

Please note: this e-mail was sent from an address that cannot accept incoming e-mail.

To contact us about an unrelated issue, please send us a new e-mail.

Best regards,

Padmanaban Guruswamy
<http://www.amazon.com>

That's a document simply amazing in its arrogance. It makes the simple act of changing a price a bureaucratic nightmare. Uploading the original DTP file took three days, and I won't say we ever got it right because the interior map that is a feature of the print edition could not be included.

That they will not even try to write a line of computer code that could disable the text-to-speech function is simply another example of their disregard for authors' rights. But, when I asked, they did take the file down, which relieves me of the burden of filing a lawsuit. Copyright reserves the right to control distribution to creators. If you are distributing a Kindle edition of your own original work, it's a good thing to keep in mind. It's yours, not theirs.

Amazon.com did send offers to do that file conversion for me, for the amazingly low fee of \$99.00 marked down from \$299.00. I was not persuaded that this would be a good investment. And while Kindle only produced about one percent of our sales to date, Amazon.com is responsible for less than ten percent of our total sales. Surprised? I was.

I can't fault their advertising either. They do try hard with all of their book titles, create author blogs, and so on, and I'm pretty sure it's not the book itself since I have more than a dozen favorable reviews including those five star ones on Amazon.com. ([Click here](#) to read them.)

The brick and mortar space still generates more book sales than any other channel. We have the good fortune to have done 16 book signings with the Hastings Entertainment chain, which does stock "The Shenandoah Spy" on the shelves of its 152 stores. We've been very aggressive about promotion, and we are following a "slow and steady" marketing plan to build word of mouth because it is the first of five books in a planned series.

I've been publishing e-books, mostly recycled trade magazine articles, since 2004. I have to say that this is not the financial bonanza that everyone thought it would be. Although available in multiple channels, these titles are very low demand and produce only a trickle of revenues.

That's true of the fiction as well as the non-fiction.

We continue to experiment with e-book publishing, but it's no longer a priority, and any future Kindle offerings will be through Smashwords.com.

Coming Soon to Your PC: Kindle Books

First there was the Kindle iPhone app and now Amazon is further hedging their hardware bet with this announcement about the future ability to read Kindle books on your Windows PC. No word on Mac support, btw.

The most important point in this announcement is captured by these three words: "No Kindle required." You probably won't want to read on your laptop for hours at a time, but a netbook/tablet device becomes a more viable option, even with a backlit display.

Just as printed books will never go away I can see where dedicated e-readers like the Kindle, Sony Reader, iRex, etc., could be around for quite awhile. And while they'll offer a reading experience that's easy on the eyes, I've said it before and I'll say it again: More and more reading will take place on multi-function devices, not one-trick ponies like the Kindle.

Amazon obviously realizes that too and is taking the initial steps to ensure they remain relevant as an e-content provider on other platforms.

The Asus Eee-Reader: I Don't Get It

Have you seen the leaked photos of the upcoming Asus Eee-Reader? If you missed it, [here's a short article on CNET with a picture](#). OK, I get the lower price. Sure, that's something the market is clamoring for as the Kindles, Sony Readers, etc., are destined to be nothing more than nichey luxuries as long as they're \$300+.

But what's with the 2-panel hinged display? Why take a relic of the print book and force it into an e-reader? Think about it. There's not a single time in the past year where I've said, "gee, I really wish this Kindle had a second display that hinged onto this one." Never.

Why? First of all, I can only read one screen at a time. OK, things get more interesting when you can have full color with hi-res so that images pop. Um, that's not the current state of the Kindle (or Sony) technology though, is it? So a second screen is just there, waiting for me to get to it. Oh, and btw, it costs more to make. And since this new device won't be using eInk display technologies, it's basically a pair of LCD screens that suck more juice from the battery. What's there to like?

They talk about using the second screen as a virtual keyboard. Anyone who owns an iPhone will tell you the thing they like least about it is the virtual keyboard. Heck, even the chicklet Kindle keyboard is better than a virtual one. (Wow, did I just say the Kindle has an interface feature that's better than the iPhone's?! That's the only one, btw.)

The article goes on to talk about how the device will have speakers, a webcam and a microphone built in. Sounds great, but isn't this starting to smell a lot like a netbook? Asus has been in the netbook space for a few years now and they're just tweaking their product a bit and calling it an e-reader.

I'd rather just have a netbook. And if there's one thing I've learned in 2009 it's that the dedicated e-reader doesn't have much of a future. Sure, they'll still be around in a few years but the real action will be with the multi-purpose devices like mobile phones and tablets.

