e-Publishing: Need of the Hour

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Abstract

Electronic journals and electronic books play a crucial role in the changing scenario of libraries and information centres. This paper deals with the emerging technology of electronic publishing. The paper covers e-journals, e-books, advantages of e-journals and e-books, publishers of scholarly e-journals and important e-publishing initiatives.

1. INTRODUCTION

Electronic publishing or e-publishing is the publishing process where the manuscripts are submitted in electronic form, edited, printed and distributed to readers via computers and the network of networks of computers. It means that e-publishing realizes the dissemination of information through electronic media in all its various stages. Two major fields of e-publishing are electronic journals (e-journals) and electronic books (e-books). Electronic journal is a periodical available online or in CD-ROM format. In an electronic journal all the activities of publishing viz., submission of manuscript, editing, layout, and distribution including access can be performed using electronic media. Portable electronic book reader will bring about dramatic changes in the field of e-publishing.

2. E-JOURNALS

e-Publishing is two decades old.[1] The American Chemical Society (ACS) was the first professional body to publish their journals in electronic form in 1983. The American Physical Society (APS), the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE) and the Institute of Engineers offer their prestigious journals in electronic form. These and some other organisations offer the literature on engineering, library science, technology, art and medical science in the form of journals, proceedings, colloquia and reports through electronic media, that is, through e-publishing. e-publishing through CD-ROM is a well established field. The Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) provides their journals only through electronic form. The electronic Journals Online (EJO) service provides peer-reviewed journals online, free of cost, for example, *World Scientific*, Singapore. With e-publishing and networking nowadays, it is a privilege of an author to submit the copy of his/her research paper (scientific and technological fields) to the site xxx.lanl.gov (maintained by Los Alamos National Laboratories). From this archive, one can access research material free of cost. A mirror site of it is available in India at Institute of Mathematical-Science, Chennai. In general, individuals, universities and research centres can access e-journals through net on the basis of payment and on an agreement regarding the copyright.

An e-journal is a journal available online. A journal is a periodical that carries research papers, review articles, rapid communication, letters to the editor, tutorial papers, etc., covering a narrow field but in depth. In the conventional publishing that is print publishing (P-publishing) the following steps are

involved. It begins with the submission of the manuscript to the editor of the journal. The editorial process involves in sending the manuscript to referees for critical comments. If referees demand some changes in the manuscript, this information is passed on to the author and resubmission is requested. After the acceptance, the content is formatted in the 'journal's own style'. It is then sent to the press, after a delay of three to six months or even more .

The total time lag between the submission of the manuscript and its paper print, called turn-around time, is about six months in most cases. In a world of rapid progress, this delay is intolerable and even retarding for research results of great value and use. Here comes the e-journals as a boon! In the e-publishing, the manuscript is submitted online in the prescribed format. Refereeing and the related editorial processes will be fast as no postal delay will be involved. The turn–around time is mainly due to the modification of the manuscript, postal delay and the inevitable delay of fixing the issue for the publication of the article as decided by the editorial board.

2.1 Advantages of e-Journals

The most attractive feature of e-journals is the minimum turn-around time. It is of great value for communicating the research results. The popularity of e-journal is also due to the fast and easy access to information. It is possible to retrieve a particular article using search engines. This is facilitated by keywords and author search, provided by publishers. e-publishing is eco-friendly as it does not demand cutting of trees. The user can access the relevant information from his workplace or from any node having connectivity to internet provided the library has subscription to e-journals and related database. It is even possible to publish an article by an author himself by submitting it to an archive for example the website of Los Alamos National Laboratory. Electronic journals are now widely used by researchers and the field of e-publishing maintains very good pace through e-journals and CD-ROM versions.

Many of the major scholarly societies have made their journals available online. For example:

- ❑ IEEE Electronic Library (IEL)
  http://www.ieee.org
- ❑ American Physical Society (APS)
  http://www.aps.org
- ❑ American Chemical Society
  http://www.acs.org
- ❑ Association for Computing Machinery
  http://www.acm.org
- ❑ American Society for Information Science and Technology
  http://www.asis.org
- ❑ American Medical Association
  http://www.ama-assn.org
- ❑ American Mathematical Society
  http://www.ams.org
- ❑ American Society of Civil Engineering
  http://www.asce.org
- ❑ American Society of Mechanical Engineering
  http://www.asme.org

2.2 Major Publishers of Scholarly e-journals

- ❑ Elsevier Science
  www.elsevier.com
- ❑ Academic Press
  www.apnet.com
- ❑ Blackwell-Science
  http://blacksci.co.uk/online/default.htm
- ❑ Kluwer Academic Publishers
  www.wkap.n1/kaphtml.htm
- ❑ MCB University Press
  www.mcb.co.uk
- ❑ Springer
  http://link.springer.de/whatsnew.htm
- ❑ Cambridge University Press
  www.cup.org

3. ELECTRONIC-BOOKS

The term electronic book was coined by Andries Van Dam, a professor of technology at Brown University. The concept of portable e-book was emerged in the late seventies. The first e-book titled 'Dyna Book' was

introduced by Alan Kay, a post graduate student at Utah in 1968. Sony attempted various versions of portable electronic books with partial success. Adobe Acrobat is the commercial software for publishing and viewing electronic text.

