ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR INFORMATION PROVISION IN NIGERIAN LIBRARIES

By

CAROLINE, N. NDAKOTSU (Mrs)

kashim Ibrahim Library

Ahmadu Bello University

ABSTRACT.

Information technology has opened many channels of not only information retrieval and transmission but also of information generation, When the computer was introduced into the printing process, the possibility of electronic publishing was no longer a pipe dream.

"his paper examines the idea and concept of electronic publishing and its revolutionary impact on information generation and dissemination. It also looks at the controversial side of it publishers scepticism to it especially in the area of piracy and copyright and its merits and challenge to the Nigerian academic.

The paper agrees that like every other *technological innovation the electronic publishing has it own problems though,its advantages far outweight its problems the academic community in Nigeria or elsewhere stands to gain a lot if they can overcome the Infrastructural problems that generally stand in the way of technological advancement.*

Introduction

Nigeria's status as a developing country has, to a large extent, contributed to the slow pace of her exploitation of the many opportunities offered by information technology (IT) of which electronic publishing is one. We are already familiar with the term 'publishing' this is the art of disseminating or making available recorded knowledge for public good as well as commercial gain. Our understanding of 'electronic publishing' may not be all that straight forward. There is therefore the need to highlight and explain it a little further.

According to the McGraw –Hill Dictionary of Scientific and Technical Terms (2003) electronic publishing is an umbrella term for non-paper publishing which includes publishing online or on media such as CDs and DVDs. It is the provision of information with high editorial and value added content in electronic form by allowing the user some degree of control and interactivity.

Wikipedia (2001) states that electronic publishing includes digital publication of e-books and electronic articles, and the development of digital libraries and catalogues. It comes under values hyponyms like online publishing e-publishing, and web publishing.

Compaine (1998) sees "publishing" as the process by which an information provider assembles, formats, and distributes a content – intensive product, whereas electronic publishing means taking the content created by the writers, artists, photographers, etc. and getting it to the end user in digital rather than printed format. In the purest form, he further explains electronic publishing as the creation, storage, transmission, and reception of text, sound and graphics by digital means. Of course, throughout the process computers are involved.

Strong (2006) compares "electronic publishing" to "intellectual property" as it involves the transfer from the publisher to the reader of a tangible thing in which the published work is embodied.

The raison d'etre for the rising profile of e-publishing according to Ressler (2006) is that the technologies surrounding the Internet and the World Wide Web are changing so rapidly that no book can be completely up-to-date for long. By utilizing the benefits of IT, e-publishing has dramatically increased the speed at which large volumes of data can be structured, indexed, sorted, stored, accessed, and delivered to a sector of

information utility.

Just as in the familiar tradition of publishing the process begins with the author actualising ideas and concepts utilizing facts, creating information by selecting from a mass of data, and imposing order and structure on the resulting work. The author assembles his raw material from facts, figures, concepts, and options, other published works, etc, which are analysed and synthesized. At the end of these, he achieves his objective of communicating with the reader through the written word. The best application of IT is to the printing process by way of electronic typesetting.

Indeed e-publishing is concerned with the use of IT in the process by which the user can interact directly with the electronic form of the author's work, exploiting the structure as well as the content of the information and using the power of IT to search vast accumulations of information and to transmit results directly to the user.

E-publishing creates an information chain involving technology, authors, producers, retailers, suppliers, and users. Technology comes in the shape of hard-and software's as well as communication systems. It is however, not debatable that without the author who is the creative originator, there would be no chain at all. It is actually the works created by authors that producers develop into electronic information products. Retailers, on their own part, deliver the electronic information to end users.

But there is something else to publishers' electronic products which Chapman (2001) pointed out. They can go straight to the user, bypassing any intermediary information or library services. Some materials are produced both in print and in electronic form while some are exact reproductions of the same text (Chapman, 2001). Thus we now have journals made increasingly available electronically and books also though at a slower but sure rate.

Desktop Publishing

Desktop publishing is one of the products of technology in electronic publishing. Its software is an example of the use of electronics in publishing rather than the true electronics publishing which is concerned with the use of electronics directly by the information user. However, the error persists in the perception of desktop publishing as being synonymous with electronic publishing.

Desktop publishing provides the user with facilities in a PC which emulate th...

the relationship between the library and the publishers of the new electronic products, in particular off-line databases involving the use of optical media.

The main worry for publishers is the potential use of optical discs by libraries to carry out activities that might deprive them of, or lower their profits and reduce their market. However, the publishers and the libraries can come to agreement on some points, like:

a. No related production of multiple printed copies should be allowed without permission from the publishers.
b. No direct (on-line) transmission to other libraries without a special licence. In other words, no networking.
c. No downloading to computers other than in the institution.
d. No sale of download files.

But libraries need not be too constrained. Without permission or payment, they *can provide the following:*

a. Ordinary access to optical discs, for scanning or reading on the screen. This is more or less like reading of printed journals in a library or at home.
b. Printing paper copies for individual users-similar to photocopying of printed articles.
c. Downloading for use within the institution.

CONCLUSION

What ha been discussed is not merely a project for the future, an ideal, or something of science fiction. Electronic publishing is a reality, already established and functional. In the hard-pressed world of Nigerian publishing business, it is really an inviting idea which will no doubt be embraced with enthusiasm by the academic community where libraries would serve as the go between.

However, we have to be mindful of certain facts which are part of the 'Nigerian factor'. For one thing, unless and until power supply is reliable anything electronic is bound to be a dismal failure. Again, the country's copyright laws are observed more in breach. Electronic publishing without proper and firm control may just open the floodgates of piracy and plagiarism in Nigerian academic.

These, however, should not diminish the importance and usefulness of

electronic publishing in a book-starved country like ours.

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