Managing Stolen/Lost Kindles

It should be so much easier than this. I'm talking about Amazon's policy regarding lost/stolen Kindles, as outlined in [this article](#). I can't imagine losing my Kindle and having Amazon tell me they won't disable it.

Come on. That's an almost \$400 device and it would be so easy for them to deny service to the person who found/stole it. If England can do this with cell phones why in the world can't Amazon do it with Kindles?

Whatever happened to this company that built its reputation on a foundation of outstanding customer service? Anyone who accepts this policy and then buys another Kindle to replace their lost/stolen one is a sucker.

Dear Mr. Bezos, can you please just implement the oh-so-simple solution outlined at the end of the article?!

Sheet Music on Kindle DX

Kudos to [Andrys Basten](#) and her [Kindle World blog](#) for opening my eyes to something I had never considered before: [Using the Kindle DX to display sheet music](#). The DX screen still seems a bit too small to me for this but maybe that's just because my vision isn't what it used to be!

You'll find there's a [quite a bit of sheet music already for sale on Amazon's website](#) but be sure to consider the free options as well. Andrys provides info on [IMSLP](#), a free public domain sheet music library, as well as some screen shots of how sheet music renders on her own DX ([here](#) and [here](#)).

If you're on Twitter, and you should be(!), you can [follow Andrys there](#) too.

Slowly Losing Interest in Subscriptions

I've been a Kindle NY Times subscriber for more than a year now. Because the issues show up automatically and wirelessly wherever I go it's one of the reasons I tell people I enjoy owning a Kindle and taking it on the road.

I discovered the NY Times iPhone app when I got my first iPhone. As is the case with most apps, they keep updating and improving it. The latest version has me wondering why I bother paying Amazon \$13.99/month for the Kindle version. I hear there are elements in the Kindle version that don't appear in the (free) iPhone version but I'm hard-pressed to tell you what they are. All the articles I read in yesterday's Kindle edition are right there in the iPhone version.

The iPhone version has ads and the Kindle version doesn't. So what? If that's one of the key differences and it saves me \$14/month, bring on the ads!

The Kindle version comes automatically and can be read without a live web connection (once the issue is downloaded, of course). The iPhone version let's me save individual articles for later offline reading. Close, but not quite the same. Of course, if the iPhone app ever comes with a setting that lets me save the whole edition automatically, well, I'd pay at least \$5/month for that, maybe even \$10.

Amazon hasn't exactly set the world on fire with new and exciting Kindle features. The ones that exist on the K2 and DX are pretty much the same that debuted with K1 almost 2 years ago. Meanwhile, Apple is rumored to have a sexy netbook/tablet coming next month. It will undoubtedly build on the success of the iPhone and unless Apple lays an egg it's likely to be the product I upgrade to from my Kindle 1.0.

Lessons from the iPhone App Store

The Kindle Review blog recently posted [this excellent article on lessons we can learn from Apple's App Store](#). As the post notes, discoverability is one of the major problems in the App Store today. Sure, Apple provides lists of recent additions and even popular apps, but finding your way through 65K+ apps seems hopeless when you're scrolling through 5 or so at a time!

I'm an iPhone owner and I love the device. I've downloaded a few dozen apps over the past 6 months but I'm amazed at how many I miss out on. The other night at dinner a colleague mentioned a new one to me that's just what I was looking for ([Fluent News](#)). I had never heard of it but I immediately downloaded it. Word-of-mouth promotion is nice and all but it can't be the only way forward.

I'm anxious to see how this all plays out. What new promotional vehicles will develop that help improve the discovery problem? And before we look at it as just an Apple issue, think about how this applies to ebooks...

Amazon has a tried and true method for promotion and encouraging discovery. But they're only one outlet. More and more ebook storefronts are popping up every week. Then there's the self-publishing angle. How many new self-published works hit virtual shelves every month? Hundreds of thousands?

Is this an opportunity for a third-party aggregator to step in and build an uber-catalog with all sorts of bells and whistles? This isn't just bestseller lists but also community recommendations and other lists tailored for your needs and interests.

Ebook services and offerings are growing like crazy. Without an uber-catalog service we'll soon find ourselves as lost in the sea of unknown ebook choices as iPhone owners are in the sea of apps.

A glimpse of the future?

At the end of the film 2010, Dr. Heywood Floyd looks up at the new sun that had been created in our solar system and observes, "You can tell your children of the day when everyone looked up and realized that they were only tenants of this world. We have been given a new lease and a warning from the landlord."

Amazon's recent Orwell (and Orwellian) debacle served as a similar wake up call for me as a Kindle user.

