

## Interactive ebook developing programmes for tablets: pros and cons

### Preview

The history of electronic books may reach back to the 1960s or even 1940s, but the real story starts in the 1990s with things like Project Gutenberg ([www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)) in the Net and the first ebook readers “Rocket ebook” and “SoftBook”. Since Apple iPad launched in 2010 the soaring sales of the tablet computers have made it very attractive for publishers to use interactive features in their ebooks with the new technical possibilities.

The forecasts for tablet sales (Fig. 1) predict an excellent chance for interactive ebooks and is furthermore encouraged by the ever increasing number of ebooks bought worldwide. According to the Publishers Association, the ebook sales in 2011 increased by 366% from the previous year. (1) The Association of American Publishers note that in the United Kingdom the ebook sales increased whopping 1317% in one year and that over 9% from all book sales in 2011 were electronic books. (2)

Tablet Sales Worldwide, by OS, 2011-2016				
thousands of units				
	2011	2012	2013	2016
iOS	39,998	72,988	99,553	169,652
Android	17,292	37,878	61,684	137,657
Microsoft	0	4,863	14,547	43,648
QNX	807	2,643	6,036	17,836
Other	1,919	510	637	464
Total market	60,017	118,883	182,457	369,258

Note: sales to end users; numbers may not add up to total due to rounding  
Source: Gartner, "Forecast: Media Tablets by Operating System, Worldwide, 2010-2016, 1Q12 Update" as cited in press release, April 10, 2012  
138972 [www.eMarketer.com](http://www.eMarketer.com)

Figure 1: Forecast for tablet sales 2011-2016

The features of interactivity are always in the state of change and this results in some difficulties with designing interactive ebooks. Not all platforms support all features and the role of interactivity is still relatively small in the field of the ebook market. (Fig. 2) From all the ebook readers in the market, it is really only the tablet computers that can support interactivity and even there the possibilities of different devices are very diverse.

The big ongoing changes in electronic publishing are the EPUB standard (which is updated to EPUB 3) and HTML5. Both offer huge possibilities for ebook developers, because they offer things which were not possible in the previous editions. Still, currently (May 2012) EPUB 3 is rather non-supported standard on tablets. It is likely that the situation will improve, though, since EPUB 3 is built to work with HTML5 whereas the previous version of EPUB was built on the XHTML standard whose development is nowadays merged with HTML5.

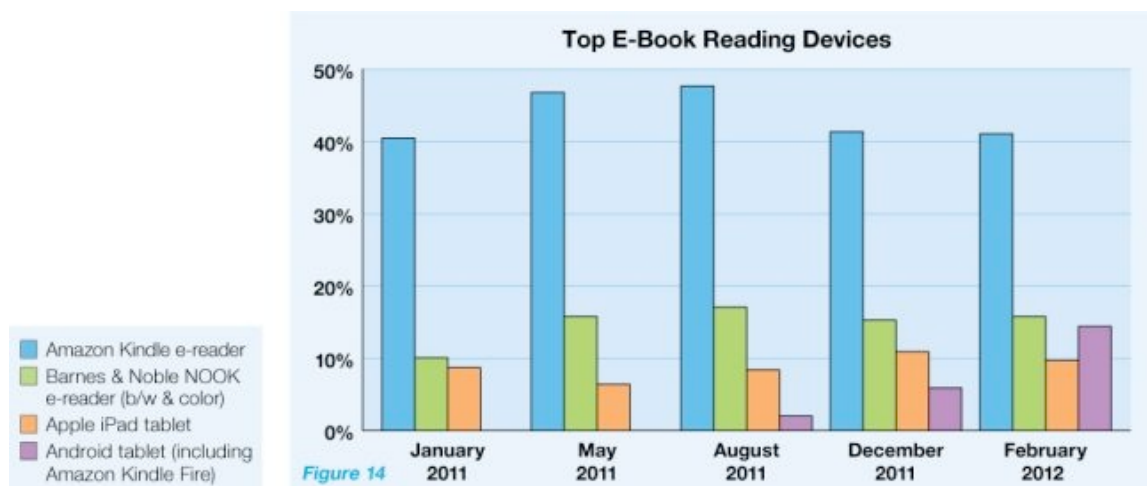


Fig. 2 Source: <http://www.digitalbookworld.com/2012/ipad-e-reading-market-share-stagnates-as-tablet-e-reading-rises/>

## What is interactivity?

In the last few years interactivity has become a standard gadget in most applications and on the Internet. Websites and programmes that don't offer interactivity can already be considered slightly outdated and even boring. There are several different stages and possibilities in interactivity, from pressing a button to get a result or an answer all the way to complex game engines where the whole storyline changes according to the actions the user makes.

The electronic book uses something in between when it comes to interactivity. Since the whole scheme is relatively new and some of the lines between ebooks and other products can be somewhat vague, it's a bit tricky to make things totally clear. It's also very common for publishers in any branch to top up their publications with all sorts of bells and whistles that don't really bring anything new, useful or important to their products.

The possibilities to create interactivity in ebooks are still quite limited, even if at the first glance the features that ebook creation programmes offer seem fabulously diverse. The problem lies in the other end - the possibility to view and use the encoded interactivity depends entirely on the equipment the user operates. Still, the number of tablet computers sold guarantee a very decent customer base for any ebook publication, let it be interactive or not.

## File formats

One of the ways to reach the biggest possible audience for electronic publication is to select a file format that is supported in as many devices as possible. Two of the most used formats are the EPUB and the PDF formats (Fig. 3). This is why many programmes for developing ebooks are exporting their files in at least one of these two formats.

