

e-books

Yesterday I bought my very first *e-book*.

I like to think of myself as being up there in the vanguard of all things technological, but for some reason I have never considered *e-books* before. In the matter of books I am a traditionalist. I love everything about books, their appearance, feel, even smell. I get a great pleasure from owning a book, I get a great sense of comfort from books.

And there is also the reading of books. That comfortable arm chair, the warm light streaming from the standard lamp behind the chair, the licking of the flames in the open fire on those long winter evenings, the book comfortably resting in your lap.... Then, you compare that to the concept of the *e-book*! Sitting bolt upright on the office chair, leaving on the hard desk, squinting at the vertical screen that as you concentrate begins to flicker in your peripheral vision. I seem to remember my mother telling me that if a looked at a screen from such a short distance – I would go blind – or at the very least get square eyes!

The whole concept seems to grate. But I was at my favorite on-line bookstore looking for a book that had been recommended to me, which detailed the way companies woefully could not deal with immerging markets and new technologies. The printed book was £15, the *e-book* was £10, a difference which was not enough to sway my opinions. However the printed book “will normally be despatched within 3 weeks” whilst the *e-book* was available instantly... I am obviously not £s poor, but I am time poor. I purchased the *e-book*.

Of course you need an *e-book* reader - A very easy and free down-load acquisition. An *e-mail* from the book store indicated that the *e-book* was available in my account for download, and 2.56 minutes later I was reading my first *e-book*!

And the experience? Was everything that I had feared – and worse! The “library” opened up and proudly showed my single purchase. I double clicked on the image and the title page of the book was displayed. Great! <Page Down> and the copyright details, publishes address and ISBN numbers filled the screen. <Page Down> displayed the author’s biography. <Page Down> displayed the Preface, then the Attributions, then the Dedications... and so on. My one thought was do I have to trudge through all this every time that I open this book? Why can I not just “go to page No”, then I saw the scroll bar at the bottom – this was a 400 page book so the definition of the first few pages was not obvious (the bar grows as you go through the book just like the opening of the paper book gets progressively thicker to the left-hand side). So I could. And I can leave multiple bookmarks within the text for easy access, and search by word – try doing that in a paper book!

But the page is VERTICAL! The human body was designed to do detailed work immediately in front of the body (at about waist level) with the head slightly bowed and the eyes looking down past the cheek bones. Its natural, it has been that way for millions of years. A human is 80% more productive in this natural, relaxed stance than in the vertical projection. Go on, when was the last time you put a paperback book on a shelf and stood there trying to read it?

And the size was all wrong, and the zoom facility was laborious – but I eventually got the size that I could reasonably comfortably read. You see I am getting older and reading is no longer as trivial as it once was. Stop sniggering! It will happen to you sometime! I have given in to reading-glasses and the one thing that you suddenly realise is that they only work properly in a quite restrictive range.

And then, suddenly, it dawned on me. This is new – do not try to make it adapt to the old methods, let's maximise the new opportunities.

I increased the size of the print until it looked like a church lectern bible, and made the reader full screen. I sat back in the chair and reclined it. I distanced myself far enough from the screen that not only did I no longer need those reading-glasses but the peripheral shimmer ceased, and turning the page became a simple tap on the <page Down> key. I suddenly realised that I had been so engrossed in the book that I had read 30+ pages and been totally unaware of time passing – just like in that old arm chair....

Then I found that you cannot just highlight passages for latter attention, but you can also write your own notes and comments – Oh, and didn't you just hate those people that write in those old fashioned paper books?

Just imagine talking to a customer and being able to say that all the terms & conditions, details of transactions, quotations etc. are in their account area. They can down-load at their convenience and click on the link if they have questions or wish to complete the transaction. Imagine, being able to co-read the documents and dynamically highlight portions of the text to which you are referring. Eminently possible in the AORTA world (Always On Real Time Access)

In the near future we are likely to get Tablet Computers – a bit like those palm held PDA computers of today, but sized to be the equivalent of a hard-back book – how convenient! Then we will even be able to curl up in that old arm chair by the fire and read *e*-books....