People are still debating over whether Amazon handled the situation properly. Some, including our own Joe Wikert, have offered suggestions on how Amazon could have handled it better.

But what bothers me is not whether Amazon was right or wrong in removing books from our Kindles -- it's the fact that they had (and still have) the technology to do it at all.

In a recent Slate column titled "Why 2024 Will Be Like Nineteen Eighty-Four," Farhad Manjoo warns that we've just glimpsed the future of book banning. Sure it sounds alarmist now, but consider the possibilities. As Manjoo observes, Amazon's mass deletion "sets up a terrible precedent. Amazon deleted books that were already available in print, but in our paperless future—when all books exist as files on servers—courts would have the power to make works vanish completely."

Unthinkable? Perhaps. But now we've been shown that it is technically possible.

Manjoo's suggestion?

Don't buy a Kindle until Amazon updates its terms of service to prohibit remote deletions. Even better, the company ought to remove the technical capability to do so, making such a mass evisceration impossible in the event that a government compels it.

I'm not quite ready to go that far, but I do think we need to keep the pressure on Amazon. And the incident has made me think twice about purchasing Kindle editions of books.

I'm sure Amazon didn't intend to send a message when they deleted those files from our Kindles, but a message was sent nonetheless.

It was a reminder that we do not really own the e-books we purchase from Amazon.

It was a reminder that when we abandon physical media for digital we give up a lot of rights.

And it was a reminder that the media giants who sell us that digital content wield an ever-increasing amount of power.

We Kindle users just got a warning from the landlord. For the future's sake we better pay attention.

Has the incident made you think differently about the Kindle or the future of ebooks?

Paul

Follow me on Twitter @phigginbotham

What I'm reading now on my Kindle: Nothing. I'm reading a dead-tree edition of American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century by Kevin Phillips.

How Amazon Should Have Handled the Orwell Situation

It's old news by now. Someone who didn't own the rights uploaded Orwell's 1984 and Animal Farm to the Kindle distribution service. Amazon then stepped in and removed all the illegal copies from Kindles around the country. It should also be noted that Amazon provided refunds as well.

It's one thing to wake up and find you're missing a book you bought, especially if you had already started reading it. It's another thing when you find Amazon also deleted the notes you took while you read the book. This happened to at least one student that I've heard about, which is unfortunate as Amazon is trying to push the Kindle in the academic channels.

I don't dispute the fact that IP must be protected. I just have a problem with how Amazon addressed the problem.

Amazon's self-service publishing platform clearly needs more checks and balances. I realize one person (or even a team of people) couldn't possibly scan the mountain of submissions to see if something illegal has been uploaded. But how hard would it be to have the system check random excerpts against the content already in Amazon's library of Kindle content? This step would have immediately flagged the problem and rejected the submission.

Amazon should also have some sort of guarantee that the content you're buying is legit and won't be removed, even if they refund your money. The automated review process I described above would be a big first step to helping then stand behind this promise.

But let's say something sneaks through again. Somehow a book from publisher xyz is scanned and uploaded by another party without the rights. Once Amazon discovers this problem they should remove it from the site, substitute your illegal copy with a real one and pay the publisher the full price. That's right. I'm suggesting Amazon foot the bill for the legitimate book. They could start by taking it out of any further payments owed the illegal distributor and they could follow that up with a lawsuit to try and recoup the rest. It's highly unlikely this will cover everything, so Amazon would simply have to write off the difference.

Maybe that would be enough of a deterrent to reduce the likelihood this sort of thing in the future. At least this way Amazon would get high marks on customer satisfaction, which has to be far better than the PR hit they're still struggling through.

Follow-up: More publishers delaying e-books?

Just two days ago I posted news about one publisher, Sourcebooks, Inc., purposefully delaying the release of an e-book version of a new book. Now *The New York Times* is reporting that other publishers are considering the same course of action.

Authors whose works may be delayed in e-book format include Dan Brown and Stephen King (Yes, the same Stephen King who wrote a story exclusively for the Kindle to help pimp the Kindle 2.).

Are we heading for a showdown between publishers and Amazon?

Paul

How do you spell "shortsighted?"

S-o-u-r-c-e-b-o-o-k-s. As in Sourcebooks, Inc., an independent book publisher that recently announced it is thumbing its nose at e-book readers.

In an article titled "Publisher Delays E-Book Amid Debate on Pricing" from the July 13 *Wall Street Journal* (I'd link to it but WSJ are stingy with their online articles and the link would expire in a week), the chief executive of Sourcebooks says they are delaying the e-book release of the latest in their Brian Hambric series* for as much as six months after the dead-tree version hits shelves.

