

# The Rise of eBooks

by  
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As technology progresses, certain forms of media have adapted to cope with the evolving sentiment that older media will be replaced with more convenient and powerful media. The incremental alteration from the predominance of physical books to the recent spawn of electronic books, or eBooks, is an example of this progression. However, the real question lies in whether or not eBooks will completely replace traditional books as they are viewed in modern society. Technology's advancement that affords the proliferation of eBooks in the book market spreads the concept of traditional books as archaic media artifacts, therefore creating room for eBooks to influence and eventually substitute the role of the traditional book.

Everyone has experienced, read or at least seen a traditional, physical book. They are often characterized as bulky and expensive. Narrow margins, small font and low contrast make the book as a form of media a hassle to deal with and uncomfortable to read. The Gutenberg revolution that produced the printing press allowed for the first printed book to be created. Traits of these first books are still

shared with the books we now we as media artifacts. Richard Campbell mentions this in *Media & Culture 5* with the following statement: “Many early books were large, elaborate, and expensive, taking months to illustrate and publish,”(351). Books cannot be duplicated with as much ease and perfection as electronic books are so inclined to. It is not possible to email someone an eBook you found interesting or wirelessly transmit it to their PDA or Personal Digital Assistant, the vellum of the Computer Age. What ways are traditional books exceptionally better than eBooks in their current form? The only issue regards the fact that eBooks require a device, a high-tech medium, to display their contents. This device then requires some form of electricity to power it. However, rapidly advancing technologies are making this a non-issue.

EBooks have been around for over a decade (Davidson 26). They have yet to catch on for several reasons. EBook readers have customarily been costly, buggy and as Richard Shim of the market research firm IDC said, “too bulky or the displays too hard to read,” (Snider 1). EBook publishers and device manufacturers have constantly adapted their creations to compete against the popularity of the traditional book format of media. Massive changes are emerging as eBooks are on the forefront and brink of a born-again digital revolution. More recently, services have emerged to come to the eBook format's aid. Dr. Lloyd Davidson, a professor at Northwestern

University stated, "Using a new generation of book scanners that can transform printed works into photoperfect, fully searchable replicas of the original at a rate of over 1000 pages per hour, companies like netLibrary and Ebrary are amassing very impressive stores of books..." (27). Google's new service, Print, affords the ability of archiving books into a digital eBook-accessible format with their database currently holding over 100,000 books. Granted there are a near indefinite number of books not yet in a digital format, it still will not be too far away when a person will be able to go to a Borders or Barnes and Noble, memory card in hand, and purchase any book in the eBook format. EBooks are currently up to a quarter cheaper than traditional books as they bypass publishing and distribution costs (Snider 1). Sony hopes to speed up the industry's substitution of eBooks for books with their new eBook reader simply named Reader. Weighing less than a pound, the Reader features a large 6 inch screen and is capable of displaying 7,500 pages on a single battery charge with adequate, yet expandable, internal memory to store roughly 80 books (Snider 1). If this development is not enough to spearhead the monumental transition to eBooks, perhaps the fact that nearly every best seller book is being simultaneously released as an eBook will prove to be evidence of the dawn of the eBook revolution. The evolution of the eBook format to overtake the role of books has been well thought out by eBook pioneers. Things such as writing in the margins in regular books can be done with eBook features such as notetaking which allows the reader to interact with

the media by inserting as much commentary as necessary, unbounded by the margin size (Cavanaugh 59). By replicating every trait of the physical book media and then including more features, eBooks are well on their way of altering modern society's perception of books to that of mere media artifacts.

The proliferation of eBooks in the book market may very well lead to the demise of the original book format as first created by Johannes Gutenberg in the 1450s (Campbell 350). It is not a question of can eBooks substitute traditional books but rather when. The adaptation of eBooks has nearly perfected the electronic media by which the future eBook market will thrive. Davidson believes that the next major transformative event, the switch to eBooks, will be a death blow to academic libraries and universities (26). Similar to how the first books were obscenely expensive and have now become much more attainable, eBooks are beginning their journey to be the next primary book media. Media may be viewed as a reflection of culture. Our culture is technologically stunning and experiencing the spoils of the computer age. Therefore, the next media, to be filled in my eBooks, must reflect the current technologically superior culture. While Tom Prehn, creator of Adobe's Digital Media Store stated that nearly half of all eBooks sold were reference and nonfiction, eBooks are swiftly being introduced in all book genres (Peek 17). Thousands of websites are popping up around the internet, devoted to supplying affordable eBooks with the

added benefit of instant delivery via web download. Microsoft has an archive of free technical eBooks, as does O' Reilly Media. Potential customers are also able to read the first few pages of each eBook online, such as with Amazon's *Search Inside the Book* feature (Davidson 27). Such milestones have never been possible with the traditional book media. With organizations such as the Open eBook Forum promoting the development and distribution of electronic publishing helping guide the eBook revolution, books will soon be regarded as historical media artifacts (Peek 17).

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