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Digital Dharma

Digital Books

A Huge Revolution Is Taking Print from Paper to Cyberspace

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When traveling on the bus or train these days, you might have noticed fewer people reading unwieldy newspapers or magazines. Instead you see commuters engrossed in sleek and portable e-reading devices--a Kindle, a Sony Reader, their iPhone or a netbook that fits on one hand.

Hundreds of Books in One Gadget

On June 10, 2009, Amazon released Kindle DX, the third version of their popular e-reading device. Soon after, on August 5, Sony announced two new editions of the Sony Reader. Other highly anticipated devices include Plastic Logic, a letter-sized touch-screen reader and a dual-screen e-reader by ASUS, perhaps the cheapest e-reading device yet.

Some users prefer a small device with a complete operating system that can run everything from MS Word to their personal management calendar. For them there is a plethora of new netbooks being released it seems almost weekly. Today's units are fast enough to run games and play hi-resolution video. Meanwhile everyone is holding their breath to see if the as-yet-unreleased, sure-to-be-fabulous-but-expensive Apple tablet, will eclipse them all.

Whatever the device, one thing is clear: the era of the 10-pound book and the home library of a thousand volumes is waning. These devices can contain thousands of e-books, instantly available at your fingertips.

Major Players Battle for Market Share

Not since the time of Guttenberg has there been such a marked change in how we consume and share knowledge. It is a radical revolution in the way we experience the written word. E-books were once specialized products delivered on DVDs. But the internet has changed the game, and major players lead the way from print into cyberspace at a mind-boggling pace.

Google has ramped up its ambitious and controversial project to digitize millions of books to create the world's first comprehensive e-library. Scribd.com, the "YouTube of documents," houses over 10 million books, documents, reports, and other text-based files in its vast online warehouse. While Amazon and Sony are not disclosing the number of e-readers sold, industry estimates range from 500,000 Kindles for 2008, to 400,000 Sony Readers as of January 2009. Interestingly, Dan Brown's new hit bestseller "The Lost Symbol" sold better in its Kindle version than as a hardcover book in the first week of its release in September 2009. Disney has also jumped into the fray by unveiling a new subscription-based e-book web site, www.DisneyDigitalBook.com Government-run educational institutions are also jumping on board. In May 2009, Gov. Schwarzenegger of California announced his "Free Digital Textbook Initiative," aiming to have digital textbooks used in California public schools by the fall of 2009.

Blogs such as HinduEBooks.blogspot.com keep track of the latest Hindu publications online, while HinduEBooks.wordpress.com makes note of Hindu scriptures in PDF format, in their original Sanskrit using Devanagari script. Hindu educators, leaders and organizations can capitalize on this growing trend by preparing and distributing e-books. It can be as simple as uploading a PDF to Scribd or DocStoc.com. Instantly your publication will face an international audience of millions.