Fig. 3: Comparison of the supported file formats in different iOS ebook readers (reduced excerpt)

Product	.cbr/.cbz	.chm	.djvu	.epub	.fb2	.html	.mobi	.pdb	.pdf	.rtf	.txt
<a href="#">Blio</a>	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
<a href="#">Bluefire Reader</a>	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
<a href="#">eBookMobi</a>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<a href="#">i2Reader</a>	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<a href="#">iBooks</a>	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
<a href="#">Kindle</a>	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
<a href="#">Kobo eBooks</a>	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
<a href="#">MegaReader</a>	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
<a href="#">ShuBook</a>	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<a href="#">Stanza</a>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
<a href="#">uBooks</a>	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison\\_of\\_iOS\\_e-book\\_reader\\_software](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_iOS_e-book_reader_software)

There are several ebook development programmes in the market, but in the end they offer mostly the same interactive features in slightly different packages. These can include for example the following:

- buttons and other hotspots to launch interactive content (both in text and in images)
- creating interactive slide shows from several images
- zooming into and out from images
- embedding media like video and audio directly into the page
- creating animated properties to page objects
- gathering more information through the cloud computing, Bluetooth, etc. by communicating with the other users

### ***Widely used programmes for developing interactive ebooks: pros and cons***

#### *iBooks Author*

In early 2012 Apple launched iBooks Author, Apple's new application for developing ebooks especially for educational purposes. With iBooks Author the author can compile books to given templates and publish them in the iBookstore. The limitations in the distribution still cause some fuzz, because through iBookstore the publications are accessible only for the Apple users and the store automatically takes their share of the sales. On the other hand, if the publication is distributed for free, it is allowed to be distributed by any means.

+: Clear user interface (especially if used to Apple products), supports 3D Collada files, the possibility to create new widgets for the programme, available for free

-: The ready ebook can only be sold through iBookstore, there is no blank template, the ebook will work only in Apple hardware

<http://www.apple.com/ibooks-author/>



Image 1. iBooks Author (Source: Apple)

#### *InDesign 5.5*

With the new version of Creative Suite also InDesign's possibilities to produce ebooks have increased. As should be, InDesign is - after all - a layout publishing programme. In the latest version ID supports e.g. multimedia embedding, zooming into images and 360° pictures (that try to imitate 3D modelling) for ebooks. Since ID's true strength lies in creating layouts it gives an attractive base for creating ebooks, too. It is good to keep in mind, though, that ID uses Flash for e.g. animated page objects, so they are naturally not visible for the iPad users.

+: Very broad possibilities in creating layouts, the results can be published in several platforms, the ability to share files with other Adobe programmes like Flash and Photoshop

-: Because InDesign is a professional programme it is both expensive and advanced, there is no real 3D support

<http://www.adobe.com/products/indesign.html>

### *Moglue*

Moglue is an ebook developing application that works both in Windows and Mac. Currently, it claims to be focused on childrens' books, but the potential is for much more. At the moment the ready ebooks can be distributed only for Apple products, but they will become available for Kindle later this year (2012). This makes Moglue a very competitive application for the market. The programme is for free for the users who don't plan to charge from their work in MoglueBooks or AppStore, for these features the user will need to pay for the product. The interactivity is already quite good - for children's ebooks. But the company promises lots of new features in the coming versions.

+: Clear user interface, lots of promised features for future releases, works in Windows and Mac

-: The features (use, distribution) still somewhat limited, it is hard to tell if a young company in the hard media branch will survive, the user needs MoglueBooks or iBooks Reader to view content



Image 2. Moglue (Source: Moglue)

<http://www.moglue.com/>

### *HTML5, CSS3 and JavaScript*

Development develops. Even if EPUB 3 format is not supported format yet, in the run of time it probably will be. That will open the floodgates for the HTML5 content which is already partially supported by most of the browsers. It is not always easy to tell what is an ebook and what is an application or a webpage, when they all look pretty much the same for the user. There are already many HTML5 based electronic publications that work not as ebooks but as applications or webpages on tablets. After all, if the end result works, it might not play a big role what programme created it.

+: Huge possibilities with what comes to the interactivity

-: The developer needs to understand coding, not all equipment support the features

<http://www.w3schools.com/html5/>

Useful reading in the Net:

What is EPUB and its formats (Published 14.01.2012)

<http://goldenorbcreative.wordpress.com/2012/01/14/epub-an-introduction/>

Features and ways to use interactivity in ebooks (Published 12.04.2012)

<http://uxmag.com/articles/interactive-ebook-apps-the-reinvention-of-reading-and-interactivity>

Official new features in EPUB 3 standard (Published 11.10.2011)

<http://idpf.org/epub/30/spec/epub30-changes.html>

Advice for customers considering which ebook reader to buy (Published 7.5.2012)

[http://news.cnet.com/8301-17938\\_105-20009738-1/kindle-vs-nook-vs-ipad-which-e-book-reader-should-you-buy/](http://news.cnet.com/8301-17938_105-20009738-1/kindle-vs-nook-vs-ipad-which-e-book-reader-should-you-buy/)

The Digital Reader blog: The Best News and Info on eBooks and eReaders

<http://www.the-digital-reader.com/>

Links:

(1) [http://www.publishers.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2224:consumer-ebooks-sales-increased-by-366-in-2011&catid=503:pa-press-releases-and-comments&Itemid=1618](http://www.publishers.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2224:consumer-ebooks-sales-increased-by-366-in-2011&catid=503:pa-press-releases-and-comments&Itemid=1618)

(2) <http://www.publishers.org/press/68/>

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28.5.2012