At the outset, we mention that an e-book is different from CD-ROM version of a book. Encyclopedia Britannica CD-ROM is very popular. A Malayalam version of this has been released. Knowledge bank, Monorama year book, etc. are also popular. The University of Kerala has prepared a CD-ROM version of book titled 'Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai' written by Dr. Ayyappa Panicker. Another title from the university is 'Saraswathy Kandabharanam'. These CD-ROMs give textbook like display in which one can turn the pages forward or backward. It is clear that CD-ROMs are portable but can't be used as an e-book in the technical sense. The CD-ROM versions are also a part of e-publishing.

The contents of an e-book are the usual text, graphs, illustrations, etc., just like that of printed version. The electronic content is transmitted and/or displayed on a device (hardware) called e-book reader (portable electronic device very similar to personal digital assistant, or palm top computer), to be read by the viewer. It is almost similar in experience to reading a printed book. An e-book is written in machine readable form. An attractive feature in using e-books is the ease of reading and using them and even the scope for scribbling notes on it. But, the practical problem is about the e-book reader. e-book hardware devices are still not quite practical or cost effective (Rs. 10,000 or more). A variety of device are being developed to simulate some of the virtues of printed books, including portability and network independence, so that e-books function on a variety of platforms. Two types of e-book readers available in the market are full-sized reader and palm-sized reader (Rocket e-book, Soft Book, etc.). The software called Adobe Acrobat can also be used for publishing and reading an e-book. The contents of an e-book could be down

loaded into an e-book reader. It is portable and one can read it at any place unlike the reading of a CD using a personal computer. In this paper we do not address the issues of digital rights management, archiving and long term access, loaning, price, acquisition, circulation, etc., of e-books. We can search 'E-BookNet' site for consumer information about e-books titles available. A site useful for librarians is 'elibraryBook'. Some other sites are 'Book of the Future', 'Don't be afraid of E-books', 'From P-Book to E-Book' 'Electrifying the Book', etc. The top vendors of e-books are the Netlibrary and ITKnowledge. More than 50,000 e-books are produced by the University of California.

3.1 Advantages of e-Books

e-book reader (hardware) provides a simpler rocker switch that fits pages back and forth. With a scroll bar one can quickly go through the book. Using the stylus one can search for text, highlight it or even add hand-written notes. e-books have some added functionality over p-versions. It provides multimedia information, full text searching, citation formatting, reference linking, portability, inter-operability on a variety of devices, availability in advance of paper-print, and the ability to share or loan information.

4. IMPORTANT E-PUBLISHING INITIATIVES

4.1 NetLibrary

NetLibrary (http://www.netlibrary.com) is located in Boulder, Colorado and was founded in 1998. As the world's premier provider of electronic books, netLibrary helps academic, public, corporate and special libraries to create a richer and more productive learning environment for their patrons. NetLibrary is a division of OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), a nonprofit organisation that provides computer-based cataloguing, reference, resource sharing and preservation service to libraries worldwide.

4.2 World ebook library

The World ebook library (http://www.netlibrary.net) provides free unlimited public access to a comprehensive collection of public domain texts, references and links to thousands of online libraries around the world via internet. The subject coverage of this library includes literature, serials, bibliographies, dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc. This initiative is sponsored by The World Electronic Text Library Foundation, Honolulu.

4.3 Project Gutenberg

Project Gutenberg is the brainchild of Michael Hart. It began in 1971 at The Materials Research Lab of University of Illinois. The Project Gutenberg Philosophy is to make information, books and other materials available to the general public in forms a vast majority of the computers, programs and people can easily read, use, quote and search. Here a lots of famous and important texts are freely available to everyone in the world.

4.4 e-books

e-books site (http://e-books.org) is a non-commercial repository of information related to e-book research and products. This site attempts to encourage the sharing and analysis of ideas surrounding e-book reading appliances to create an accurate understanding of their possibilities and limitations. This is designed and maintained by the Kent State University, Ohio.

4.5 The Online Books Page

The Online Books Page (http://digital.library.upenn.edu/books/) is a site that facilitates access to books that are freely readable over the internet. It also aims to encourage the development of such online books for the benefit of all. The major services of this site include (i) an index of thousands of online books freely readable on the internet, (ii) pointers to significant directories and archives of online texts, (iii) special exhibits of particularly interesting classes of online books and (iv) information on how readers can help and support the growth of online books. This site is edited by John Mark Ockerbloom and is hosted by the University of Pennsylvania Library.

4.6 e-print archive

e-print archive (www.arXiv.org) is an e-print service in the fields of physics, mathematics, non-linear science, computer science and quantitative biology. ArXiv is owned, operated and funded by Cornell University, a private not-for-profit educational institution. e-print archives has got a number of mirror sites in different countries. The Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai, acts as the mirror site of India (www.in.arXiv.org).

CONCLUSION

e-Publishing will have a great role in making the libraries and information centres digital. e-journals and e-books would become very practical media of dissemination of information. It may be a funny thing to see a student having a dozen of books in his pocket! A kind of 'mobile reading' could be realized. In future, we may give our digital signature without using a pen and get an e-book reader and some e-books downloaded, without a single paper, from a digital library.

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