* I'd never heard of it, but apparently it's pretty popular with the Harry Potter crowd?

"It doesn't make sense for a new book to be valued at \$9.99," said Dominique Raccah, CEO of Sourcebooks, which issues 250 to 300 new titles annually. "The argument is that the cheaper the book is, the more people will buy it. But hardcover books have an audience, and we shouldn't cannibalize it." An e-book for "Bran Hambric" will become available in the spring, she said.

Let's break that down a bit, shall we?

First, "It doesn't make sense for a new book to be valued at \$9.99." Um, it doesn't make sense to whom? Wiser folk than I have repeatedly done a great job at breaking down the various costs involved with publishing and shipping dead-tree books. Sometimes those costs even include being forced to accept unsold merchandise.

When you take away those costs and replace them with a digital product that by nature is in unlimited supply and costs you nothing to distribute how much larger is your profit margin?

Consumers are savvy. They understand these things. No one, especially Kindle owners who cherish reading, wants to cheat publishers or authors out of hard-earned money. But no one wants to be gouged either. Like it or not, the market has settled on a \$9.99 price point for new novels. As a publisher you either embrace it or risk alienating a growing percentage of your readers.

Second, "But hardcover books have an audience, and we shouldn't cannibalize it." Maybe you can help me with this one because it just baffles me. Are the profit margins for publishers that much higher for

hardcover books than for e-books? If so you're doing something wrong. And if not, why does it matter in what format your fans read your works?

Is it a sentimental clinging to the venerable printed word? Is it a growing fear that as the e-book market grows and the dead-tree format shrinks there will be less of a need for publishers at all?

After watching the music industry completely fail at accepting and embracing digital technology and seeing the resulting consequences, it's almost unfathomable that any other major media industry would make the same mistakes. But the publishing industry is heading in that direction.

Trachtenberg, Jeffrey A. and Geoffrey A. Fowler. "Publisher Delays E-Book Amid Debate on Pricing". *Wall Street Journal*. 13 July 2009.

Paul

Follow me on Twitter @phigginbotham
What I'm reading on my Kindle: Nothing! I'm reading a dead-tree edition of *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas.

PC Mag and BusinessWeek on the Kindle

I've been an on-again, off-again print subscriber to PC Magazine and BusinessWeek for many years. I let my PC Mag subscription lapse a couple of years ago, lost track of them and assumed they went belly up. The last several PC Mag issues I saw on newsstands were pretty thin, hence the assumption that they went away.

New magazines seem to appear on the Kindle without a lot of fanfare. PC Mag is currently #5 and BusinessWeek is #10 on Amazon's Kindle magazine bestseller list, but initially it was hard to find either anywhere on the site (despite the fact that you could subscribe to both if you found them!). Another example from the newspaper side is the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review. I've been subscribing for a few months but up until recently it almost impossible to find The Trib on the site. (I'm wondering if Amazon does soft launches initially, letting subscribers slowly sign up, then waits to make sure there are no major problems/complaints before making it more public.)

Having looked pretty closely at the latest Kindle edition issues of both PC Magazine and BusinessWeek I have to say I'm not overly impressed with either. PC Mag is definitely pretty lightweight. I read the small number of articles that interested me in less than 20 minutes. This is a magazine I used to invest at least 2-3 hours immersed in every time a new issue arrived. Yikes. Even John Dvorak's stuff just ain't what it used to be.

BusinessWeek's problem isn't so much the lack of content. All the regular columns appear to be intact. Even the tiniest of sidebar elements seem to have made it through to the Kindle edition. What's missing though are some of the USAToday-like standalone graphics that frequently catch my eye. I'm not sure why BusinessWeek didn't just include images of these but their absence is disappointing.

More importantly, I'm starting to become as discouraged about the quick-and-dirty print-to-e conversions the magazine business is doing, similar to what the book publishing world has done up to now. Nobody's really fully leveraging the Kindle's full capability. When was the last time you saw a Kindle version of a product that had more e-functionality built into it than the static print version? And let's not be

satisfied with embedded links, although most of those opportunities are often missed as well! I'm talking about really taking advantage of the wireless connection and dynamic content capabilities the Kindle offers.

I blame some of this on Amazon for having such a closed model and not allowing for a third-party development ecosystem like what Apple has done for the iPhone, but most of the responsibility lies with the content publishers. I don't see anyone stepping up and creating some great, new Kindle content that wows you. I almost get the impression we're all figuring te Kindle is a flash-in-the-pan and we (publishers) don't want to spend too much on it for fear of it going away tomorrow. That's a valid concern, particularly if Apple comes through with their much-rumored "iPad."

