
DIGITAL TEXTS

The textbook industry now prepares on-line sources, CDs, test banks, animated demos. And oh, yes: specialized printed books.

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The comments are an edited version of a telephone interview'

"They've been talking about e-books in the textbook industry since I started back in 1999. The industry even then kept saying that the textbook was on its way out. And the industry did even then focus on electronic products (such as companion websites, interactive testing, etc.) and e-versions of their books.

"Now it's 2010 ...and the general thought is that it's going to explode all of a sudden. (Many in the industry) seem to think it's going to keep on building slowly and then all of a sudden will be a switch to e-only books.

"There is a growing corporate demand for the industry to do more and more online and interactive stuff. I assume that it's going to definitely be the mandate of the industry – that some might set a target and say we need to make ourselves 75% e-only only by such-and-such a date. As to how it's going to be received I'm not 100% sure.

"A year ago, I was lecturing for an editing course at Ryerson and I was astonished at how many laptops were in the classroom. I thought whatever happened to pen in paper note taking? It was about 50-50 split and I didn't even see that the year before. So

this can change very, very fast.

"Most educational publishers develop supplementary materials for the textbooks. Both students and instructors have access to data under a number of different resources, whether it is review questions, the instructors manual or question banks and animations.. (Faculty) can administer exams ...there's all sorts of material available that is supplementary to the text.

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"Right now we've only got a handful of schools that are doing

the e-only. The vast majority is doing a combination, so we sell packages where they have the print book and have access to the online version as well. That seems to give people the comfortable options. Both schools and publishers are looking to move towards an e-only focus. Depending on the groups that are using the material there may not be 100% wholehearted enthusiasm for the transition.

"Nursing students, still like the print book a lot. I don't know if that's just that they prefer a solid reference as opposed to going completely electronic. They seem to like the solidity of having that paper backup. This doesn't mean they are not tech savvy – just that perhaps as a group they hang onto their p-materials more than many disciplines.

"There will be groups that really like the change and other groups that are more resistant to it. The industry has the whole world of print on demand in our back pocket as well. So there's a lot of custom publication that goes on in textbook publishing, so print is not going to die entirely."