

# Technology

## A Growing Market for E-Books

New technologies, from the Internet to iPods, have captured the imaginations of techno-wizards and technophobes alike. But electronic books, or e-books, have not had the same impact. Because technology has yet to produce a computer screen that is as comfortable to read as the printed page, users just haven't embraced e-books with the same enthusiasm as they have other innovations.

That trend may be turning as the public becomes more accustomed to reading text onscreen and as more online texts become available. Practitioners in quickly evolving fields like business, science, and engineering especially appreciate the e-book format because it is much more easily updated than print.

Efforts such as Project Gutenberg, which aims to convert books and journals in the public domain into digital format, now offers nearly 17,000 free books in its catalog at [www.gutenberg.com](http://www.gutenberg.com). In 2004,



Coming soon to a library near you?

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search engine giant Google announced its intentions to digitally scan the 10 million book titles in the collections of five major research libraries, including those at Oxford University, Stanford University, Harvard University, the University of Michigan, and the New York Public Library.

The evolution of e-books themselves has also helped their cause. The latest generation of e-books includes a wide range of features, many of which a traditional textbook cannot match. Companies are enhancing electronically printed materials with highlighting and notetaking capabilities, Web links, video, and electronic talking Flash presentations that allow the students to hear the words as they read them to increase their onscreen comprehension. Boston-based Texthelp Systems, for example, offers Lexiflow, a software program that offers these features as well as keyword searches, zoom control, and quick page navigation.

Traditional publishers like McGraw-Hill also have entered the e-book market to offer digital textbooks to students. In partnership with digital publishing company Zinio, which also digitally publishes a number of magazines, McGraw-Hill Higher Education has made available 150 of its college textbooks in e-book format at half the cost of their printed counterparts.

Although the public's love affair with e-books may be slow to develop, educators like David Blakesley,

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According to the Associated Press, African Internet users pay 90 percent more for Internet access than Americans do. African citizens pay about \$1,800 for 20 gigabytes of data per month, while Americans pay only \$20 for the same capacity. An obstacle to Africa's economic development, this discrepancy stems, in part, from the continent's lack of communications infrastructure, say government officials.

an associate professor of English at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, believes e-books ultimately will become a major force in the publishing industry. Their affordability and ease of distribution will win out, especially when technology produces a device that makes onscreen reading more viable, he believes.

"E-books are becoming popular not only because of their affordability, but also

because they are a great resource," he says. Blakesley admits that many people, including his own students, still prefer holding a traditional book in their hands when it comes to reading for pleasure. But as far as informational reading is concerned, the e-book is starting to win out. "E-books are here to stay," says Blakesley.

## New RFID Tech at IU

### A new piece of equipment at Indiana

University's Kelley School of Business is more than just a printer—it prints radio frequency identification (RFID) tags, which will allow Kelley undergraduate and graduate students to model the complete life cycle of an item embedded with RFID technology. The printer is a gift from Zebra Technologies, a company based in Vernon Hills, Illinois, that manufactures universal product code (UPC) and RFID printers.

The printer adds a new capability to the Kelley School's RFID lab, which was established two years ago as the first working RFID education-

Kelley MBA supply chain academy students in the RFID lab.




TYAGAN MILLER

al model at a U.S. business school, according to school officials. “We were able to design and read tags through a system, develop interfaces to other systems, and generate metrics; but until this gift, we were not actually able to produce the tags,” says Daniel Conway, a visiting clinical associate professor who runs the school’s RFID lab.

RFID technology utilizes smart media, which can incorporate text, graphics, and bar code information into “smart tags” that allow organizations to track inventory, packages, and even people. Unlike standard UPC bar codes, RFID tags do not require line-of-sight access to be recognized—they can be detected over a wide area. Because of its versatility,

RFID technology is being adopted by businesses of all types, including warehouses, shipping operations, distribution centers, and hospitals.

RFID technology is still in its infancy, but as companies use RFID more frequently, business schools will need to produce more graduates skilled in this area,

says M.A. Venkataramanan, chair of undergraduate programs and the Lawrence D. Glaubinger Professor of business administration at Kelley. A fully equipped RFID lab, he says, is one way to help students stay at the “leading edge of this emerging technology.” 

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A study by the Association for Computing Machinery aims to calm those who fear offshoring will take too many IT jobs from the U.S. The study estimates that only 2 percent to 3 percent of computing jobs will move from the U.S. annually over the next decade.

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

### More flexible benchmarking with AACSB International’s DataDirect

Business schools often benchmark their programs against peer and aspirant institutions to know where they stand in the marketplace. In an effort to make such comparative information more accessible, AACSB International recently rolled out its new online subscription service, DataDirect. The service’s objective is to offer schools more flexibility and customization when it comes to obtaining benchmarking data, says Dan LeClair, vice president and chief knowledge officer for AACSB.

“Schools have asked us for much more flexibility in terms of how they receive information,” says LeClair. “Before DataDirect, when schools asked for benchmarking reports, the only information that schools could customize was the group of schools included—the reports were standardized. With this new system, schools can not only select their comparison group, but also focus on particular variables. They also can access the system online and

receive information in a variety of formats, such as Excel, PDF, or HTML.”

DataDirect was created with the help of New York-based Peerfocus, a provider of association-oriented research Web engines. With the Peerfocus product, AACSB and DataDirect are able to provide schools with anytime-anywhere access to member information within a secure online environment.

The system includes five years of data, which allows schools to follow historical trends as well as obtain data-driven snapshots of the current market. All AACSB-member schools have free access to manage their own data and download standardized reports through DataDirect. Customized information is available through time-limited subscriptions—\$150 for three months or \$500 per year.

For more information about DataDirect, visit [www.aacsb.edu/datadirect/](http://www.aacsb.edu/datadirect/).