At this point though, it's hard for me to get overly excited about Kindle content unless it's available at rock-bottom prices, and that's not much of a reason to get excited for the future, is it?

UR, by Stephen King

I love it that Stephen King is willing to experiment with new content models. Do you remember The Plant, a serial novel King started writing and releasing in pieces back in 2000? I loved it...or at least I loved the handful of chapters he released before abandoning the project. It was probably ahead of its time. King relied on the honor system and not enough readers paid up so he never finished the project. Bummer.

King's latest experiment is a Kindle-only story called UR. At first I couldn't help but think it was nothing more than an advertorial for the Kindle, but the story still managed to pull me in. It's an intriguing read and well worth the \$2.99 you'll pay for it.

It's also a very quick read. I'm a slow reader and I still managed to get through it in little more than an hour. You might call that "short" but I call it "perfect." I spend most of my Kindle time reading short pieces of content. Newspaper articles, magazines, blog posts. Those are the things I like reading most on my Kindle. For some reason I tend to lose interest with longer Kindle books.

Jeff Bezos originally pitched the Kindle as a way for all of us to get past "info-snacking" and get back to reading long-form works. UR is another great example of how the Kindle is still feeding my info-snacking habit, I'm afraid.

A Kindle App Opportunity

Do your friends and colleagues send you email messages with links to great articles and web pages they want you to go check out? I do, and when I get them I never seem to have enough time to thoroughly read them at that moment. Sometimes I print them. Quite often though I accidentally forget and miss the opportunity to read them.

What if you could do this?: Grab the url from the email message or your browser and drag it over to your Kindle, which is connected to your computer via USB? The application looks up that url, grabs all the HTML content that appears on the page, converts it to the Kindle's native format (mobi) and drops it into your home screen so you can read it later.

This is an app that you'd buy for your PC/Mac and would have no affiliation with Amazon. You'd be free to use it to easily and quickly convert and load whatever webpage content you want.

I provided more info about it in [this longer post on my Publishing 2020 blog](#). I'm curious to see if others would benefit from an app like this. Also, if you know of a service that already fills this hole, please let me know!

When Two Out of Three Ain't Good

Remember that great Meatloaf song, "Two Out of Three Ain't Bad"? I do, and for some reason I thought of it when I read [this Jeff Bezos quote from Wired's "Disruptive by Design" conference yesterday](#):

“[The Kindle DX] is \$489, and that is an unbelievably low price for something that has inside it a sophisticated computer, a completely new kind of display of that size, and a 3G wireless radio,” Bezos said.

Bezos rightfully points out three important attributes of every Kindle: it's a full-fledged computer, has a great display and a 3G wireless radio. What irritates me though is that that Amazon, in their infinite wisdom, prevents Kindle owners from fully leveraging two out of the three (computer and wireless).

Imagine the iPhone without the App Store. It would be nothing more than a phone, like most of the other phones that preceded it. Have you heard of any third-party apps you can add to your Kindle? No, because Amazon doesn't want you to extend the device's capabilities. And even though all Kindles have wireless functionality built-in, there again, you're pretty much limited to what Amazon does and doesn't want you to do with that feature (although clever services like [KindleFeeder](#) have managed to get around it).

Jeff, can you imagine the doors that would open and the opportunities that would arise if you'd just let us fully utilize that "sophisticated computer" and "3G wireless radio"?! The DX's \$489 price tag will always be deemed wickedly expensive as long as you place artificial limits on what we can and cannot do with it.

WSJ's Mossberg on the KindleDX: "Bigger, Not Better"

Walt Mossberg, the Wall Street Journal's personal technology guru and hit maker, has weighed in on the KindleDX, and the word isn't good. He indicates that after testing, he "didn't like it nearly as much as the Kindle 2, which I own and enjoy using daily."

See the full review [here](#).

What do you think? Are you planning to spring for a DX? Indicate your intent in our poll below:

[Online Surveys](#) & [Market Research](#)

E-Books get Olfactory

Do you enjoy e-books on your Kindle, but feel like you are a few sniffs shy of the full reading experience? Worry no more, Smell of Books has you covered.

With tongue firmly in cheek, Smell of Books promises to delivery the "smell of your favorite paper book" in a handy aerosol delivery format.

Not convinced it's a joke? Jump to site for [DuroSport](#), the parent company of Smell of Books and browse the archive of truly funny product announcements and press releases. My favorite: the company's [response](#) to the Author's Guild, who criticizes Smell of Books for "Allowing unauthorized third parties to provide the "scent" for a book substantially changes the underlying work to a degree that infringes upon the author's copyright, not to mention artistic vision."

