

MEDIA RELEASE

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ARE SOUTH AFRICANS READY FOR E-BOOKS? THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA CREATES A PLATFORM FOR POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Are you ready to replace your hardcopy book with an electronic version of an entire book? Have you ever thought what the future will be like without a hardcopy version of your book?

According to Wikipedia, an **e-book** (electronic book) is the digital media equivalent of a conventional printed book. Such documents are either read on personal computers, or on dedicated hardware devices known as e-book readers or e-book devices.

However, it is not merely about scanning your book and saving the content onto your computer.

According to Monica Hammes, co-ordinator of BookJol at the University of Pretoria, e-books are not merely digital, online variations of their print counterparts.

"Functionality inherent in the Internet makes them more useful. Books will no longer be islands but can be linked to every other bit of information on the Web," she said.

The questions we need to ask ourselves are the following: Are e-books the future? Are South Africans ready for this phenomenon?

These are some of the questions that will be addressed at a one-day symposium hosted by the University of Pretoria this Friday (07 March 2008).

The symposium is one of the activities lined up for BookJol (a book festival aimed at celebrating reading and writing of books as a way of life in the academic environment). The festival starts on Wednesday and ends on Saturday.

“The real change will come in the way people exploit the inherent attributes of online books and how this will influence the way we learn,” Hammes said.

The first part of the symposium will revolve around the following topics:

- The e-book phenomenon and the way it will change learning, scholarship and our understanding and use of knowledge
- What is in a book? – an evolutionary journey from paper to electronic
- A panel discussion on “The future of academic books”
- Shimmer Chinodya, winner of the 2007/08 Noma Award for Publishing in Africa and who is featured in the online African Writer Series (ProQuest) will talk about his work and the impact of being online.

The second part of the symposium will cover the following topics:

- E-books – productivity booster or resource drain?
- Socially-produced content and the wisdom of the crowds
- Electronic dictionaries: where language meets.

The audience will be given an opportunity to ask questions.

Hammes cited some of the advantages of using an e-book:

- Sharing – one book can be read by many people at the same time.
- Unpacking and repacking: no need to buy an entire book for the sake of a few chapters; e.g. chapters from different books can be reassembled to create a useful academic textbook.
- Books will never go out of print and many books that already out of print are given a second life. Print-on-demand facilities such as espresso printers make it possible to have a text printed and bound within an hour.
- Books are even more globalized, e.g. children's books from Kenya would have been totally unknown to the rest of the world if e-books did not exist.

Other advantages are:

- Search and cross-reference capabilities
- Less physical space
- Available indefinitely
- Simultaneous and 24-hour access
- Easy conversion to spoken books
- Easy replication
- Adjustable text
- Easy and quick distribution
- Little risk of damage etc.

Hammes said that the e-book phenomenon could create a possibility of free books.

“Currently the emphasis is on digitization and the many copyright problems associated with it, hence the tremendous profile of Google's activities and similar projects. Media 24 is busy with something similar for South Africa. The University of Pretoria Library Service is a partner in that venture,” she said.

Organisations such as Ingram Digital Group already has online e-book and e-content resources for users across the world. This resource, called MyiLibrary, enables the user to access digital content using any of the following criteria: individual title, publisher-specific or subject collection basis. The resource has over 100 000 titles available, covering a range of academic disciplines.

See the profile of speakers including background information on the e-book on the website that has been created for the BookJol: www.bookjol.up.ac.za.

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