Funny stuff!

Do You Want More Magazine Options on the Kindle?

I do, and that's why I wrote [this post on my Publishing 2020 blog](#). I don't normally cross-post like this but this particular topic is perfect for Publishing 2020 but also highly relevant for Kindle owners who read Kindleville.

Let me know what you think of the idea.

The Lion That Squeaked?

Look out, Amazon! Google is getting into the e-book market! Or as the *New York Times* puts it, Google is "throwing down the gauntlet."

Sayeth the *Times*,

In discussions with publishers at the annual BookExpo convention in New York over the weekend, Google signaled its intent to introduce a program by that would enable publishers to sell digital versions of their newest books direct to consumers through Google. The move would pit Google against Amazon.com, which is seeking to control the e-book market with the versions it sells for its Kindle reading device.

Google boasts that unlike Amazon e-books which require the proprietary Kindle, their e-books will be accessible on multiple devices, including phones and PCs.

And publishers are giddy because Google plans to let them have more of a say about e-book prices, giving them more control over their commodities than Amazon does.

Anyone would be foolish to underestimate Google's impact on a market once they set their sights on it, but am I the only one who sees the flaws in their plan?

First, attacking the Kindle by making e-books available on multiple devices is a nice concept, but has Google considered that one of the keys to the Kindle's success is that people don't want to read to books on computer or cell phone screens? To paraphrase an old political attack, "It's the e-ink, stupid."

It bothers me not one bit that I can't read my Kindle e-books on other devices because I have no desire to.

Second, giving publishers more control over pricing will certainly bring plenty of them running to the table to do business with Google, but have they been paying attention to the virtual revolution that Kindle users have initiated over pricing? One of the biggest and most active threads in the official Kindle discussion forum is titled "Boycott anything over \$9.99."

Publishers: "Hurray! We can raise the price of our e-books and increase our profits!"

Consumers: "Uh, yeah. About that..."

E-book adoption has been slow enough. Do the publishers think raising prices will help? Perhaps they think that multi-device access will make readers more willing to loosen their purse strings? Or are they just so scared of what Amazon means to the future of publishing that they're anxious to back any other contender?

Again, I wouldn't dare dismiss Google's venture into e-books -- or any market -- as folly. They'll undoubtedly make an impact. I'm just not sure they quite have their finger on the pulse of the consumer in this case.

Paul

Follow me on Twitter: @phigginbotham

What I'm reading now on my Kindle: Nothing To Be Frightened Of by Juilan Barnes

Unlike Texting, Reading While Driving is Safe

Too many compare Kindle's text-to-speech to a beautifully crafted and performed audio book. That is a mistake. There's too much additional information in an audio book represented by among other things, the voices of famous actors. It's hard to imagine a text-to-speech engine ever being able to impart the drama and emotion of a Richard Burton or Peter O'Toole. Not to mention the fact that two audio books performed by different actors will result in two different works.

The text-to-speech capability in Kindle is obviously not on par with an audio book, or up to speed with the best speech engines. However, once you're into a book and familiar with the characters and story line, brief episodes with Kindle's text-to-speech are perfectly acceptable.

For example, let's say you started reading a particularly thrilling book last evening and continued reading the next morning. Sadly, you must leave for work. Instead of listening to the radio or another rap song, fire up your Kindle and "read" while you drive. Again, it's not great audio, but at this point you're so engrossed in the story it doesn't matter.

Try it. You might be surprised.

--by Mel Dashner, Kindle Zen blog

Kindle File Manager is Awful

Amazon desperately needs to come out with a better Kindle file manager. Every time I use it I feel like I'm stepping back into the 1980's. I'd say it's got all the functionality of MS-DOS but that would be an insult to anyone associated with that fine (but very old) operating system.

Am I the only one who wonders why there's no GUI interface for the Kindle? Haven't we all been using GUI's for at least the past 15 years? Just because the display is one color doesn't mean the operating system interface has to feel so outdated.

OK, maybe a GUI is asking too much. How about simply letting me arrange my books and other documents in whatever order I prefer? Why can't I customize it so that my main page features the books, magazines and newspapers I want to read that day? Why do I have to go hunting through screen after screen of listings just to find that book I'd like to read today? I may not have read from it for a couple of weeks but I'd like to have it front and center every time I wake up my Kindle.

I typically have enough entries on my Kindle to fill up 8 or 9 pages of screen listings. Some of these are books. Others are magazines or newspapers. Some are just book samples. One of the major problems I'm finding with the current Kindle file manager is that I forget about certain books/magazines/etc. Out of sight, out of mind. I'd really like to move all the important stuff to the first page but there's no option for this.

C'mon Amazon, can you at least bring this UI into the 1990's and let me dock my important stuff on the first screen?

Thoughts on Amazon's New Whispernet Charge Policy

As everyone probably knows by now, Amazon has altered the conversion/delivery fee associated with sending files wirelessly to your Kindle. When I got my Kindle v.1 I was happy to see that I could email PDFs and other documents and have them delivered wirelessly to the device for 10 cents/attachment. When I dug in deeper and was told by an Amazon rep (last summer) that they're actually not charging anything for this service I was ecstatic.

Once I figured out there was no cost involved in using this service, well, I'm sure I used it a lot more frequently than Amazon anticipated. Unfortunately, I apparently wasn't the only one doing this, which is what forced Amazon to change the policy.

Am I happy about the change? Absolutely not, but I understand the reason behind it. [Here's a great summary of the situation](#) from the Kindle 2 Review blog, btw.

So although I understand why Amazon made this change, I think they're financially addressing the symptom but not the cause. If the problem is due to so many of us using Kindles for services other than buying books or subscribing to magazines, newspapers and blogs, well, Amazon what does that tell you?! Maybe the model for those books, magazines, etc., needs to be adjusted.

This gets back to one of my chief gripes about Amazon and the Kindle. I see almost no innovation happening with the platform. How about other ways to acquire content? What would you think of an all-you-can-eat Kindle content subscription model like [Safari Books Online](#), for (one simple) example? When I get my AMEX bill every month I'm amazed at how little I spend on Kindle content. I guarantee you I'd spend considerably more for a monthly all-you-can-eat subscription model on it and I suspect I'm not alone.

So Amazon, rather than just putting a bandaid on the wound and hoping it gets better, would you please take a closer look at the data and see what it might mean about the platform itself?

KindleFeeder Free Wireless Is Back!

When Amazon announced their recent decision to start charging for wireless file conversions (and raise the price from 10 cents/file to 15 cents per meg) I had to change my KindleFeeder settings to manual rather than wireless. I was pretty bummed because I had gotten hooked on the ease of use this service offered and now I'd have to shift to always remembering to download and move the files from computer to Kindle via USB cable.

Earlier today I got an email from KindleFeeder's Dan Choi saying he's got an interesting workaround to resurrect that wireless service (premium KindleFeeder subscription required). Here's how he describes it:

It's the "Prepare download" button in the middle column of the Dashboard. Click this, then wait for the delivery to become ready in the Deliveries box on the right side. When it's ready, download the linked file on your computer and transfer it manually to your Kindle. This should be a one-time thing.

Then, when you open this latest delivery in your Kindle, you should see links at the top for "Check download status & get download" and "Prepare new download". You click the latter link to tell Kindlefeeder to start preparing a new download. Then 5 minutes or so later, you click the "Check download status & get download" to go to a page (using your Kindle web browser) where you can download your newest Kindlefeeder delivery. This is pretty fast, maybe 20 seconds for a big delivery. Then you should be able to find the new delivery on your Kindle home screen and read it.

I'm heading over to give it a shot right now!

Thoughts on the Kindle DX

The big news this week, of course, was Amazon's announcement of the next member of the family, the Kindle DX. I decided to let the news settle a bit before writing anything about the DX here on Kindleville. Now that a few days have passed I wanted to share my observations as both a consumer and a publisher. Let's start things off with the positives.

Kindle DX Pros

I'm glad Amazon is innovating and not just sitting still. The Whispernet content delivery feature included in the entire Kindle family was a unique why-to-buy for K1 and it remains one for K2 and DX. It would be very easy for Amazon to just sit back and watch the competition limp around without that sort of feature but they're not. (Although I have to admit it's remarkable that Sony, for example, still hasn't figured out a wireless solution almost 18 months after the Kindle set the standard.)

I'm also delighted that Amazon is, at least on the surface, trying to help the newspaper industry find their way. Perhaps most importantly though, I'm thrilled Amazon is looking to help reinvent the textbook publishing industry. Having seen firsthand just how screwed up that sector is I'm glad Amazon is trying to do something about it. It's just that I'm not convinced the newspaper industry can be saved and I'm pretty skeptical the textbook industry can be changed, which leads me to...

Kindle DX Cons

The word on the street is that Amazon keeps 70% of the subscription fees you and I pay for newspapers and magazines. Hey, I wondered why there are so few products to choose from and now I know why. 70%. Are you kidding me?! Even Apple turns that model around and only keeps 30% on App Store sales, passing the other 70% along to developers. I can totally sympathize with newspapers/magazines as long as this remains the Kindle revenue model. As I read somewhere else recently, Amazon needs these magazine/newspaper publishers more than the publishers need Amazon. I hope Bezos & Co. wake up to that before too long. In the mean time, just know that your choices here will continue to be extremely limited.

One of the key benefits to the Kindle DX is the larger display size. Amazon plays that up and how it will provide a reading experience

closer to what you've grown accustomed to in newspapers and magazines. Huh? I've had a NY Times subscription on my Kindle for almost a year now and I'm here to tell you that I love the fact that the content isn't rendered like it is in the printed paper! One of the flaws in trying to invent a next-generation product is to focus too much on the attributes of the current product. As my O'Reilly colleague Mac Slocum asks in [this blog post](#), "why would anyone want a print experience on a digital device?" Amazon, liberate yourself from the way things work today and focus more on the great functionality you can offer tomorrow.

Regarding textbooks, I've got two kids in college and there's no way I'm spending almost \$1,000 so both of them can have an e-reader...unless the price of textbooks comes way, way down on these devices. Heck, I recently bought a replacement laptop for my daughter and only spent \$350, so there's no way I'm coughing up this kind of cash for a one-trick pony like the Kindle DX. You might be thinking it's OK to pay \$489 for the device because the textbooks will be a fraction of the price students pay today. Dream on. I'm sure DX textbook prices will be less but I seriously doubt the savings will pay for a DX. Don't forget there are a bunch of textbook publishers out there who are used to getting fat margins on their print products; they arguably have a monopoly in this space and even though it's being challenged on a number of fronts, don't look for them to suddenly become filled with benevolence.

I admit that I'm still pretty irritated with Amazon's decision to essentially abandon the K1 and focus on K2, DX and beyond. I'm not asking for a free upgrade but I sure would appreciate it if they'd simply provide some of the same features available on K2 to all those early adopters who bought into K1. Text-to-speech is a great example. Is there really a reason why Amazon can't simply offer a software upgrade to support this on the K1? Again, despite the rumor of a "media pad" from Apple, the folks in Cupertino are not abandoning existing iPhone users. In fact, I'm looking forward to the OS 3.0 update that's due later this summer. It sounds like it will include a number of very cool features...and it will show up on my phone for free. Hey Amazon, even if you can't find it in your heart to offer free K1 software updates like this, how about making text-to-speech (and other K2 functionality) available for \$5?!

I still use my K1 every day and I even bought a new book for it last

night. So although I haven't abandoned Amazon and the Kindle platform, each new product release seems to give me more and more reason to explore other alternatives. That doesn't sound like the type of customer loyalty Amazon has built via their core services but sometimes it feels like the Kindle comes from a totally different company.

Some Kindle pundits have caught Whine Flu

As you've no doubt heard by now, Amazon recently announced that they will finally begin charging a fee for sending personal documents to your Kindle wirelessly (after *giving it away* for two years). Instead of charging by the document, as they had originally planned, they will by the megabyte -- 15 cents per MB rounded up to the nearest megabyte.

Of course Kindle critics see this as one more sign of the Kindle's future downfall.

One blogger asks "Does this increase lessen the value of the Kindle?", and proceeds to express his displeasure at the pricing change.

My favorite headline so far comes from C-Net: "Amazon's Kindle: Your fat personal docs aren't cheap."

Exactly how "fat" do your personal documents have to be before transferring them wirelessly is no longer cheap?

Just for a frame of reference, I visited Project Gutenberg and looked up *War and Peace*. Any guess on how much that "fat" txt file will cost to transfer under the new pricing structure? 60 cents. That still seems like a bargain for document conversion *and* wireless delivery, especially considering we're paying no monthly fee for wireless service.

Of course PDFs are much larger than text files, but given the dodgy quality of PDF conversions for Kindle I doubt too many Kindle users will be concerned about PDF pricing.

I don't know about you, but I don't have too many Tolstoy-sized personal documents sitting around that I need to transfer to my Kindle. But if you do, fortunately there's always the free solution of transferring documents to your Kindle manually via USB cable, either after converting them yourself using a program such as Calibre (which we introduced you to earlier), or by using your @free.kindle.com email address.

I'm certainly no Amazon apologist, but the whole thing seems to be much ado about nothing. I strongly doubt it will affect future purchase decisions or send any current Kindle users scrambling to eBay to list their device. Not until Apple unleashes their "Kindle Killer," that is (yawn). But that's another column.

Paul

Currently reading on my Kindle: Nothing! I'm reading a real paper book from my local library. Ugh. *Wherever You Go, There You Are* by Jon Kabat-zinn.

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